

# District Executive Minister's Report

Russ Matteson

## COVID Year 2

As we gathered virtually last November for District Conference, COVID case counts were just beginning to climb and within weeks we found ourselves at the beginning of what was a long four months of pandemic concerns as the second wave started and vaccinations were just becoming available. Most of our congregations were gathering via Zoom or watching services on YouTube, Vimeo, or Facebook Live.

As we approached Easter several congregations began gathering again, many meeting outside or with significant distancing as they were together. The ability to be vaccinated and the hope that one would avoid serious illness by being vaccinated opened the doors of regathering even more. Since Easter I've been back on the road most weekends joining churches as they gather for worship. Some of these have been occasions for saying thank you to pastors who are retiring, being present for votes to call and then install new pastoral leaders, and to be part of ordinations, commissioning, and licensing services, many of which had been delayed until we could physically gather as the church. Caution and safety remain central as we seek to follow Jesus and care for each other and our neighbors. Each church is figuring out what works for them as it relates to gathering and worshipping. People are grateful to be together, and to be in the church buildings once again.

It has been a second challenging year for our pastors. I give thanks daily for the gifts that each of them brings to this moment of ministry. They have worked tirelessly to meet the spiritual and other needs of those that God has entrusted to their care. They have figured out how to keep communities of faith connected to each other and Jesus. They help the church to continue reaching out to our neighbors in word and deed, meeting needs that were made more challenging by the pandemic. Thank you pastors, for all that you have done to share God's care, hope, and love through these last two years.

## Relocating the District Office

2021 found the District Office relocating from Pomona to spruced up space at the Glendora Church of the Brethren. We are grateful to Pastor Bob Morris and other leaders from the congregation who worked to clear things out, clean things up, and coordinate the painting, flooring, electrical, heating

and cooling, and other work that needed to be done so we could make our office home base there. Feel free to stop by (we are around back, off the alley) and say hello if you are in Glendora.

With the relocation came a change in PSWD's mailing address for the first time in a very long time. The PO Box in La Verne was the only address I had known for my 30 years of association with PSWD. But if you want to get something to us now, please be sure to send it to: PSWD COB, PO Box 760, Glendora, CA 91740. Our phone numbers and email addresses remain the same.

## New Opportunities

In February, leadership groups from six congregations participated in the Future Church Summit that was done by Fresh Expressions US. The District encouraged local churches to participate and has provided coaching for those teams to develop next steps in ministry as they planned for how they might engage the community around them during the months ahead as we moved to a new moment in relation to the pandemic. This was the first Leadership Development event sponsored with funds from the District's Ministry & Improvement Fund.

The District planned and shared an online Love Feast on Maundy Thursday. The service was done in both English and Spanish, with subtitles in the language that wasn't being spoken. We used pastors and musicians from throughout the district to provide leadership, from the planning to the production to the participation. And that evening participants could join together in Zoom where they had the opportunity to talk with each other, or to participate by watching the service on YouTube with opportunity to reflect and to share responses in the chat. Special thanks to Pastor Erik Brummett from Live Oak who both sparked the idea and provided most of the post production editing work.

This spring we offered a weekly Bible study that looked at the denomination's Compelling Vision statement. Over the 13 weeks of study we had a consistent group of 8 to 12 participants via Zoom, representing about 8 congregations. The group formed a good community in our virtual space. The district will look for other opportunities to connect people in this manner in the years to come around other topics of interest.

## A multicultural district

It is exciting to be part of a district that is

growing more culturally diverse. This year we are continuing to work at ways that we can work together, include one another, and deepen our connections as followers of Jesus who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. We are grateful to have had the support of Dr. Darla Deardorff, who works to help organizations throughout the world develop their cultural competency and work together with deeper understanding of others. Darla is a member of the Peace Church of the Brethren in Durham, NC. She has worked with the Policy Board and will provide leadership for a special session during our business on Saturday. She will also host an insight session on Wednesday evening.

The work in this area is one of the blessings that God is giving to us in the Pacific Southwest District. As with so many things, we do not know with certainty where it will take us, but we trust that God will make the way known as we faithfully follow and learn. I encourage you to pray that we will be made new in Christ as we continue to journey together.

### **Pastoral/Congregational Transitions**

- *Bakersfield* – In April the congregation called Sandra Millard to serve as their pastor. Sandra has had a career with *Youth for Christ* in Kern County and is a licensed minister who is a member of the congregation.
- *Centro Ágape en Acción (Los Banos)* – In October they will move into their own church facility, the remodeling work on the property to transform it into a worship space and classrooms having been completed. They have been virtual since the pandemic began, and are looking forward to moving into their ministry center. Pray that they will use this new home to be Christ’s blessing to the community around them.
- *Circle of Peace (Peoria, AZ)* – The congregation is working with a project manager and architect on the design for a new worship center on their existing property. Plans for the new space include seating for 350, outdoor gathering space, and a children’s area. The project is likely to break ground in early 2022.
- *Cristo Sion (Glendora)* – The congregation moved their worship home from Pomona to Glendora and began sharing space with the Glendora congregation. Pastor David Flores was ordained in May. Pastora Rita Flores finished her EPMC course work and is beginning her ordination paperwork.
- *Nueva Visión la Hermosa (Waterford)* – After

delays that resulted from the pandemic, Pastora Florecita Merlos began to hold worship and prayer services in August. During the pandemic she had maintained contact with several households that she was reaching out to, and the group is beginning to grow as they gather.

- *Papago Buttes (Scottsdale, AZ)* – Pastor Don Shankster retired at the end of April. The congregation has called Jonathan Chubb to serve as their pastor. Jon is a commissioned minister who is in the process of transferring his ordination to the Church of the Brethren. Jon began his service at the end of May.
- *Pasadena / Conexión Pasadena* – Pastor Elizabeth Rowan will retire at the end of 2021, having served there for 20 years. That will also mark the end of the English language ministry at this site. During the last two years, Elizabeth and the congregation have fostered the beginnings of a new ministry in Spanish that is led by three licensed ministers, Juan Pablo Plaza and Adriana Rios (a married couple), and Fernanda Navarrete. Conexión gathered people online during the pandemic, began to meet outdoors soon after Easter, and in September moved into the refreshed Chapel in the church building.
- *Pomona Fellowship* – The sale of their property was completed in April and the congregation moved all they were taking with them out and into storage by the end of May. They are currently meeting twice a month in Zoom, and twice a month in space they rent from an Episcopal church in Pomona. While Pastor Lauren Seganos Cohen was on maternity leave, Ron Faus served as the interim for preaching and worship from July through September.
- *Prince of Peace (Sacramento)* – Pastor Mary Fleming retired at the end of August, having served the congregation for 16 years. I am working to place an interim for preaching and pastoral care while the Leadership Team works to figure out future direction for the congregation.
- *San Diego* – Pastor Sara Haldeman-Scarr has announced that she will retire at the end of August 2022. The congregation has formed a vision committee and is working with me towards finding new pastoral leadership for after Sara’s retirement.
- *South Bay (Redondo Beach)* – Jim Stewart retired as pastor of the joint congregation, Journey South Bay, in February. Jim was the founding pastor of the Journey Evangelical Covenant congregation,

and his ordination was recognized by the PSWD, commissioning him for his term of service. The joint congregation has formed a search committee and is working with a search consultant to find pastoral leadership. They have an interim pastor who is local to the area serving them at this time.

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

*Russ Matteson*

District Executive Minister

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## Deceased Ministers

John H. Gingrich - 9/17/1941 – 12/7/2020

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## Recognition of Ministers' Ordination Anniversaries

### 60 Years

Elvis C. Cayford

### 50 Years

Glenn J. Frazier  
John Grindler Katonah

### 40 Years

Don Booz

### 35 Years

Ron E.H. Faus  
Carol A. Wise

### 15 Years

Jeremy Ashworth

### 5 Years

Robert Aguirre  
Erik Brummett  
Lauren Seganos Cohen

**Representing 250 years  
of service.**

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**TRIM Supervisor Report.** . . . . . Russ Matteson  
See also Ministry Commission report on page [21](#).

The District has one TRIM (Training in Ministry) student at this time. Jody Romero, pastor of Restoration LA, has completed his course work in Ministry, History, and Theology through the program. This spring into summer he completed his Supervised Ministry experience, having weekly meetings with me via Zoom to reflect on his ministry work with special focus on some areas where he wanted to further develop his ministry skills. This is now complete and Jody will begin his ordination paperwork.

The District also uses the courses available in TRIM to provide training to other licensed and commissioned ministers who are needing to complete courses to learn more about the Church of the Brethren history, theology, polity, and practices. And some of our ministers take TRIM courses for professional growth as areas of interest are offered.

*Russ Matteson, TRIM Coordinator*  
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**Youth Advisor Report.** . . . . . Rafael Aranda

Hi PSWD, My name is Rafael Aranda and I am the District Youth Advisor for Pacific Southwest District. I have been married for 7 years to Estefany

Aranda and have 3 beautiful children Nathaniel 7, Naason 5, and Noelle 3. My wife has been in ministry since she was born and when I met her I integrated into Principe de Paz church in Santa Ana. I am a Youth Leader at our church, play the Bass, and help in the Pastoral Ministry as Executive Director to the pastors Richard and Becky Zapata. I came on board as district youth advisor in 2020, the year of the pandemic. It was a rough year to say the least. Since then we had District Youth Zoom Calls until mid summer, because the youth were tired of sitting in front of a computer everyday all Day. It was a blessing to have youth from our district join and have devotion time as well as spend time together as that was our new normal. We have now had a District youth bonfire at Huntington Beach since the re-opining and are planning other events before the end of this year. I look forward to seeing what God is going to do with our youth, and it has been a blessing being part of such a great community. I encourage those of you reading this to reach out to me if you have a youth group or have a youth in your church to join us in what is coming next. Look forward to what God has in store!

*Rafael Aranda, District Youth Advisor*  
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**MTC: Ministry Training Coordinator: SeBAH, EFSM, EPMC Report.** . . . . . Gilbert Romero  
See also Ministry Commission report on page [21](#).

In my role as MTC (Ministry Training Coordinator) for the district I find that through the many challenges, our current team makes everything work! I have a wonderful job centered on putting people that have been called to ministry in the Church of the Brethren, into the training programs EFSM: Education for Shared Ministry, EPMC: Educación para Ministerio Compartido, and SeBAH: Seminario Biblico Anabautista Hispano. Then I follow-up with calls and emails encouraging the licensed ministers as they move through the training, and keep them connected to resources.

I praise God for the three licensees from “Cristo Genesis” who are on their second unit of the EPMC program. Pastor Luz of the Las Vegas “Iglesia

Cristiana Elohim” church plant is doing well in EPMC, about to start unit four this fall. Pastors Rigo & Margie Berumen of the Los Banos “Centro Agape en Acción” fellowship are doing well in EPMC, about to start unit four this fall. Pastor Florecita Merlos of the Waterford “Nueva Visión La Hermosa” church plant has finished SeBAH, and has finished 8 of her 20 experience write-ups. “Príncipe de Paz” Pastor Becky Zapata has finished SeBAH and been ordained. Pastor Richard Zapata is working on his last SeBAH class and his 20 experience write-ups. “Iglesia de Cristo Sion” pastor David Flores has completed EPMC and been ordained. Pastor Rita Flores is on her last EPMC Unit.

Thank you for letting me work with these students during these trying times. Be blessed.

*Gilbert Romero, MTC*  
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