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

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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.

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## Join PSWD for a Hybrid District Conference Online Nov. 7-10, Gathered & Online Nov. 12-14

Plans are coming together for the 2021 version of PSWD Conference! The planning committee is taking some of the best experiences from 2020's virtual conference and combining them with the opportunity to gather in a hybrid setting of both physically (with precautions) and online. Here is some of what you can look forward to this November:

- Insight sessions will be offered online at 6:30 Pacific/7:30 Mountain Sunday through Wednesday evenings, November 7-10. Each night will feature four sessions, and many will be recorded so that you can watch it later if you are having trouble choosing.

- A Virtual Mixer will take place on Sunday, November 7, at 5:00 Pacific/6:00 Mountain, providing an opportunity to meet and visit with others from across the district. Bring your own supper or dessert to this fun time of connecting!

- Conference fees will again be on a per congregation basis, this year's fee is \$200. With that fee any member of a congregation (delegates and others) can register for online sessions, and participate in person or virtually for the weekend. Individuals will still need to register to get links to sessions, and so we can plan for who will be with us at Hillcrest.

- Worship services on Friday and Saturday evenings will take place in the Meeting House at Hillcrest in La Verne. In addition to those physically present the services will be live-streamed for any in the district to enjoy! Livestream details will be available closer to the time of conference.

- Saturday's business session will allow for participation of those physically present as well as those joining online. The committee hopes that many participants will be in La Verne, but we are planning to conduct our business in a hybrid format.

- As we live into being a multi-cultural district, we will take time as the gathered church to join in a Story Circle experience, designed to help us build our cultural competency as we practice intentionally listening to each other.

Learn more about other events that will make up DC 2021 throughout this newsletter, and make plans to register beginning September 8! We look forward to being Together!

### Together / Juntos is our theme!

The theme of this year's Pacific Southwest District Conference is



“Together,” the final word in the Church of the Brethren’s denominational tagline, “Continuing the Work of Jesus, Peacefully, Simply, Together” and the first word of the denomination’s new

Compelling Vision statement.

Brethren frequently speak of their peace church and of the simple life, but “Together,” from the Old English “to” + “gather,” is a concept often forgotten or ignored, particularly when issues of social policy or theology arise.

The text for the conference theme, Acts/Hechos 2, begins with the disciples “together in one place” where they receive the Holy Spirit (as in the conference logo taken from a 15th century manuscript illumination) and concludes with throngs of new converts spending “much time together,” breaking “bread at home” and increasing in numbers together every day (NRSV).

The insight sessions include two Bible studies addressing Acts/Hechos 2 and the worships contain five sermons focused on the text and its message of “together.”

As we gather together for the conference, let us focus on together, the clear theme of the Christian Church’s first weeks, and celebrate what we have in common while following Jesus.

*Al Clark*, Moderator

## Worship Services bring many voices

Friday night's opening worship at 7:00 Pacific / 8:00 Mountain will feature musical leadership from the Glendale congregation. Following a welcome from District Moderator Al Clark, the worship will feature short sermons from Robert Aguirre (pastor at Glendale) and Amanda Bennett (Minister for Families at La Verne). Following worship, those at Hillcrest will participate in an Ice Cream Social. Worship Friday and Saturday will be at Hillcrest and carried via livestream for all to join.

Saturday night's worship will begin at 5:30 Pacific / 6:30 Mountain, shortly after the close of the business session and conclude by 7:00 p.m. Pacific. Music leadership will come from the Príncipe de Paz congregation, and the messages will be from Thomas Dowdy (pastor at Imperial Heights) and Rebeca Zapata (co-pastor at Príncipe de Paz). The service will include the consecration of the 2022 Moderator and Moderator-elect.

Sunday morning will take place at the La Verne Church of the Brethren, with conference attendees and area churches encouraged to join in this closing worship for the District Conference. The preacher will be Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship at Bethany Theological Seminary.

All services take their focus from Acts 2. preachers are invited to go where God leads them as they reflect on the call in this scripture on being together as the church.

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## Meals, Lodging & Covid Precautions

With changes that have taken place and are ongoing at Hillcrest due to the pandemic, meal possibilities are different this year. Conference attendees who are not Hillcrest residents may not eat in the dining room and the Café will be closed while we are on the Hillcrest campus. In addition, Hillcrest is no longer offering catering services for events like ours.

- **On Friday night** there is no planned meal event, and participants are encouraged to have dinner in La Verne or nearby prior to arriving for worship at 7:00 Pacific.

- **For Saturday lunch** those at Hillcrest will have the opportunity during registration to select a box lunch (from Panera) at a cost of \$15. Participants are encouraged to do this, as the lunch break will make it a challenge to leave campus, and be back on time for business to resume.

- **Saturday evening** will offer a Pizza Snack (cost \$5 during registration) available when business ends at 5:00 p.m. This will give an opportunity to have a little something to eat prior to the worship service at 5:30 p.m.

- **Lodging:** there are no official conference hotels. You are encouraged to make reservations soon as it is a busy weekend in the La Verne area. Look for hotels in San Dimas, Glendora, or Pomona.

Conference will be following the COVID guidance that is in place at the time of our meeting. This will include recommendations from the CDC, LA County, California, and our host site Hillcrest. **If the conference were being held today** the wearing of face masks would be required regardless of vaccination status whenever we are indoors per LA County guidance. We will notify participants around November 1 of current guidelines for being at the event. We certainly encourage all those who are eligible to be vaccinated for their own safety, and to help protect those who are not able to be vaccinated.

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## Business & Insight Sessions

Coming to Conference this year, in addition to the usual items of budgets and elections, is a set of proposed revisions to the district by-laws. Most significant of the changes is reducing the number of people elected to serve on the Policy Board from 17 to 13, and reducing the workload of the Board Chair and Moderator. Other changes update the by-laws to reflect current practice. The full set of changes will be in the business book and online prior to conference.

A highlight of the business session will be time spent together leaning into the intercultural makeup of the Pacific Southwest District. Leading us in a time of Story Circles will be Darla Deardorff, a Church of the Brethren member and Executive Director of the Association of International Education Administrators, a leadership organization. She is also a research fellow at Duke University. Founder of ICC Global, a global research network on intercultural competence, as well as the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence, she has lived, taught & worked in Germany, Japan, & Switzerland. Recent projects include advising a UNESCO Intercultural Competence Project. She has published widely, starting with *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Sage, 2009). Her latest book is *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles* (Routledge/UNESCO, 2020).



Insight Sessions on Sunday through Wednesday evenings will offer a variety of Zoom opportunities for congregational and personal enrichment. Two Bible studies on the conference theme will be offered, one in English (Andrew Sampson) and one in Spanish (Florecita Merlos). A few include different aspects of congregational life in the midst of the COVID pandemic including opening the virtual front door to worship, adjusting to changing situations, and efforts at re-engaging the community. Moderator Al Clark will share from his work collecting oral histories of PSWD. The full list is on line. Signup for the sessions is important so you receive the Zoom link to join in.

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

## Preaching and Spiritual Care: A Retreat and Learning Experience for Pastors and Preachers

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

Friday, November 12 — 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

by Dr. Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm

The Ministry Commission's Pre-Conference Educational Event for ministers and other church leaders will take place at Hillcrest on Friday, November 12 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific. Leadership is provided by Dr. Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching & Worship at Bethany Theological Seminary.



Through moments of spiritual reflection and opportunities for prayer and contemplation, participants are encouraged to experience rest and renewal with one another. Through brief lectures and discussions, there will be time to consider how you may develop and incorporate spiritual care into your sermon preparation and preaching.

Dawn is ordained in the Church of the Brethren and has served as a hospital chaplain (in a state psychiatric hospital and trauma hospital), pastor (in two congregations in Pennsylvania), and currently teaches practical theology (preaching and worship) and spirituality on the faculty of Bethany Theological Seminary. Her recent publications include resources for preaching (*Preaching God's Transforming Justice*), the intersection of pastoral care and justice (*Preaching Prophetic Care: Building Bridges to Justice*) and international preaching (*Preaching the Fear of God in a Fearful World*). Having earned her certification as a spiritual director through Oasis Ministries, she also accompanies her students, pastors and others in their spiritual lives. Dawn is married and her family includes three young adult children. She also enjoys long walks in nature and outdoor swimming.

- **CEU:** 0.6 CEUs in area 4, Preaching & Worship.
- **Child Care** can be reserved until October 15 during registration. There is no additional cost.
- **Registration cost** for the event is \$25 and includes lunch. Registration opens in September as part of registering for the 2021 District Conference. Registration for the event closes on October 15.

## Ministry & Improvement Funds Available

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

At the 2019 District Conference delegates approved creation of this \$1.3 million fund to support churches. The funds are available in four areas for churches to access to support their ministry: facility needs and improvements, leadership development, ministry opportunities, and youth.

In the area of Leadership Development, six district congregations participated in the *Future Church Summit* by Fresh Expression last February and have been working with a coach for the last several months to assist them in focusing their efforts and taking steps towards the future. Other opportunities will be available in the future, providing training and support to congregational teams as they work at ministry at the local church level. If you have ideas for an area of focus, talk with the District Executive Minister to see what might



be possible. Funds in this category are also available to support pastors in being involved with a personal coach to help them strengthen their ministry work.

Several congregations have begun to use the Facility Repairs & Improvement section of the fund. This provides up to \$20,000 for each congregation to use towards a repair, modification, or improvement of their existing facilities. Funds have been used to replace heating and cooling units, replace irrigation systems, paint interior and exterior of buildings, make several minor improvements, and more.

You can learn more about the fund by visiting the PSWD web page and looking under the resources tab. You can also view an insight session from 2020 (in both English and Spanish) on the district [YouTube](https://youtu.be/GOFR6PZLVA) channel <https://youtu.be/GOFR6PZLVA> Or call the District Office and begin a conversation soon.

## Opening the Virtual Front Door 2021 Streaming Grants

Most of our congregations found some virtual way to keep the connection with their members during the worst of the pandemic. Whether it was Zoom gatherings, recorded worship services, conference calls, or video messages from the pastor, a new door was opened for people to connect with the church. And now that many churches have returned to physically gathered worship there is still a need to keep that virtual door open - for members who may be homebound or away, as well as for the potential visitor who wants to see what worship is like before they enter your church's physical front doors.

PSWD provided support to several congregations who made investments in different methods of streaming services through the Ministry Partnership program. We have learned some things from their efforts that we hope can be helpful to all the district congregations.

The District is providing support for a basic equipment package that most any congregation, with just a few volunteers and some basic training, could use to stream their services via YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, or in Zoom. To learn more about how your church might keep it's virtual doors open, contact the district office to have a conversation about next steps. This funding is available through the end of 2021.

## District Office Relocates to Glendora

In April the District office moved from the Pomona Fellowship facility to space at the Glendora congregation. The Glendora church had some former classroom space that had been rented to various groups in the past. This space is now freshly painted and has upgraded electric, heating/cooling, and internet systems. We are grateful for the welcome we have received in Glendora. Email and phone information remains the same, but the new mailing address is PSWD, PO Box 760, Glendora, CA 91740-0760, and we can be found around the back of the church at 151 S. Glendora Ave.



## Milestones and Changes

❖ **Don Shankster** retired after 51 years of ministry service at the end of April. Don had served as the pastor at **Papago Buttes** since 2009. He continues to be the PSWD Standing Committee delegate. Congratulations to Don on his retirement!



❖ **Papago Buttes** has called **Jonathan Chubb** to serve as their next pastor. Jon began his service in May of this year and is in the process of moving his ordination to the Church of the Brethren. Jon, his wife Cara, and children

Franklin and June, already live in Phoenix and were members at **Circle of Peace**.

❖ **Bakersfield** has called **Sandra Millard** to serve as their new pastor following the resignation of Alan McLearn-Montz last August. Sandra is a licensed minister and has been a member of the Bakersfield congregation for many years. She is retiring from a career with Youth for Christ of Kern County.



❖ Congratulations to Pastor **Lauren Seganos Cohen** and her husband Jason on the birth of their son, Leo Thomas, in July. Leo is their first child. Lauren is out on leave until the middle of October.

❖ **David Flores**, co-pastor of the **Cristo Sion** congregation, was ordained in May. David was approved for ordination last fall, but the service was delayed until we could gather in person. The service was the first indoor gathering of the congregation since the pandemic started, and their first Sunday at their new location, sharing space with the Glendora congregation.



❖ **Rebeca Zapata**, co-pastor of the **Príncipe de Paz** congregation, was ordained in June. Becky was approved for ordination last fall.



❖ The sale of the **Pomona Fellowship** property was completed in May. The church is now renting office space in downtown Pomona and meeting for worship by Zoom and in person at St. Paul’s Episcopal church in Pomona on the 1st and 3rd Sundays. While Lauren is on leave, **Ron Faus** is serving as the interim for preaching and worship.

❖ **Nueva Visión la Hermosa**, a new church project in Waterford, is beginning worship services during the month of August. Pastora **Florecita Merlos** began to build a congregation and then this was interrupted by the pandemic. Hold the work of this new church project in your prayers.

❖ **Conexión Pasadena**, led by the pastoral team of **Juan Pablo Plaza**, his spouse **Adriana Rios**, and **Fernanda Navarrete**, began meeting for worship in a nearby park this past Spring. This is a Spanish language project out of the Pasadena congregation. The leaders are licensed ministers and came to the US through Fuller Seminary’s Spanish language program. Hold this project in prayer as it reaches out into the Pasadena community.



❖ **Mary Fleming** is retiring at the end of August as pastor of the **Prince of Peace** congregation in Sacramento. Mary has served there since 2005. We wish her all the best as she enters this next chapter of her life!



❖ Remodeling of the new facility for **Centro Agape en Acción** in Los Banos is nearing completion. Your prayers are welcomed for the work, and for the church community as it re-gathers in person for the first time since the pandemic in their new space, hopefully soon.

## Pastors Gather for Rest and Reconnecting

Under the theme *Honoring our journeys together*, a group of 24 district pastors, chaplains, and spouses gathered for the 2021 retreat. The time offered the chance for physically gathered connection with colleagues and friends in the beautiful and supportive environment of Serra Retreat in Malibu.

Retreat leadership came from Melissa Hofstetter and Steven Homestead of Shepherd Heart Ministry ([shepherdheartconsulting.com](http://shepherdheartconsulting.com)). Using the biblical stories of Jonah and Simon Peter, the imagery and experience of labyrinths, and artistic exercises, participants had the space to talk about the experience of ministry and life through the pandemic. The questions that framed many conversations and experiences focused on naming what was difficult, what was beautiful, and what was surprising over the past 17 months. In one of the artistic exercises individuals created “stained glass” windows which brought together these



questions represented by colors. After sharing in small groups the pieces were later combined to make a community art installation that added beauty to our meeting space.

The group also took time together to explore the world around us through binocular lenses, as Jeff Strogon led two bird watching experiences. Highlights included two Great Blue Heron at the Malibu Lagoon, and a well hidden female Mallard duck sitting on her nest with six ducklings around her at Malibu's Legacy Park. The bird watching is a wonderful time in God's creation, creating a shared, communal experience.



The retreat opened with a time of worship led by District Moderator Al Clark who shared on Acts 2 and the notion of being "together together". The retreat closed with a time of communion before the journey home. All sessions and worship were shared in both English and Spanish, as the district grows as a multilingual community.

In a reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, masks were required for all participants when gathering indoors, as LA County had issued this public health order just before the event in an effort to slow the spread of the delta variant.

**"Let's be careful out there"**

In the 1980s I was a fan of the TV show Hill Street Blues. One of my favorite moments was the morning roll call at the precinct which always closed with Sergeant Phil Esterhaus' reminder to the officers and detectives under his command, "Let's be careful out there." It was a statement of care and caution, knowing that the work to be done was

difficult, sometimes dangerous, and often unpredictable.

I have found those words running through my mind on a regular basis during the last year and a half, and perhaps even more so now. Stay at home orders from health departments, while not pleasant, did keep us physically distanced from others and helped keep many of us from getting sick. Gathering at our church buildings in shared space gave way to other methods of connection for worship, bible study, prayer, and even caregiving. Many families among us lost members to COVID-19, and our churches are missing people as we gather back together. You may have been ill yourself, or cared and prayed for loved ones who were ill with the virus.

Most of our district churches are back to meeting together in the church building. It is good to see each other, and as I have returned to traveling and joining congregations I can see the joy in people's eyes as they are physically in the same space. Yes, I said "eyes", because I am glad to see that mask wearing is still being practiced by most people as they return to physically gathered worship and meetings. The children who are part of our churches are still vulnerable. Others may not have been able to be vaccinated and are still at greater risk. And the delta variant is causing a new surge as I write this note.

So in the midst of all this, at this moment in our pandemic life together, my regular prayer and my cautionary words can easily be summed up with that simple phrase "Be careful out there." Be the church at it's best, caring for each other and especially caring for the vulnerable. As Paul writes in Galatians 5, that while you are free in Christ "...do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

May we, as followers of Jesus, be known for that love of our neighbors, especially in this ongoing season of the pandemic.

Pace e bene, Paz y bien, Peace and all good,  
 Russ Matteson, District Executive Minister



## Children's Disaster Worker from Modesto CoB

*This article originally appeared in the June 14, 2021, Modesto COB Chimes. Children's Disaster Services (CDS) is a ministry of the Church of the Brethren – [www.brethren.org/cds](http://www.brethren.org/cds)*

On May 10, I flew to McAllen, Texas, to join 4 other volunteers serving for 2 weeks at Catholic Charities' Humanitarian Respite Center (HRC). Sponsored by our denominations' Children's Disaster Services, we interacted with immigrant children and their families that had just been released from the local ICE detention center. Weeks or even months earlier they had left their homes in Central and South America and set off on a treacherous journey north to and through Mexico to the Rio Grande River. There they had crossed the US-Mexico border illegally and then immediately turned themselves in to the border patrol as refugees seeking asylum.

After spending some days in the detention center for processing and providing the name of a sponsor waiting for them in the US, each family had been given a court date to plead their case sometime in the future and then were released with temporary legal status to travel to their sponsors' homes across the US. At that point they were invited to come to the Respite Center, where they were tested for COVID and then welcomed to spend several days receiving rest, food, showers, clean clothes, legal advice, and help in arranging for their travel to their new homes

in the US. In the words of founder Sister Norma Pimentel, the goal of the respite center is to "restore human dignity" to these travelers who had just endured inhumane conditions to give their children a chance for a good life.

These young families had left their homes to escape extreme poverty, the effects of natural disasters, and rampant violent criminal activity and corruption. On their trek they had endured horrific threats from dehydration in the desert to confronting "coyotes" and cartels that demanded money in exchange for their safety or even their lives. If one wonders whether the conditions they were escaping were all that dire, they have only to think about

what it would take to cause parents to lead their children into such unimaginable danger.

Our delightful assignment at the respite center was to create a play space for the children and to welcome and interact with them as they enjoyed "just being kids" once again. The children's smiles and giggles as they chased bubbles, played corn hole & UNO, shared books, and expressed their creativity with their drawings, paintings, and 3-D structures of magnetic tiles, Duplo blocks, and Play Doh were music to our ears – and to their parents' ears too.

All the folks we worked with spoke only Spanish. Two of us with some fluency in Spanish served as translators, with help from the Google Translator app. But most of our interchange with the children only called for basic expressions like "hola," "me gusta" (I like it), "que bonita" (how beautiful) and the international "ta-da" when a task was completed. These were wonderful children to "play" with – not a one demanding, complaining, or "entitled" child in the bunch. (I can say the same of the adults too.) We shared many heart-warming moments but also heart-tugging times when a family would come by to say they were on their way to the airport or bus station for the next leg of their journey. Tears were shed with heartfelt hugs and "Vayan con Dios."



Did our time in McAllen really make a difference? It's impossible to answer for the people we served there, but I do know it made a difference for me. In addition to the uplifts from the children, I was encouraged to realize the widespread support the center receives from the town of McAllen and from all over the US. All of the services are provided with no government help. We met volunteers who were there to cook, serve food, cut hair, distribute donated clothes and reading glasses to the families, and provide legal advice. But the biggest difference in me is my willingness now to speak up to folks like the woman beside me on my flight home who made disparaging comments about "those illegals." I have to tell them about what I've learned.

If you would like to be inspired by the soft-spoken dynamo Sister Norma Pimentel of the Missionaries of Jesus whose efforts have helped hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the last 8 years, just Google her name.

~ Linda Owen

# New Life

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## Your District Conference 2021 Checklist:

- Read this issue of New Life to learn more about what is planned
- Visit [pswdcob.org/distconf](https://pswdcob.org/distconf) to learn even more and see the most current information
- Register by October 15 to be a part of the conference (and there is no cost for individuals to participate!)
- If you are a delegate, check with your church leaders to make sure credentials have been submitted and the Congregational Registration Fee has been paid

We can't wait to see you at the  
PSWD Hybrid District Conference!

Al Clark, Moderator

Moderator@pswdcob.org

Also in this issue:

- Milestones and updates
- Serving on the border
- MIP funds are available

