

District Executive Minister's Report

Russ Matteson

Joe Vecchio Retires

We knew that it would happen sometime, and 2022 was the year that it did - Joe Vecchio decided that after 29 years as the PSWD Administrative Assistant it was time for him to retire. Joe started in this position at the same time as my first contact with the district as Erin and I finished seminary and accepted a call to come to California as pastors. I can honestly say that until this September I have never known the PSWD without Joe serving in that role. We are losing a 29 year memory of decisions made, actions taken, programs created and ended, and names and memories of who was here when. As a district we have been blessed to have had Joe's consistency, compassion, computer skills, and so much more answering the phones, sending the emails and letters, and caring about our churches and the people who attend them.

I am also grateful that Joe wanted a smooth transition that would give him the opportunity to help train a new Administrative Assistant, work with other things that are happening in the district, and allow him the opportunity to finish well. That transition took place during the months of July and August.

Hopefully by now you have had the opportunity to interact with Kimberly Rouse, the new Administrative Assistant. Kimberly is learning the vocabulary of working with PSWD and the Church of the Brethren, and she is excited to be using her office management skills to support the work of the church. I invite you to join in welcoming her to this district, and ask for your grace and patience as she gets to know us and deepens her understanding of the work we do together for the building up of Christ's church.

AB 506 - Safely caring for children and youth

This is a new California law that relates to any organization that is serving those under the age of 18. I don't recall seeing much about it when it was passed in 2021, but it is a big deal as the implications of it for churches become more fully known. I attended several webinars provided through our insurance provider to get a better understanding of what the law requires of churches and the work that we are engaged with, and hosted two webinars on this for district churches (one session in English, one in Spanish, both with good attendance). Recordings of these sessions are on the

PSWD YouTube channel.

In summary the bill requires that any organization that works with children or youth needs to ensure that the following three things are in place within the organization:

- 1) That all employees and significant volunteers have received training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting. There is a free training module available through the state of California.
- 2) That any staff or significant volunteers working with children will have been screened to make certain there is no history of child abuse in their background. The law also requires that this be done using a fingerprint based system (Livescan), more stringent than the systems that most of our churches and the district have been using.
- 3) That the organization have in place documented policies for how they will report incidents and how they will safeguard children, including the expectation that as much as possible there will be the presence of two mandated reporters whenever children are being worked with.

One of the enforcement mechanisms in the law is that insurance providers are allowed/encouraged to ask for the records around this law (proof of training, screening, and policies) in the process of writing liability insurance for the organization. So getting in step with this is important for our California congregations (I also encourage our Arizona and Nevada churches to use this opportunity to put policies and procedures in place).

This is a major undertaking for churches. The district has provided resources in both English and Spanish to churches and continues to work to support congregations as they work at getting into compliance with the legal requirements, and more importantly, putting steps and processes in place that make for the safest possible environment for children we are blessed to serve.

District Youth Ministry Direction

In June I decided, in consultation with the Executive Board, that the model we were using to try to support Youth in the District was not working. I have questioned this many times over my tenure as District Executive and we have tried many things over the years. A mixture of changes in the lives of youth and their availability, and then the

added pressures of COVID for the last 3 years, makes it a good time to pause and evaluate. My recommendation was that we should: end our current method of doing things; end our employment of Rafael Aranda as District Youth Advisor; and take the next year to work with congregations and youth to determine what, if anything, would be helpful to the work of our local churches and their youth ministry. We are gathering a group to work at what would be helpful and might be meaningful to support churches and youth today and into the future. I expect that this group, in the year ahead, will engage the Policy Board and interested churches in conversation and will make recommendations on how best to serve and support our youth and congregations working with youth in the years ahead.

I do want to express my thanks to Rafael Aranda for his work over the last 2 ½ years with our district youth. Rafael started just before COVID arrived, worked to host a twice a month Zoom District Youth Gathering for a year, and organized two different in person outdoor gatherings. He also invested significant time in working to publicize the 2022 COB National Youth Conference and ways the district was supporting churches to help get youth and advisors there. PSWD had five youth and four advisors from three congregations attend the COB National Youth Conference in July.

Pastoral/Congregational Transitions

- *Circle of Peace (Peoria, AZ)* - Work on the new sanctuary project continues, including the fund-raising campaign which is now in operation. Groundbreaking will take place sometime in 2023. The congregation received a \$250,000 grant from PSWD's Growth from the Ashes Fund.
- *Glendora* - Pastor Bob Morris retired at the end of September. Work is underway to provide interim leadership as they assess next steps towards future leadership. The congregation celebrated 120 years of ministry in Glendora last March.
- *La Verne* - Pastor Dawna Welch resigned at the end of 2021, and Pastor Susan Boyer retired this June. The congregation has formed a search committee and has been evaluating their pastoral leadership structure. Carol Wise has been with the congregation since February serving as the interim lead pastor, and Dena Pence started in July as a part time interim pastor.
- *Modesto* - The congregation celebrated its 100th year of ministry with a party in September.

- *Paradise* - While the congregation was closed in 2019, the district still had ownership of the property. After allowing a company that was working on rebuilding the town use the land as a base of operations for about 1 ½ years, we sold the property this summer to one of the church's long-time neighbors.

- *Pomona Fellowship* - Pastor Lauren Seganos Cohen resigned in August, relocating to Pennsylvania in September. She and her husband both accepted positions at Bucknell University. The congregation continues to rent space from St. Paul's Episcopal and meet in Zoom two Sundays each month.

- *Prince of Peace (Sacramento)* - Matthew Real has been called to serve as the interim pastor. Matt is the director of CPE for Kaiser Hospitals Sacramento and is working part time with the congregation. He is an American Baptist minister.

- *Restoration LA* - they celebrated 100 years of Brethren ministry in their community this April. The Restoration LA congregation is the third manifestation of the Brethren ministry in their location. Originally founded as the Belvedere congregation, then becoming the Bella Vista church, and now for the last 12 years as Restoration LA the church has served the community of East Los Angeles. A new plaque was installed that identifies the history of the ministry.

- *San Diego* - Pastor Sara Haldeman-Scarr has retired as of the middle of August and she relocated to Pennsylvania. The congregation has called Carrie Cesar to be the next pastor and her service began on October 1. Carrie formerly served PSWD as staff for missions development.

- *South Bay (Redondo Beach)* - The congregation continues to search with their partner church Journey Covenant for their next pastoral leader. They also paid off the remodeling loan they had taken from the PSWD, completing payments of the 20 year loan in just over five years.

Sabbatical Plan

The District Board granted me a sabbatical as I began my 8th year as District Executive Minister. Due to family circumstances it did not work for me to take the time as planned, and the Board agreed to allow me to use the sabbatical in early 2023. I will be on Sabbatical from January 25 through March 28, 2023. The key portion of the sabbatical will be

spending six weeks in a Spanish language immersion program in Mexico. I am grateful for the opportunity to have this time away and the time to work on improving my Spanish as I seek to be able to have conversations with members of our Spanish speaking congregations.

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

Russ Matteson

District Executive Minister

Deceased Ministers

Thomas Deal - 8/9/1938 – 5/9/2022

Clark Youngblood - 12/10/1946 – 9/4/2022

Recognition of Ministers' Ordination Anniversaries

45 Years

Russell Betz
James Isaacs
Donald Shankster

40 Years

Philip Corr
Olga Serrano

35 Years

Sara Haldeman-Scarr
Joseph Vecchio

20 Years

Nick Corral
Elizabeth Rowan

10 Years

Thomas Guthrie

5 Years

Thomas Dowdy (with COB)

**Representing 340 years
of service.**

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

At this time the district has no students formally enrolled in the TRIM program. We are using the courses offered in TRIM to provide Brethren content for Jonathan Chubb (Papago Buttes) as he works to have his ordination transferred to the Church of the Brethren, and for training of Sandra Millard (Bakersfield) who is licensed and doing some coursework to add to other work she comes into ministry with.

Russ Matteson, TRIM Coordinator
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MTC: Ministry Training Coordinator: SeBAH and 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 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 two 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 18 of her 20 experience write-ups. Príncipe de Paz Pastor Richard Zapata has finished his last SeBAH class and is working on his 20 experiences. Iglesia de Cristo Sion Pastor Rita Flores finished EPMC and is working towards ordination.

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

Gilbert Romero, MTC
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