

Vol. 58 • Issue 1

**Inside**

District Conference 2019 [1](#)  
2020 [7](#) & [back](#)

Youth Ministry [2](#)

Refugee Aid [2](#)

Policy Board [3](#)

Around PSWD [3](#)

NM Youth Trip [4](#)

Summer Camp [4](#)

Pastor Spouse [5](#)

Challenging Time [5](#)

Compelling Vision [5](#)

Future Focus [6](#)

Knit Afghans [7](#)

[www.pswdcob.org](http://www.pswdcob.org)

**Editor:** Joe Vecchio  
Administrative Assistant  
[FrontDesk@pswdcob.org](mailto:FrontDesk@pswdcob.org)

**Publisher:** Russ Matteson  
District Executive/Minister  
[DE@pswdcob.org](mailto:DE@pswdcob.org)

New Life Subscriptions (a \$10 value) are **Free**. New Life, the newsletter of the Pacific Southwest District of the Church of the Brethren, is sent to all of our ministers, church officials, and others who request it.

**Address changes to:**  
Pacific Southwest District  
Church of the Brethren  
P.O. Box 219  
La Verne CA 91750-0219  
Voice Tree (909) 406-5367  
Joe (909) 406-5368  
[FrontDesk@pswdcob.org](mailto:FrontDesk@pswdcob.org)

## District Conference 2019 enjoys trip to Arizona!

In November representatives of 21 PSWD congregations, fellowships, and projects gathered for three days of worship, fellowship, and business at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, AZ. This was our second time at FRC, having held the 2013 conference there as well.

The weekend started with a professional growth event for ministers and lay leaders led by Bethany Theological Seminary professor of New Testament Dan Ulrich. Dan invited the participants into an intercultural study of John 15 and surrounding passages. The event was attended by more than 40 participants, and was led in both English and Spanish, inviting the different cultural backgrounds of those present to engage and bring insight to the text.



Dan Ulrich and the intercultural study class

Friday night's preacher was Moderator Bob Morris (Glendora) and he took the time to expand on the conference theme Jesus said, "*Apart from me you can do nothing.*" Bob also shared his talent as a violist on the hymn *Thou True Vine*. Other preachers included Dan Ulrich in an outdoor worship in the desert on Saturday evening, and Annual Conference Moderator Paul



Paul Munday, Annual Conference Moderator

Munday on Sunday morning. Munday was with us through the weekend and led an insight session on evangelism Saturday, as well engaged in several conversations with delegates and others over meals and breaks.



Moderator Bob Morris leading business

The first order of business was a vote by the delegate body to organize Centro Agape en Acción (Los Banos) as a fellowship which was followed by a prayer of thanksgiving and encouragement and the seating of their four delegates. Delegates also approved the disorganization of the Tucson and Paradise congregations, and were introduced to Florecita Merlos and family who is heading up the new project in Waterford, CA.

In addition to the budget related actions, this year the Policy Board brought two major recommendations related to the use of two new sources of money to the district. The conference approved the creation of the "Ministry and Improvement Fund" with \$1.33 million from the sale of a parking lot in Los Angeles. This fund has money allocated for Leadership Development, Facility Repair and Improvements, New Ministry Opportunities (in existing congregations and for church planting), and Youth. This proposal was developed out of a series of listening



conversations the Policy Board held in many of our congregations. Next steps will be the preparation of guidelines and application procedures to make the funds available. The Policy Board hopes to have those ready to share with the District in early summer.

Also created was the “Growth from the Ashes Fund” which directs the insurance settlement from the fire which destroyed the Paradise congregation to be used as capital investment in churches that need additional or new space to support continued growth. This fund of about \$1.5 million will provide a maximum of \$250,000 to any single congregation.

Around business was time for insight sessions which included options on children’s ministry, facility accessibility, new church development, a spiritual growth opportunity, Brethren work in South Sudan, a virtual trip to Schwarzenau, and several other opportunities. Hospitality was provided by the Papago Buttes congregation, and the Circle of Peace church organized childcare and children’s activities and provided the music for both Friday and Saturday evening worship services.

District Conference is scheduled to return to Arizona in 2025. We look forward to being welcomed back.



## Updates on PSWD Youth Ministry

by Russ Matteson

I am pleased to share that **Rafael Aranda** has accepted the position of Interim District Youth Advisor and began his work in late January. He can be reached at the [youth@pswdcob.org](mailto:youth@pswdcob.org) email or by phone at 714-910-4301. Rafael leads the youth ministry at the Príncipe de Paz congregation. He and his wife Estefany have three children. Rafael’s day job is in business development for a health services company that provides home pediatric support services. He covers Riverside, Orange, and San Diego Counties.



Please welcome Rafael to this work. We look forward to what he will bring us in the months ahead.

PSWD appreciates **Nohemi Flores’** two years of service in the youth advisor position which ended in December, 2019. During that time she coordinated our 2018 NYC trip, planned youth events for two district conferences, and several regional youth events. We wish Nohemi well as she works to complete her bachelors degree at the University of La Verne.

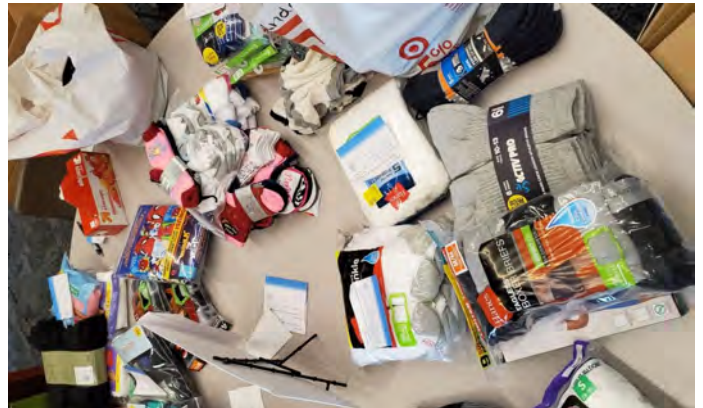
## Thank you from Refugee Aid Our 2019 Service Project

Refugee Aid was chosen as the service project for the PSWD Conference this fall and was nominated by the Papago Buttes congregation in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Approximately 400 pounds of new and used clothing donations were received at the conference, along with cash donations of \$1102. Our sincere thanks and gratitude to the Church of the Brethren PSWD for this gift.

It will be utilized to assist the churches who host refugee families each week in Phoenix, and refugees stranded across the border in Mexico, awaiting an opportunity to have their asylum case heard in the United States.

Due to changes in asylum policy thousands of refugees are now trapped in Mexico, unable to come to the US and join their sponsor. Refugee Aid is working with four homeless shelters in Mexicali to help provide food, shelter, and clothing to over 500 homeless refugees a week, including teens, toddlers and newborns.



Your generous contribution will help support the cause of protecting and assisting families and children who are fleeing criminal gangs, corruption, and the breakdown of civil societies in their home countries, and whose only secure place of refuge is the United States.

The United States, with its thousands of miles of borders with our neighbors north and south, has long been a beacon of liberty through dark times. Your generous contribution has made that beacon shine a little more brightly for these refugees.

With sincere thanks and gratitude,  
Mary Jo Forman Miller, Founder and Executive  
Director, Refugee Aid

*Refugee Aid is a volunteer group of concerned individuals who assist refugee families seeking asylum in the United States. “We are disturbed by the mistreatment of refugee families, particularly refugee children. We believe all people deserve to be treated humanely.” Refugee Aid is a project of the Southwest Heritage Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation.*

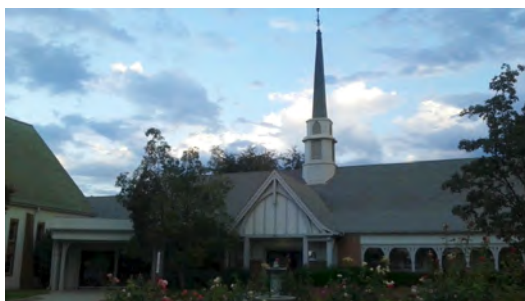
## Policy Board Meets at Pomona Fellowship

On January 11 the District Policy Board gathered at the Pomona Fellowship Church facility to begin their work for 2020 and beyond. The morning began with meetings of the Ministry and Stewards Commissions, as well as the Congregational Vitality Task Group. The day's agenda was full and varied between time to get acquainted and welcome new Board members, hearing reports from the commissions and task groups, and reviewing the 2019 financial reports.



Nancy Heishman, Church of the Brethren Director of Ministry, joined the meeting to share the results of the five year review of District Executive Minister Russ Matteson. In fall 2019, the Policy Board participated in an evaluative survey process and this meeting was a report out of the summary of that process. Heishman also met with the Ministry Commission to share about the "Calling the Called" program the denomination is hoping each district will host that invites individuals to explore credentialed ministry in the Church of the Brethren.

Key work for the day focused around moving the "Ministry and Improvement Fund" that had been approved at District Conference from words on paper into a plan that will get money to support leadership development, facility repairs and improvements, new ministry opportunities, and youth. After some rounds of brainstorming the Board organized into four working teams that have responsibility for carrying each area forward. The Leadership Development group is hosting a meeting for all pastors on Saturday, April 18, to gather input and priorities for leadership training and support. Plans are to have policies and procedures ready to share throughout the district by early summer.



Pomona Fellowship

## Around the District

[www.pswdcob.org/churches](http://www.pswdcob.org/churches)

❖ In October the District purchased a commercial building in Los Banos that will become the home of the **Centro Ágape en Acción fellowship**. The total building is 7,000 square feet, and half of that is leased to two existing tenants.



That means about 3500 square feet will be available to be configured for worship space, office and classrooms, bathrooms, and a pantry. Jim LeFever, a retired architect from the Glendale congregation, has been working with them to design the new space. Demolition of a former doctor's office was completed in January and they are now awaiting approval from the Building Department to move forward.



The worship space will hold 160-170 people, and there is plenty of parking in the Premier Cinemas Plaza where the building is located. This gives the district some diversity of investment, owning commercial property and then a mortgage to the fellowship.

❖ The sale by **Pomona Fellowship** of their church buildings and property is moving forward with Crestwood Homes. The builder is working on final approval with the city for the construction of close to 40 homes on the site. Pomona Fellowship will be in the building into early 2021, but is making plans for what their new ministry will look like and where God will lead them to call home as a church. Hold them and their leadership in your prayers as they move through this time.

❖ The **Empire** congregation had leased out some land to the city schools for years, but last fall the school district moved to other space but offered to leave the portables on the property for the church to use. And now “Heaven’s Bounty Thrift Shop” fills two of the units with “Attic Treasures” in one and “Basement Bargains” in another. The new space has also allowed them to expand their hours of government commodities distribution to families in need. What a blessing to them and their neighbors!



❖ **Disaster Ministries** — Brethren Disaster Ministries - Our PSWD time of service in April has been delayed due to concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic. They plan to send our team out in the late summer or fall. If you are interested in serving with PSWD BDM contact our district coordinators Lois & Lindy Frantz at lfrantz667@aol.com to get your name on the list and they will keep you posted as to opportunities to serve. PSWD budget covers the cost of transportation to work sites, and BDM provides the lodging and meals.

❖ **Arizona** — In late November, Pastor Jeremy Ashworth at **Circle of Peace Church** (Peoria, AZ) received a call from leaders at Christ Church of the Valley (CCV) inviting Circle to share how they might use a financial blessing to further their ministry. CCV is a multi-site church in that area with an average weekly attendance of close to 30,000 people. The CCV leaders had realized they would not be able to reach all of the Valley with the message of Jesus, and so had a vision to empower 15 other churches in the area to help them grow in their ability to reach the community for Christ. CCV would ask their members to give \$2,000,000 as a Christmas offering to be shared with these churches to strengthen their ministries. In January, Circle of Peace learned that CCV exceeded their offering goal and that they should expect a check for \$250,000 to support adding a worship space to their facility. That amount, when combined with funds from the PSWD “Growth from the Ashes” fund, will be enough to launch the process towards the building of a long needed addition. Circle of Peace Church is still in the process of making final decisions, but they are feeling blessed by this Christmas gift from CCV.

## See you at Camp in 2020 Mountain Reflection Time !

**Camp La Verne** in Southern CA  
[www.camplaverne.org](http://www.camplaverne.org)

- ❖ Senior High Camp: June 21-27, 2020 - Entering 9th - 12th grade, Directed by Erica Schatz & Kevin Schatz
- ❖ Junior Camp: July 5-11, 2020 - Entering 3rd - 5th grade, Directed by Janet Hart Short
- ❖ Jr. High Camp: July 12-18, 2020 - Entering 6th - 8th grade, Directed by Chris Bache



**Camp Peaceful Pines** in Northern CA  
[www.campeacefulpines.org](http://www.campeacefulpines.org)

- ❖ Women’s Retreat- June 19-21, 2020
- ❖ Discovery Camp- July 7-12, 2020 - Director: Garry Pearson, Resource Leader: Joe Vecchio
- ❖ Junior/Jr. High/Youth Camp- July 19-24, 2020
- ❖ Family Camp- July 24-29, 2020

## PSWD Youth Learning Tour June 11-17 in Lybrook, NM

**District Youth** are encouraged to join other youth from PSWD that will participate in a New Community Project Learning Tour in Lybrook, NM, this June 11-17. [www.newcommunityproject.info/learning-tours](http://www.newcommunityproject.info/learning-tours)  
This trip will spend time with the Dine people who call the area home, and includes cultural learning, relationship building, and some small service project. Cost to youth is \$125 for the program with the district covering travel costs. You buy your own incidentals like snacks. Participation is limited to twelve PSWD youth. Questions? Ask Interim Youth Advisor Rafael Aranda at 714-910-4301 or [youth@pswdcob.org](mailto:youth@pswdcob.org)  
Event updates and registration are on the PSWD website. Register today at: [www.pswdcob.org/youth](http://www.pswdcob.org/youth)



## Pastor & Spouse Retreat 2020 June 1-5 in Malibu, CA

Encourage your pastor to join their colleagues at Serra Retreat in Malibu from June 1-5 for the 2020 retreat. This time of renewal and rest is a blessing each year to those who participate. The cost to pastors (and spouses) is \$100 per person, and the balance of the cost is part of PSWD's support for our pastors. We are excited to be joined by Joel Peña, pastor of Alpha y Omega Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, PA. Joel will present in Spanish and English around the theme of *Digging inside of our Iceberg / Excavando dentro de nuestro Iceberg* and will invite us to think about emotionally healthy spirituality. Register today:  
[www.pswdcob.org/events/pastors](http://www.pswdcob.org/events/pastors)



## A Challenging Time For All

As this newsletter goes to print we in the USA are just moving into the work of social distancing and self quarantining. I don't know what the situation will be as you read this, but I want to share that whatever the circumstances we are in, you are in my prayers for health, for safety, for courage, for wisdom, and for faith as you and your church seek to follow the way of Jesus in the moment we find ourselves in. Be reminded that God is near, and the message of scripture for those who believe resounds over and over again, "Be not afraid, for I am with you." This Holy Week and Easter may be different than we have known before, but the celebration of Christ's victory will ring out of the hearts of his followers wherever we find ourselves. How wonderful it will be when we can celebrate that together, worshipping together in our houses of worship!

Until then, reach out by phone and email to each other. Call your pastor for prayer and support. Pray for your pastor. Join your church online and other ways they may be gathering. Share the love of Christ with those who are near to you.

Pace e bene, Paz y bien, Peace and all good,

Russ Matteson, District Executive Minister

## Compelling Vision Recommendation to Annual Conference is Released

The compelling vision recommendation that will be presented in July to the 2020 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren has been released. Following is a statement from the Compelling Vision Team:

### "Jesus in the Neighborhood"

*"Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless."*

The vision is accompanied by an interpretive document that unpacks the scripture and theology behind each significant word or phrase in the vision. The full interpretive document

can be found at [www.brethren.org/compellingvision](http://www.brethren.org/compellingvision). The March issue of Messenger also has a four page story on the compelling vision.

To prepare for consideration of this statement at Annual Conference this summer in Grand Rapids, MI, the Compelling Vision Team encourages people across the church to read the full document, study the scripture passages that undergird the document, and reflect on the following questions:

- How does the compelling vision reflect the soul of your congregation?
- How does it reflect the soul of the Church of the Brethren?
- How do you see this vision being lived out in your own neighborhood?
- What might you need to let go of?
- What are the issues facing your community which could be healed/addressed by the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ?
- How might we work at calling and equipping innovative, adaptable, and fearless disciples to live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ?
- What are the creative ways your congregation, your district, or the denomination as a whole, might embody this vision?

This brings to fulfillment the three year process of listening, praying, and discerning that included conversations at Annual Conferences in 2018 and 2019, as well as sessions throughout the districts which included nearly 2600 people, as well as youth at NYC 2018 and young adults at NYAC 2018. If adopted this vision will lead the Church of the Brethren in ministry for many years to come.

*This article uses elements from the COB Newsline of February 20, 2020 and items from the brethren.org website.*



Pastor Erik Brummett shares a bulletin board he created for the Live Oak congregation to explore Jesus in the Neighborhood.

**God's Adventurous  
 Future Focus for  
 Annual Conference 2020**  
[www.brethren.org/ac](http://www.brethren.org/ac)

Registration is now open for the 2020 Annual Conference, being held July 1-5 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Moderator Paul Munday writes this regarding the conference theme:

As the theme implies, our future is not uneventful; it is marked by "rigorous peaks, rushing currents, and deep valleys"! Thus, there is challenge in the journey that, in all honesty, can be unsettling, even anxiety-producing. Such angst marks, in particular, our pilgrimage as the church. Frankly, we live in one of the most complex, jarring eras in modern ecclesiastical history. Numerous issues not only rumble among us, they tear at us, threatening the very fabric of our denominational being.

As we acknowledge such reality, it's hard to be optimistic. But it's wise to be expectant—even hope-full—for God moves among us, calling us beyond our bewilderment and discord. Scripture bears testimony to God's audacious initiative: "Look, I am about to do something new. Now it begins to happen! Do you not recognize it? Yes, I will make a road in the wilderness and paths in the wastelands" (Isaiah 43:19 NET). "...Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They're his people, he's their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eyes...Look! I'm making everything new. Write it all down—each word dependable and accurate" (Revelation 21:3-5 MSG).

It's God's dependability and accuracy that charts our course. Yes, much rattles and disrupts; we have our doubts and are afraid. Yet we press on toward God's adventurous future, drawing on the endurance of God. For "The Lord [our] God is in [our] midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over [us] with gladness; he will quiet [us] by his love; he will exult over [us] with loud singing" (Zephaniah 3:17 ESV).

It is my prayer that God's divine decibel will captivate us, invading our apprehension, stirring us to trek onward—nevertheless—toward God's new creation in Jesus. For "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, [is] what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9, NRSV).

In addition to nightly worship services (Thursday evening's preacher is Richard Zapata, co-pastor of Príncipe de Paz in Santa Ana), there will be Bible study each morning led by Michael Gorman studying passages from Revelation, one of his fields of expertise as a professor of Biblical Studies and Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore. Gorman will also be the keynote speaker for the Minister's Association pre-Conference gathering June 30 and July 1, focusing on "1 Corinthians: Challenges for Today's Church" and will lead an insight session on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, July 2-4, on "Reading the Bible Missionally." On Saturday, July 4, he will speak at a luncheon on the theme "Nonviolence in the Writings of Paul."

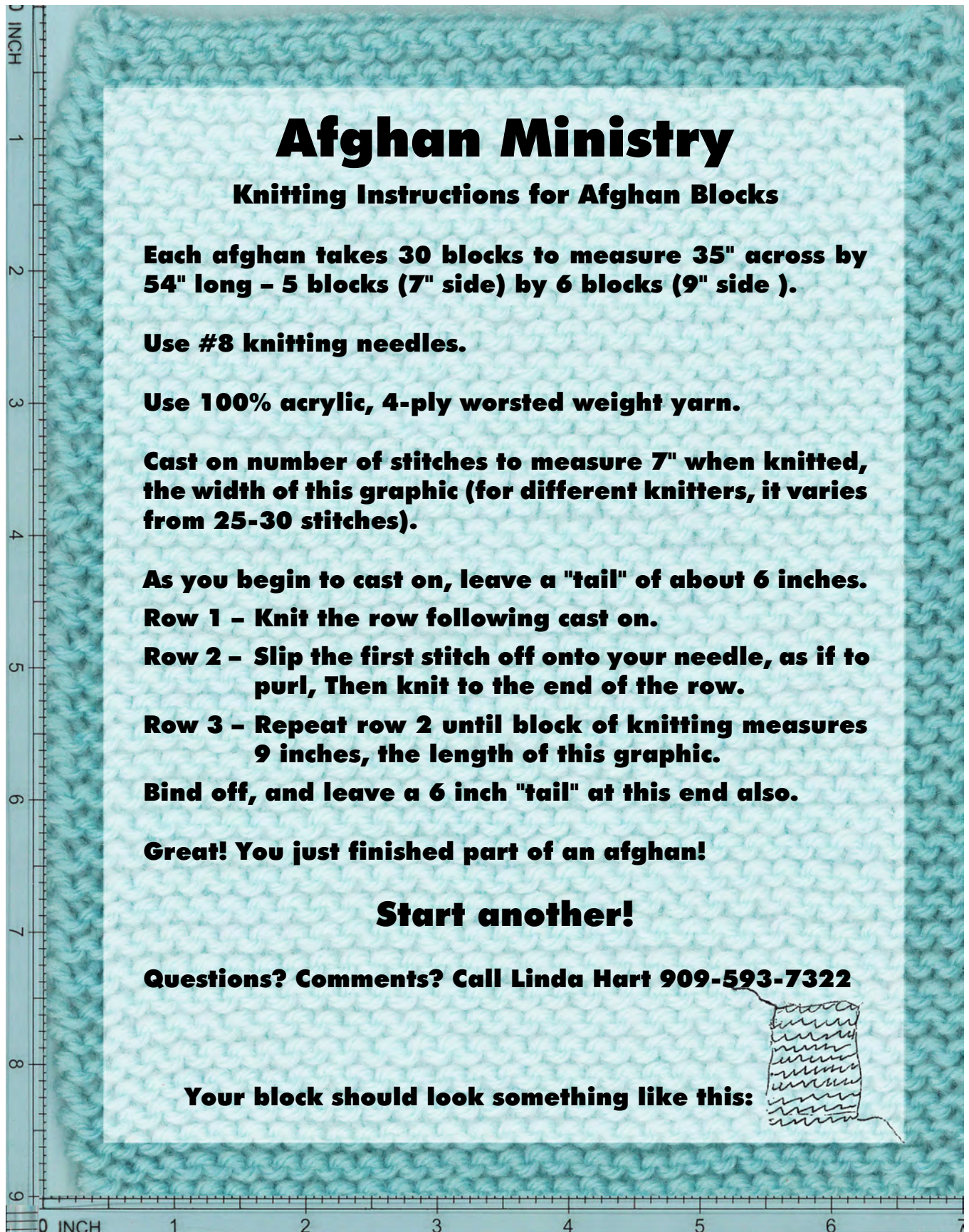
Friday at Conference will be an "equipping session" featuring Tod Bolsinger, vice president and chief of leadership formation at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, where he will address "Doing Church in Uncharted Territory." On July 2, he will speak at the Moderator's Dinner on the topic "Adventure or Die," and will lead an insight session on "Standing the Heat, Surviving the Sabotage." He will also speak at a breakfast on Friday, July 3, on the topic "The Fire and the Anvil." Bolsinger's most recent book is *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*.

Wednesday evening will feature a concert by Fernando Ortega, a multi-Dove award winner and singer-songwriter. Ortega's works include hymns, liturgical songs, and inspirational and praise and worship favorites. He has three Gospel Music Association Dove Awards and a Billboard Latin Music Award to his credit. His Christian radio hits include "This Good Day," "Jesus, King of Angels," and "Sleepless Night." Also popular are his arrangements of beloved hymns including "Give Me Jesus" and "Be Thou My Vision," among others.

Consideration of the Compelling Vision statement will lead the business sessions. Each congregation can send at least one delegate, and other members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Registration for the conference and hotels can be done at [www.brethren.org/ac](http://www.brethren.org/ac). Registration needs to be completed by June 10 to avoid paying higher fees to register on site.



**The Tie that Binds** – The 2020 District Conference Service Project is working with the Pomona Fellowship “Knit Wits” and the Hillcrest “Knit2gether” groups to produce afghans that are delivered through local community agencies. Since 2011 they have created and given 231 afghans. Please bring blocks, made to these specifications, with you to conference.



# **Afghan Ministry**

## **Knitting Instructions for Afghan Blocks**

**Each afghan takes 30 blocks to measure 35" across by 54" long – 5 blocks (7" side) by 6 blocks (9" side ).**

**Use #8 knitting needles.**

**Use 100% acrylic, 4-ply worsted weight yarn.**

**Cast on number of stitches to measure 7" when knitted, the width of this graphic (for different knitters, it varies from 25-30 stitches).**

**As you begin to cast on, leave a "tail" of about 6 inches.**

**Row 1 – Knit the row following cast on.**

**Row 2 – Slip the first stitch off onto your needle, as if to purl, Then knit to the end of the row.**

**Row 3 – Repeat row 2 until block of knitting measures 9 inches, the length of this graphic.**


**Bind off, and leave a 6 inch "tail" at this end also.**

**Great! You just finished part of an afghan!**

### **Start another!**

**Questions? Comments? Call Linda Hart 909-593-7322**

**Your block should look something like this:**



# New Life

Pacific Southwest District of the  
Church of the Brethren  
P.O. Box 219  
La Verne CA 91750-0219

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
SAN DIMAS, CA  
PERMIT NO. 78

Address Service Requested

---

## Bless'd Be the Tie That Binds

My theme *Bless'd Be the Tie That Binds* is the title of a hymn often sung in Churches of the Brethren at the conclusion of love feast or a conference. It holds special meaning for many of us who grew up with this tradition. It also speaks to our unity in the Christian faith supported by Psalms 133 (the first and last phrases, taken from several translations and paraphrased by Willard Ressler):

How wonderful! How beautiful! How good and  
pleasant it is when all God's people, as sisters  
and brothers, live together in unity!  
On them the LORD pours out His blessing  
of abundant, eternal life.

Our service project this year is knitting rectangles for afghans which will be pieced together and given to various organizations. Page [7](#) inside has the pattern. More information about the knitting groups can be found in the January / February 2020 issue of *Messenger* on page 4.

Mary Kay Ogden, Moderator  
Moderator@pswdcob.org

