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Focusing on Jesus Together

November 9-11, 2018

From across the District, including representatives from the new church plant in Nevada, sisters and brothers gathered at Hillcrest last November to do the business work of the District, but also to fellowship, worship, and learn.

Moderator Karen Pierson (Church of the Living Savior, McFarland) shared the theme of “Focus on Jesus” in the Friday night worship and invited all present to spend their time at District Conference and their lives focused on following Jesus. The scripture focus of Matthew 14:29-30 (Jesus inviting Peter to get out of the boat) was the text for all three worship services, with different preachers sharing the message God gave them for the text, and the worship experience being planned and led by the congregation that the night’s preacher serves. Saturday evening’s message was from Pastor Jody Romero with worship leadership from the Restoration LA congregation, and on Sunday morning conference attendees joined the La Verne congregation in their building as Pastor Susan Boyer brought the message. Many attendees appreciated the way each of the preachers worked with the scripture text and how they heard the invitation to focus on Jesus.

Delegates also voted to officially disorganize the Lindsay congregation, and were informed that the proceeds from the sale of their building were being used to support church planting work. Leadership for the years ahead was also called, including Mary Kay Ogden (La Verne) as Moderator-elect, who will work alongside 2019 Moderator Bob Morris (Glendora).



A two hour block of business time was used for the district to engage in the denominational Compelling Vision process. David Steele (COB General Secretary) was present to guide the conversations in small groups around where God might be calling the Church of the Brethren to be as we move into the future. About 140 delegates and others participated, including 15 who participated in Spanish. The sharing gained at this conversation will be combined with sharing at events in other districts to form the foundation of the conversation that will have most of the time at Annual Conference this summer.



Karen Pierson Jody Romero Susan Boyer

In business delegates were introduced to Pastor Luz Roman and her husband Orlando who were warmly welcomed as the leaders of the new church project in Las Vegas, Nevada. Later the delegates approved a change in the by-laws that added the state of Nevada to the territory of the PSWD. Other items of business included the approval of the 2019 district budget with expenses of \$446,000 for core operations and \$60,000 for church planting from set aside Lindsay funds, and setting the 2020 expense maximum at \$450,000.



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Caring for those at Paradise

www.pswdcob.org/fire



November 8 started like most any other day for those who live in Paradise, CA, and surrounding areas. However, by mid-morning a small fire pushed by high winds across dried out grasslands and woods had made its way across the miles and placed the town of Paradise in peril. Among the 20,000 residents were Pastor Mel Campbell and his wife Jane, and a few other folks who made up the membership of the Paradise Church of the Brethren. As Pastor Mel drove away the church building was already on fire, and the flames soon consumed the parsonage, youth building, and two rental homes on the church property. All of the people associated with the Church of the Brethren, and the Rock Church with whom they shared worship, made it out safely - but most did so with only the clothes they were wearing and perhaps a few personal items they managed to grab in the moments before they fled.

Before the fire was even contained Brethren from around the district and across the country were asking how they might help those who had lost everything in the fire. To date more than \$60,000 has been donated through the PSWD to provide direct assistance to the Brethren who were part of the Paradise congregation. As funds have come in they have been passed along to those in need, some of whom lacked insurance and others who have found that insurance and disaster relief funds through FEMA still leave them facing a challenge to live today and to figure out where they will finally end up.

The Paradise congregation was small and at this point their leadership has asked the district to handle the process of the insurance claims, property cleanup, and decided that they do not plan to continue the congregation. Part of this is the unknown of how long it will be before anyone knows when rebuilding might begin and what changes will be needed, in addition to the size of the group that was there.

The PSWD will continue to work with the folks there and provide care and support as they are about rebuilding their lives. You are invited to hold them in prayer for the



time ahead which is still challenging. They have lost much, but their faith in God has deepened and grown in the midst of this tragedy.

Ministry Updates

- **Pomona Fellowship** has called **Lauren Seganos Cohen** as their new pastor. She began her work there on December 1. Lauren comes to PSWD from Maine and the Middle PA district. Her husband Jason took a new position in Pasadena this summer and Lauren called looking for places to serve in ministry. Welcome to PSWD, Lauren and Jason!



- This past July **Pastor Randy Short** of the **Glendale** congregation was taken by an aggressive cancer that he had fought for about six months. Continue to hold Randy's widow Kathy and daughter Bailey in your prayers. They have returned to Michigan where they had moved to California from just about a year prior to Randy's death.

In October **Annali Topf**, a newly licensed minister and recent graduate of Fuller Seminary, began serving as the interim pastor at **Glendale**. We are grateful for her ministry there. Glendale is in the process of finding a new pastor to work with them.



- **Modesto** continues with interim pastoral leadership as they search for a new pastor. **Mike Fletcher** finished his time as their interim pastor in November, and **Stephen Reddy** began serving as interim in January. Stephen is a long time member of and music minister for the Modesto congregation who is ordained in the American Baptist Churches.



District Board Organization

www.pswdcob.org/ministries/board

- * **Executive Board:** Chair Nelda Clarke, Vice-Chair Dott Hess, Moderator Bob Morris, Moderator-Elect Mary Kay Ogden, Ministry Chair Clark Youngblood, Stewards Chair Joel Price.

- * **Ministry Commission:** Chair Clark Youngblood, Norma Sexton, Cindy Slaughter, Katherine Boeger Knight, David Flores, Richard Zapata.

- * **Stewards Commission:** Chair Joel Price, Christi Bowman, Jonas Funderburk, Eddie Hernandez.

- * **Congregational Vitality Task Group:** Chair Cheryl Crane, Richard Keeling, Joanne Wagoner, Julia Wheeler.

- * **Church Planting Task Group:** Rudy Amaya, Robert Aguirre, Mike Fletcher, Dawna Welch.

Passing on the Ministry in Tucson

When members of the Tucson congregation gathered on Saturday, January 5, for a closing time of worship and remembering, their sadness was tinged with hope as they prayed a blessing for the church that would now do ministry from their location on Dodge Ave. Members, friends, and others from around the district came together to give thanks for the work that the Brethren had been doing there since 1956. Pastor Nelda Rhoades Clarke led out, a message was shared by former pastor and district moderator Bob Morris, and there was sharing from former pastors, members of families of former pastors, and others whose lives had been touched by this congregation.



Also joining the service were about 30 members of Iglesia Fuente de Vida Asamblea de Dios, the Spanish speaking church of about 130 that had purchased the church buildings and property and would now reach the community in ministry from this place. Fuente de Vida members had been assisting Tucson leaders in cleaning things up at the church for the last few months, and delayed their

moving in so that the Tucson group could continue to worship through the Christmas season together.

The service's ending included a prayer of blessing for this new ministry, words of thanksgiving from their pastor, and a closing singing of How Great Thou Art in both English and Spanish, led by the praise team of the new congregation.



“What is God calling the PSWD to do?” Conversations...

Members of the District Board have been visiting congregations to lead a conversation around what members of local churches believe God might be calling the PSWD to be about in the years ahead. The sale of a piece of property in the Koreatown area of Los Angeles brought in significant new resources in the Spring of 2018 and district leadership decided it would be good to talk with local churches and explore together what God might be inviting



us to do through the use of these funds. So far 8 churches and a gathering of 40 at District Conference 2018 have been in the conversation. If your church hasn't been visited yet, reach out to your church leadership and the district office to get on the schedule. The Policy Board hopes to develop a plan over the next several months and bring a proposal to the District Conference this November.

Getting to Annual Conf 2019

www.brethren.org/ac

The conversations this summer at Annual Conference will play a key role in setting the direction that the Church of the Brethren will go as it follows Jesus into the future. Originally this conference was to be in PSWD's backyard (San Diego) but due to facility renovations the conference was moved to an available facility in Greensboro, NC. The District wants to encourage all churches to have a delegate present in the conversation this summer and so is making funds available to support congregations that often do not send a delegate to assist in getting there this year. Congregational leaders will receive more details on the support available to them, but perhaps God is calling you to be the person your church sends.



2019 District Conference Theme

**Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."
John 15:5 NRSV**

When I hear Jesus' words, I am called to prayer. Jesus reminds me 1.) that I must be constantly listening to and talking with him, 2.) that any of my efforts which omit him will be spiritually empty, 3.) that I am totally dependent on God, and 4.) that abiding in Jesus is the only way for me to remain connected to Jesus and to sisters and brothers. Jesus statement implies that everyone of us needs to maintain a vital, prayerful, connection to Jesus Christ. I am asking each one in our district to join with me in regular prayer and to also do anything that enhances one's connection to Jesus, and by extension, to each other. Frequent reading of the Gospels and Old and New Testament Scriptures will help us stay joined to Jesus and joined together. If we are cut off from Jesus, the true vine, we are also cut off from each other and our work then amounts to nothing. I like to tell people,

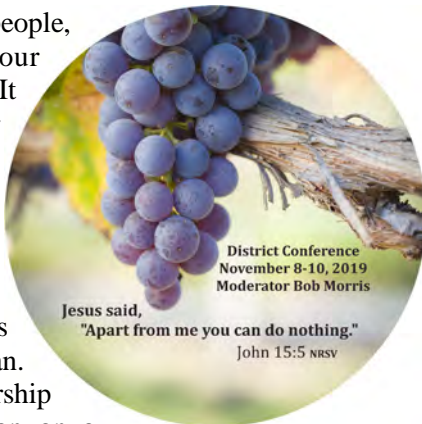
"Add prayer to your church's program. It won't increase your budget, and the benefits are out of this world."

During this year I plan to visit as many churches/congregations in our district as I can. Although I'd like to worship with every congregation on a Sunday morning, I'm afraid that won't be feasible. However, if your congregation has regular meetings during the week, by my attending those meetings, I may be able to get around to more of our congregations. I need to be here in Glendora at least a couple of Sundays each month!

Please plan to spend Friday through Sunday, November 8-10, 2019 in beautiful Scottsdale, Arizona. Once again, we will be meeting at the Franciscan Retreat Center. With renovations being made to that facility as I write this to you, we expect that our accommodations there will be even better than before! Please mark your calendar now so that we can be together on November 8.

I'm looking forward to our praying together while we are apart throughout the year.

Gratefully,
Bob Morris,
2019 PSWD Moderator



WOW Weekend of Wonder PSWD Women's Retreat

April 5-7, 2019 — Murrieta Hot Springs

The Weekend of Wonder Women's Retreat returns in 2019. We encourage you to make plans to join your sisters the weekend of April 5-7 for a time of fellowship, learning, prayer, and enjoying creation, at the Murrieta Hot Springs Retreat Center in Murrieta Hot Springs, CA (near Temecula, 40 miles south of Riverside).

Experience real *Hot Springs* that are "Luxurious, welcoming, and always available. The hot springs are the place to relax while on your retreat. The Roman Spa is filled with filtered hot springs water in an environment that is meant for you and your friends to relax and fellowship."



www.mhsretreats.com/amenities

Arrive at 4 p.m. for registration on April 5th and be welcomed by the Planning Team: Christi Bowman, Karen Pierson, Julie Wheeler. Dinner starts at 6:50 p.m. In addition to the adventure of relaxation, Julia Wheeler will share reflections on the *Water of Life*.

Attendees from last year's retreat came away refreshed, inspired and ready for life! Hope to see you there!

Register Now for WOW!

www.pswdcob.org/wow

Pastor / Spouse Retreat

May 27-31, 2019

Encourage your pastor and spouse to attend this annual retreat. This year's event will be at Serra Retreat in Malibu from May 27-31. Leadership is still being finalized, but we expect a renewing week together. There will be lodging on Monday May 27 at a hotel just inland from Malibu, and we will begin our time together at Serra and in retreat with the noon meal on Tuesday, May 28. So make plans now to be with us for this gift of time and space from the district.

Retreat for all ministers serving as pastor or chaplain, and their spouses in PSWD.

www.pswdcob.org/events/pastor



Nigerian Visit Samuel & Rebecca Dali

Thanks to our visit hosts for the February 17-24 visit: Bakersfield, Church of the Living Savior, Centro Agape en Acción, N.CA Churches, Pomona Fellowship, San Diego.



Rebecca & Samuel at Pomona Fellowship by Pastor Lauren

“Samuel Dali of Nigeria is serving as current international scholar in residence at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Ind. His wife Rebecca Dali, has international recognition for her humanitarian work with the oppressed in Nigeria, is working on a book that recounts how women and children often suffer the brunt of insurgency and violence in northern Nigeria, drawing on her doctoral research and her work with the Centre for Caring, Empowerment, and Peace Initiatives, which she founded in 1989.” (from www.brethren.org/news/2018/samuel-dali-joins-bethany.html)

“The Church of the Living Savior hosted Rebecca and Samuel at Hodel’s restaurant. Members from Bakersfield joined us for a very positive time. Don Davis gave them an “agricultural tour” of the McFarland area, especially Don’s groves. I followed that with a tour of the church plant.”

“Over dinner and during the evening we had a great time of fellowship. Samuel and I the historians and my wife Karin and Rebecca the humanitarians. I am so humbled by their Christian faith, their attitude of service, and all the sacrifices they have made over the years. They have exhibited courage in the midst of loss. I hope to see them both again in the not too distant future!”

Phil Corr, Ph.D., Pastor, Church of the Living Savior



At Centro Agape en Acción, Los Banos

Licensing & Ordination

www.pswdcob.org/nacc

- * Mercedes Zapata, ordained 11/18/2018 at Príncipe de Paz CoB.



- * Amanda Bennett, licensed 11/4/2018 at La Verne CoB where she is Children’s Ministries Coordinator & Social Media Coordinator.



- * Annali Topf, licensed 10/14/2018 at Pasadena CoB. Annali is currently Interm-Pastor at Glendale CoB.



- * Julia Wheeler, licensed 11/18/2018 at La Verne CoB. Julia is Associate Director of Development for the University of La Verne.



Hispanic ministers meet with Annual Conference Moderator Donita Keister at the Pomona Fellowship / Cristo Sion site.

THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

EDITORS: DANA HORRELL AND CYNTHIA WOOLEVER—WWW.THEPARISHPAPER.COM

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DEFINING CHURCH VITALITY: LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

Most pastors, laypersons, and denominational leaders develop a personal theory that says *one particular factor* is the key to congregational vitality. Each of those theories is correct and incorrect. Each “favorite factor” is important, but church vitality is a result of a long list of factors.

What Is the Church’s Macro Mission?

Looking at church vitality from the macro direction produces a list of classic, universal mission functions for churches of every size, in every generation, in every kind of community. From this perspective, all vital churches have the same mission. Theologians and church historians have summarized that macro mission with terms such as *Koinonia* (fellowship/relational/community), *Diaconia* (service), *Didache* (Bible teaching), *Kerygma* (proclamation), and *Leiturgia* (worship/communal prayer). We see this macro mission in the writings of theologians, the printed mission statements of denominations, and the preambles of local church constitutions. All of these documents are biblical, truthful statements of purpose.

Most church leaders and members feel adequately informed with the three verses in which Jesus answered the macro mission question: the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the Apostle Paul’s definitions of the church’s macro mission. Stated in those biblical ways, congregations accomplish that macro mission by doing three things: (a) transforming the quality of peoples’ lives by helping them strengthen their spiritual connection with God (Luke 10:27); (b) helping hurting people in the church, community, and across the world who have physical and emotional needs (Luke 10:27); and (c) encouraging more people to form a spiritual connection with God (Luke 10:29-37; Matthew 23:19-20).

What Is the Church’s Micro Mission?

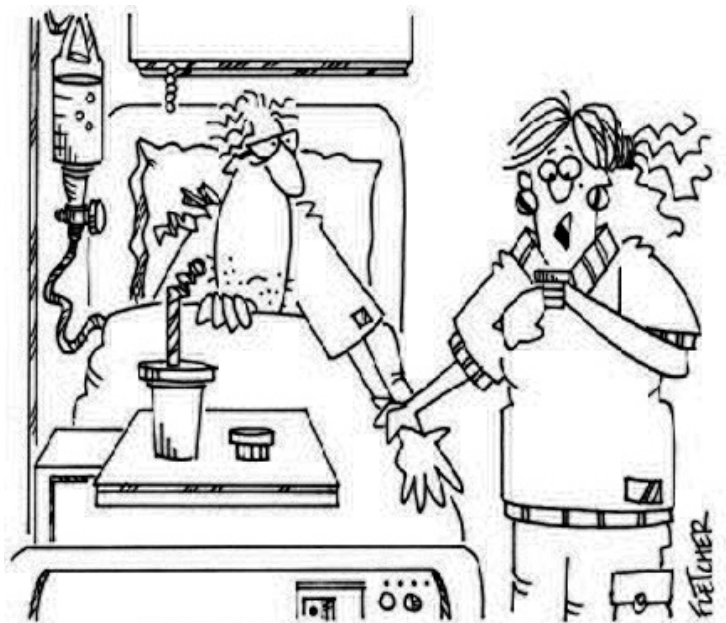
Why is the micro mission important? Books, journal articles, and blogs that answer this micro mission question tell us “how to do it” in small churches or megachurches, while other experts write about the mission

of churches located in urban or rural areas or other specific environments. Ultimately, congregations use dissimilar ways to accomplish Jesus’ mission and ministry in each community and generation.

A healthy congregational mission identity fits its size, fits its members, fits its resources, and meets the contemporary needs of people in its surrounding community. Most unhealthy congregations fall short—not by affirming something other than a biblically mandated macro mission—but by emphasizing a micro mission identity that does not fit that congregation, community, or generation.

What Is the Church’s Method Mission?

The church’s method mission tells people how to do worship, how to do evangelism, how to do member care, etc. Research indicates that healthy congregations deliver on the macro and micro mission with the following methods.



“JUDGING BY THE NUMBER OF VISITORS WHO SAID THEY LOVED YOU...YOU EITHER ATTEND A VERY AFFECTIONATE CHURCH, OR YOU’RE A LOT SICKER THAN I THOUGHT”

- **Worship that honors God, spiritually enriches members, and retains young adult newcomers.** When a congregation loses its ability, especially with its worship music and preaching, to connect with the people in its community and generation, that failure predicts the end of all its mission accomplishments.
- **Children and youth church school classes and programs that retain parent newcomers.** If the congregation lacks Sunday school classes for children under high school age, it will probably die within a few years, unless it is located in a retirement community. Also, a strong youth ministry program is important to members of most congregations. These methods recognize the validity of the old adage “Kids go where kids are!” and they know that parents often follow.
- **Adult Sunday church school and other adult groups that give members and newcomers a sense of belonging.** Few people experience a strong sense of belonging and spiritual growth except through regular meetings with other church attendees in adult groups that focus on Bible study, prayer, service, recreation, or social interaction.
- **Adult new member involvement in groups and ministries that nourish faith development and growth in discipleship.** New members need to get into a group of some kind—choir, prayer group, Sunday school class, softball team, etc.—within the first six weeks after they join. They need to get into a ministry of some kind within six months after they join. Declining membership churches assimilate the 30 percent who are extroverted. Healthy churches figure out how to involve the other 70 percent, who wait for an invitation.
- **Concern and care for members during times of illness, loss, and other stress.** Some church leaders operate only in a “spiritual achiever” mode that recruits new members. Other leaders operate only in a “mending the broken” mode. Healthy congregations do both. They do not neglect caring about people.
- **Community service/benevolence/world missions that accomplish Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbors.** Jesus defined love of neighbor in a startling way. He said it should include people we do not know, not just people with whom we are acquainted.
- **Sharing faith, inviting others to church, and hospitality that accomplishes Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples.** All human groups experience a natural centripetal force that pulls them toward taking care of each other instead of reaching out to others. Healthy churches counterbalance that with centrifugal force methods that reach out to not-yet-members in extroverted ways.
- **Atmosphere of faith, hope, and love that promotes the spiritual growth of members.** The absence or presence in congregational personality of the Apostle Paul’s three famous words predicts a great deal of what it can and will accomplish. A strong emphasis on the power of prayer is especially crucial. People who never talk with God do not often experience God’s presence, power, and guidance.
- **Organizational systems that motivate and involve members in our ministries.** Organizational structures that fit a congregation’s size increase its ministry effectiveness by enlarging the number of people involved in its ministries, reducing conflict, and increasing democratic decision making. Dysfunctional organizational structures often go unrecognized by church leaders because their defects have become invisible due to years of “we have always done it this way.”
- **Clergy and staff that motivate and equip members for involvement in ministries.** From the years when the Apostle Paul spun off start-up churches across the Roman Empire, clergy have played a key role in developing and sustaining the ministry of laity. Without this team effort, few congregations achieve their maximum potential in answering God’s call.
- **Financial stewardship that is part of members’ spiritual growth and adequately supports church ministries.** Financial giving is one of the prime methods by which people experience personal spiritual growth. Without encouragement from their church, the crab grass of self-centeredness crowds out the green growth of spiritual development. Eventually, low emphasis on stewardship stunts the congregation’s size.
- **Property and facilities that support present ministries and future goals.** Facilities are not everything, but inadequate parking, sanctuary seating, or classroom space short-circuits a congregation’s effectiveness.

The Bottom Line

Healthy, effective churches accurately answer the classic theological question, “What is the mission of the Church and how do we accomplish it?” They build on the biblical *macro mission*, apply it contextually with *micro mission* activities, and exhibit multiple *method mission* strengths.

On which of the above lists does your church need to focus more energy?

Herb Miller served as coeditor of *The Parish Paper* until 2012. This issue honors his substantial contribution to this ministry.

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New Life

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District Conference – November 8-10, 2019

Join us in November in Scottsdale!

District Conference 2019 returns to Arizona and the grounds of the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale. Conference events will take place in the new Community Life Center - a venue so new it is still under construction.

Since we were here in 2013 there has been a new guest housing center built, and all of the guest rooms have been renovated. Most participants at Conference will want to take their lodging at the Center, and the room cost includes your meals. So make plans to be with us November 8-10 as we come together as the Pacific Southwest District!

www.pswdcob.org/distconf



District Conference
November 8-10, 2019 - Moderator Bob Morris

Jesus said,
"Apart from me you can do nothing."
John 15:5 NRSV