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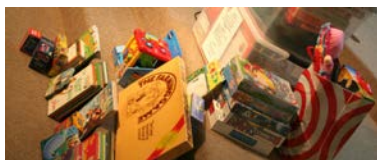
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Being God's Family the Focus of District Conference

Moderator John Price (Empire) spoke deeply into his theme "We are family. The family of God!" in the opening worship service on Friday night, reminding those who gathered that it is God who has brought us together and we need to choose to live together as sisters and brothers in Christ. The theme of family was expanded through the music, a short drama, and sharing from representatives of two congregations about how the church is family for them. A special offering as our service project was collected to support the ministry of Family Promise of Greater Modesto which works with families who are experiencing homelessness.

A collection of toys, games, and books to share with children and an offering of more than \$700 was received.



Toys received at the worship center

As we settled into business on Saturday, with representatives from 23 of the district's 26 congregations and total delegates of 67 sisters and brothers, the group gathered for the first time at tables of five delegates, like is the case



Delegates seated at the tables

at Annual Conference. Each table had five different congregations represented among those seated together, and during business there was time to get to know each other a bit, and two intentional times of conversation at tables to reflect on questions related to the theme that

had been prepared by the Moderator.



Iglesia Cristo Sion is received as a Congregation

Early in business the delegates voted to move Cristo Sion Iglesia de los Hermanos from project status to congregation. For a moment the voting was eclipsed by the celebratory applause as delegates responded to the motion and extended a warm welcome to the four representatives of this new congregation. Pastor David Flores spoke on behalf of the congregation and gave thanks for the support and welcome of the PSWD over the last 8 years, and in particular to the Pomona Fellowship congregation in whose facility they meet and who have provided support and shared ministry opportunities since Cristo Sion began to affiliate with the Church of the Brethren.

Breaks in the business session opened opportunities for a variety of Insight Sessions which were well attended by conference participants. These included a chance to talk with the new General Secretary David Steele, hear from the district Executive Board, receive training in conflict transformation, get an update on the Nigerian Brethren, participate in a Bible study and conversation on the theme, or hear about the work of some of our growing congregations.



District Conference Officers

In other business Saturday the delegates approved a 2017 operating budget of \$533,082 which includes the final round of Pastoral Support Grants totaling \$91,000, and continued investment in the new Ministry Partnership Funds of \$50,000. The delegates also approved a spending cap of \$425,000 for the district budget in 2018. Additional business included action to close the Waterford congregation which held it's last worship service in January 2016. This included some brief sharing and a prayer of thanksgiving for the witness and ministry in Jesus' name that had taken place in Waterford.

Delegates affirmed the leadership put forward by the Nominating Committee. The details are below on page 4.



Consecration of Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr (San Diego) and Moderator-Elect Karen Pierson (Living Savior)

Saturday night's worship service included sharing from three different generations about the meaning of the church as God's family, and included worship leadership from several district youth. On Sunday morning the preacher was Annual Conference Moderator Carol Scheppard, who had provided leadership for the Friday minister's event and was with us through the whole weekend. It also included a time of consecration for the new district leadership and sharing from new Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr (San Diego) about the theme for the 2017 Conference (see back page).

Thanks were extended throughout the weekend to the Modesto congregation for hosting District Conference, and to the many volunteers who extended gracious hospitality, gifted us with music, and served delicious meals. When all was said and done, we had come together as God's family to do business, fellowship, learn, and worship.

Pace y bene (Peace and all good),

Russ Matteson

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District Conference 2016

Youth News from Modesto

Shout out to all 15 youth and 3 chaperones who registered for 2016 District Conference in Modesto. Arriving from Bakersfield, Empire, La Verne, Live Oak, Modesto, Papago Buttes, Santa Ana, we had a blast! Our time included get-to-know-you activities, team building exercises, movie/bible study, labyrinth walk, Rockin' Jump, and Saturday worship leadership.



Saturday began with breakfast, and business, then went on to participate in team building fun, followed by an unscheduled, impromptu experience in the exquisite on-site labyrinth at Modesto Church of the Brethren. Some youth were very familiar with this spiritual practice, for others it was a first time experience. When describing what they felt while walking and praying they identified the following: *safe, peaceful, quiet, dizzy, impatient, amazed, relaxed, blessed and satisfied to reach the center.* Together we determined that Psalm 119:105 was a fitting scripture for the activity. *"Thy word is the lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."* Wow!

Thank you PSWD for continuing to support a youth ministry that allows youth to minister to all of us! Photo's of our time together can be found on the PSWD Youth Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Pacific-Southwest-District-Youth-271959712814142/>

Coming Soon...

The PSWD Youth Cabinet, Jorge Molina, Liz Piazza, Mario Cabrera, is excited to plan an opportunity for another Youth gathering in the Spring. Stay tuned for details! www.pswdcob.org/youth

Sending Your Congregation's Delegate to Annual Conference

www.brethren.org/ac/2017

In 2017, the 231st recorded Church of the Brethren Annual Conference will be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And once again congregations will be encouraged to send a delegate to come together for fellowship and to discern the business of the denomination. For those who may be unaware, here is some information on sending a delegate from your congregation.

Why is it important for my congregation to send a delegate to Annual Conference? Sending a delegate to Annual Conference is the only way to ensure your congregation has a say in decisions that affect the whole church. The Annual Conference delegate body is one of the most important-if not the highest-level of decision making in the Church of the Brethren. Each congregation may play a vital part in Annual Conference by sending a delegate or delegates. The number of delegates a congregation may send is relative to the number of members in the congregation.

Who can be a delegate and how many delegates does our congregation get? Each congregation may choose who their delegate(s) may be, and all delegates must be full members of the Church of the Brethren. The pastor of a congregation is not automatically a delegate.

The number of delegates allowed per congregation is based on its membership statistics as reported in the Church of the Brethren Yearbook for the previous year.

The number allowed is as follows:

1 - 200 members	1 delegate
201 - 400 members	2 delegates
401 - 600 members	3 delegates
601 - 800 members	4 delegates
801+ members	5 delegates



2017 Annual Conference Theme

What do delegates and their congregations get from Annual Conference? Delegates benefit personally from the opportunities for spiritual renewal, continuing education, and faith formation. Their congregations benefit from the spiritual growth that their church leadership may bring back and share with the church. In addition to business sessions, each Conference features daily worship services, Bible studies, insight sessions on a wide variety of topics, support groups, meal events, an exhibit hall with booths and many free resources, a Brethren Press bookstore, and much more. All of these are open to every Conference attendee. Every congregation that sends a delegate will also receive a copy of that year's Annual Conference minutes.



Carol Scheppard, Moderator

To take full advantage of sending a delegate, a congregation should make time for that person to report back following the Conference, so that they can share the experience with the whole congregation.

Delegate registration for Grand Rapids will open online on Wednesday, March 1, 2017. The registration fee for each delegate is \$285. For more information about how to send a delegate to Annual Conference, contact the Conference Office by email at annualconference@brethren.org or call 800-323-8039 ext. 365.

District Board Reorganizes

On Sunday morning of District Conference weekend the Policy Board gathered to call out leadership and organize itself into commissions. The returning and new members of the Board had been holding where they might feel called to serve in their prayers over the last month. Following some conversation and a time of introductions they offered their names for service and the following leadership was affirmed for 2017:



- Board Chair - Nelda Rhoades Clarke (Tucson)
- Board Vice-chair - Dot Hess (La Verne)
- Ministry Commission -
 - Chair Tom Hostetler (La Verne)
 - Katherine Boeger Knight (Live Oak)
 - Cindy Slaughter (Glendale)
 - Clark Youngblood (Circle of Peace)
- Stewards Commission -
 - Chair Joel Price (Empire)
 - Brenda Dickson (South Bay)
 - Lillian Hopson (Imperial Heights)
- Congregational Vitality Task Group Members -
 - Roxanne Aguirre (Cornerstone-Reedley)
 - Cheryl Crane (Prince of Peace/Sacramento)
 - Richard Keeling (Bakersfield)



Additional members of the Policy Board include: Rudy Amaya (Principe de Paz), David Flores (Cristo Sion), Eddie Hernandez (Modesto), Norma Morris (Glendora), Elizabeth Piazza (Live Oak/YA Rep), Israel Rosas (Glendale/YA Rep), Alex Sanders (Modesto/YA Rep)

Also serving are Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr (San Diego), Moderator-Elect Karen Pierson (Church of the Living Savior), and Clerk Karen Cosner (Modesto). The first meeting of the new Board takes place January 13-14 at Hillcrest in La Verne.

WOW! Retreat Returns!

May 19-21, 2017

The Weekend of Wonder Women's Retreat returns to the PSWD calendar in 2017. Women are encouraged to make plans to join their sisters the weekend of May 19-21 at the ECCO Retreat Center in Oakhurst, CA (near Yosemite) for a time of fellowship, learning, prayer, and enjoying creation. Cost for the retreat will be \$176 (shared room with 2-3 others), \$188 (double room), or \$274 (private room). Sara Haldeman-Scarr and Cindy Slaughter are coordinating the planning for the event. Registration materials will be available in late January. Look for them at your church and on the PSWD website: www.pswdcob.org/wow

Pastoral Transitions



James Isaacs will be retiring from active ministry and finishing his service at the Bakersfield congregation at the end of February 2017. James has been the pastor there for the last 14 years, and has served Mennonite congregations throughout the US prior to his time at Bakersfield.

We wish him well as he makes this transition.

Janet Ober Lambert resigned effective December 2016 from the La Verne congregation, having served as the Associate Pastor for the past 17 years and touching the lives of a generation of youth and young adults (and many others) during her tenure. Janet's future steps in ministry are being discerned, but include doing a CPE unit and exploring future calls.



Renewal for Pastors & Spouses

Encourage your pastor (and spouse if he/she is married) to mark their calendars now to join with colleagues for this annual event which is a time of rest and renewal for body, mind, and spirit. June 5-9, 2017, is when the group will gather at the Serra Retreat in Malibu, CA. Registration will be available in February.

Live Nativity at Circle of Peace



A warm welcome greeted the neighbors and friends who came out on a cool December evening in the desert to make

ready for Christmas with a visit to Circle of Peace's Live Nativity event. Starting at a welcome table, guests were invited to complete a registration card which



included a tear off with information about Christmas Eve and worship, given an introduction to the areas they could explore and a bag to place items they might collect through the evening.

From there they were off to the petting zoo, the marketplace, a host of Christmas crafts, refreshments, a campfire, carolers, and in the center of it all a nativity scene at which to take in the meaning of Christmas. This years event (Circle has been doing this for about 10 years) brought about 225 guests, a little smaller than some years, but the evening provided good opportunity to interact with newer participants in the congregation and the guests who attended.



Renovations at South Bay



Change is happening at the South Bay congregation and with their partner church, Journey Evangelical Covenant, in the form of an extensive remodeling and upgrading of the church facility. Construction work began in

October 2016 and should be completed by Easter 2017, but the work of dreaming and planning on



what was needed has been taking place for the last two years. Original plans were to provide for more space in worship and for gathering to accommodate the growing partnered congregations, an upgrade to the bathrooms, and a facelift to the exterior, all of which will be accomplished through this project. The joint congregations have raised half of the funds needed, and the PSWD has provided a 20 year loan for the balance. Hold South Bay and Journey in your prayers as they continue to worship and serve in the midst of construction, and as they make the facility and themselves ready to continue sharing the love and witness of Jesus in the Redondo Beach area and beyond.



THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

EDITOR: CYNTHIA WOOLEVER—WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

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CAN WE WAIT FOR GOD'S SPARK?

God sparks innovations, but only on God's terms, and those terms usually involve disruption. From burning bushes to wood that burns even when soaked, God's sparks manifest themselves in unusual ways. We can choose to ignore the spark or even squelch the spark. But, if we take notice of it, the spark soon becomes a roaring fire. What are the conditions for God's spark? And, does the spark look different if people rather than God initiate the encounter?

How Business Views Disruption

The average life of a shopping mall or center built today is fifteen years. And if the shopping venue does not make a radical change at least half-way through their expected fifteen-year tenure, it may not even last that long! Geoff Colvin recently wrote that the most innovative companies today, "see their business as disrupters would see it." They never stop self-disrupting their own companies.¹ For example, Amazon disrupted bookstores twenty years ago with their online selling model. Then disrupted itself with Kindle e-readers, replacing its own books-by-mail model.² They have continued this disruption by opening and successfully operating brick-and-mortar bookstores, even while the traditional bookstore model continues to fail.³

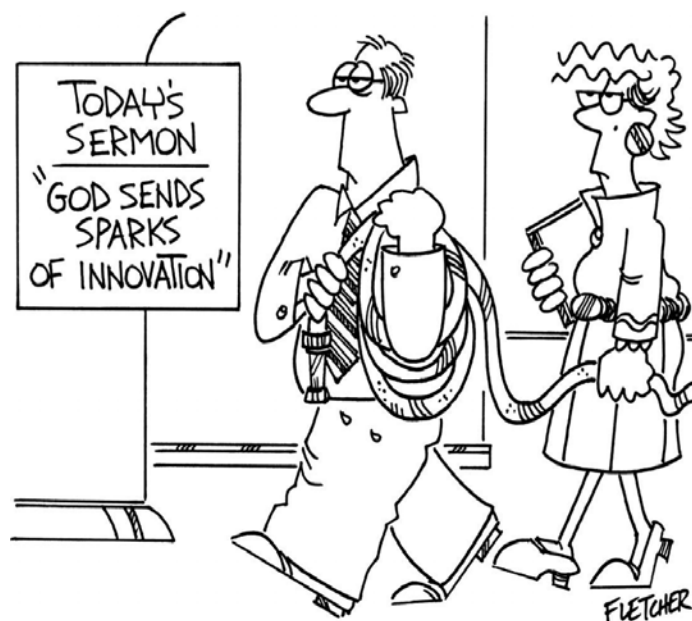
Fortunately, congregations do not have to self-disrupt. God is here to do that for us! Sometimes congregations forget how often they have had to respond to disruptions in order to faithfully minister in their present location. A church that has existed for one hundred years has probably had six or seven make-overs resulting from neighborhood swivels and societal swings. Congregations are indeed resilient. But, God must sponsor their transformations.

For instance, through a discernment process, a Milwaukee congregation challenges its members to draw from three equal sources whenever the church

launches a new ministry. Equal shares of the start-up cost must come from: (1) those launching the ministry; (2) other congregational members; and (3) nonmembers or community partners. Asking nonmembers to support new ministry ideas can be disruptive and involving community stakeholders can make the ministry launch much more messy and problematic. However, this church believes the community's involvement confirms that this is the direction in which God has encouraged them to go and have accepted the disruption proposed by God.

God's Disruptive Spark in the Bible

Sparks from God are indications that God has heard us or wants to reveal something to us. What happens when God initiates the contact? The book of Matthew reminds us that God's initiative contact is usually disruptive. God's encounter with the mother of Jesus was certainly disruptive. When God visited the shepherds and asked them to go to King Herod to inquire about a new king, that news was not received warmly by



the current king. Jesus rocks John the Baptist's world by asking John to baptize Jesus and presenting standards for an utterly new lifestyle in the Sermon on the Mount. The disruptions continue and become more personal as Jesus eats at a sinner's home and shatters Sabbath protocols. Walking with Jesus means living a constantly unsettled life.

Can We Seek God's Spark?

The book of Matthew also reveals instances in which humans initiate contact with God, and we quickly discover the importance of faith in such encounters. When Jesus calmed the storm, he asked his disciples, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Matthew 8:26). However, when a man brought his daughter to Jesus for healing, the man openly expressed his faith, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live" (Matthew 9:18). Likewise, when two blind men came to Jesus, he asked, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28).

No matter who initiates the contact, it is clear that God must sponsor the change in order for the spark to grow into a fire. We see this communication breakdown with God in a community where the owner of a local diner purposely hires and trains former prison inmates and other persons who have difficulty finding work. When the owner was asked if he had contacted local clergy to invite them to be part of his community ministry, his response was surprising. "Yes," he said, "And it was a disaster. The clergy kept asking the employees uncomfortable questions about their background. They made it clear that they would want them to attend their congregations if they helped." The clergy wanted to be a part of the spark, but could not handle the flame.

What if today's burning bushes are far away from the Sunday morning crowds? What if God is sending us sparks of innovation on a regular basis, but they are more dangerous and disruptive than they are comforting and successful by our standards? A congregation in Nebraska recently witnessed God's spark by walking their neighborhood. Some nearby apartment dwellers became concerned about these strangers who were regularly walking their neighborhood and asked what they were doing. The

neighborhood inquirers were quite surprised to learn that church members were simply trying to better understand their neighborhood and the people in it.

As it turned out, the apartment residents welcomed their intruders, as they had spiritual questions that they were too intimidated to ask anyone else. The entire group explored these spiritual questions together. The people in the apartments have not come to the church but the church members have learned as much about God as the apartment residents. God's spark is being fanned, but not in ways that we could predict.

Perhaps many of our requests for sparks from God are seemingly ignored because we are seeking a specific outcome, such as congregational growth, our own comfort and safety, or retaining our leadership status. Congregational change does not happen unless God sparks it, and not only must we have enough faith to oxygenate the spark once it appears, but we must also be prepared to accept God's end result.

Are You Ready for Congregational Change?

"A small green apple cannot ripen one night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy beside its small green counterparts. . . . We must wait for God."⁴

Look for God's pre-emptive spark and once you find it, block it from distractions, and fan it with flames of trust.

1. *Fortune*, August 1, 2016, 22.

2. *Ibid*.

3. Ryan Bort, "Amazon Is Opening More Brick-and-Mortar Bookstores," www.newsweek.com/amazon-opening-brick-and-mortar-bookstores-494216

4. James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003), 114.

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The Witness and With-ness of Jesus!

Matthew 5:1-16

District Conference
November 10-12, 2017
At Hillcrest in
La Verne, California



Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr

Christian identity involves both Witness and With-ness. Our Witness speaks to the confidence of engaging others in conversation, with curiosity and respect, as we share our understanding of the Christ-like way of life. Our With-ness speaks to accompanying each other on our chosen faith journeys seeking to find and to encounter God's merciful, abundant, and unconditional love. On our sacred journeys, illumined by the light of Jesus, together we can find the beauty of our unity nestled in the creativity of our diversity. And in this we are pulled together by the mysterious power of God into miraculous tapestries! In 2017, may we discover the artistry of our lives as we weave together our faith stories to proclaim our with-ness and witness in Jesus.

Registration begins September 2017
www.pswdcob.org/distconf

Reserve the date now:
November 10-12 District Conference
We look forward to seeing you!