

Vol. 58 • Issue 2

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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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Virtual "On-the-web" District Conference 2020

From Moderator Mary Kay:

Welcome to our 2020 District Conference. As we are planning for a virtual conference this year, we are hopeful you will take the time and opportunity to join us. While we will certainly miss the hugs, hand shakes, and in person table conversations, there are some advantages to this never before tried approach to our PSWD District Conference.

We are planning multiple insight sessions (and if you have a hard time selecting from multiple choices, you may be able to watch it later), business sessions, music, a children's time, worship, and even an ice cream social (provide your own ice cream and toppings). We will be inviting a number of you to be hosts, co-costs, facilitators, or presenters. We will let you know ahead of time, hope you say yes, and we will practice, practice, practice.

By asking you to use personal computers / smart phones / tablets, and stay at home, you won't need to wear a mask, or social distance, and we may even have more participants than we do when we meet at a site. There will be opportunities to speak, and ask questions in the insight sessions and business sessions.

Please plan to join us for this adventure.

Registration is happening now!

You may send knit rectangles for the service project to me at 2705 Mountain View Drive, unit 224, La Verne, CA 91750.

www.pswdcob.org/service

Blessed Be The Tie That Binds,

Mary Kay Ogden, Moderator

Conference Schedule:

There is a time limit to our ability to hang in there with online meetings and gatherings. So as the PSWD 2020 Conference goes virtual we are spreading out the gathering over the course of the full week. *Insight sessions will be offered the evenings of November 9, 10, and 11, and on Saturday morning November 14.* A Bring-Your-Own Ice Cream Social will happen on Thursday evening, Worship on Friday November 13, and after business sessions on Saturday the 14th there will be an online concert featuring musicians from around the PSWD.

*All times are PST: Pacific Standard Time
Arizona times are one hour later*

- **Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday** (Nov 9, 10, 11)
 - 3 insight sessions at 5:30 p.m.
 - 3 insight sessions at 7:00 p.m.
- **Thursday** (November 12)
 - BYO Ice Cream Social at 6:30 p.m.
- **Friday** (November 13)
 - A Time for Children at 6:00 p.m.
 - Opening Worship Service at 6:30 p.m.
- **Saturday** (November 14)
 - 3 insight sessions at 8:00 a.m.
 - Business session #1 from 9:30 to 11:15 a.m.
 - Business session #2 from 12:00 to 1:45 p.m.
 - PSWD's Evening of Music at 6:30 p.m.

Registration:

This year there will be a flat rate of \$100 per congregation to register delegates for District Conference. And for that fee, anyone else in the church is welcome and encouraged to register and join in the insight sessions, BYO Ice Cream, worship and business. That's right - \$100 covers everyone in the congregation!!!

www.pswdcob.org/distconf-church-fee

We do need folks to register by October 23 so we can make plans and so we know who to send the special links for each live session as we gather together. In order to have a safe and secure



virtual conference, links will not be published, so registering is the way to be part of things.

Worship, business sessions, and the concert will all be broadcast on PSWD's [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) channel, search for: PSWDCoB

Registration for sessions now live until October 23 at:
www.pswdcob.org/dc2020

*He aquí, qué bueno y qué agradable
es para los hermanos habitar juntos
en unidad. Salmo 133 v1*

Insight Sessions:

District Conference will feature 21 insight sessions spread across 4 days. 3 will be offered in Spanish (translation to English available if needed) and Spanish translation of the other 18 can be arranged (indicate need for translation during registration). Here are some of the confirmed sessions:

- Facility Accessibility (beginning and advanced) with Jim LeFever
- Conversation with CoB General Secretary David Steele
- "Help! There's too much month at the end of my money!" from Brethren Benefit Trust
- "En Busca de Obreros / In Search of Workers" con Raul y Lydia Gonzalez
- "Black Panther as Metaphor" from Steve Schweitzer, Academic Dean at Bethany Theological Seminary
- Accessing the Ministry and Improvement Funds
- Building your Children's Ministry
- "Experimenting our way forward" panel led by Jeremy Ashworth

And so many more. Registration has a complete list. We also hope to record most sessions and make them available on the PSWD website through the end of the year.
www.pswdcob.org/insight

Worship & Concert:

Join sisters and brothers across the PSWD in a spirit of worship around the Conference theme "Bless'd be the Tie" on Friday. Moderator Mary Kay Ogden will bring the message and we will have music from throughout the PSWD. At 6:00 p.m. there will be a Time for Children with 20 minutes of faith focused fun for children and parents (we will all probably enjoy it). Worship begins at 6:30 p.m. PST

On Saturday evening the PSWD YouTube channel will feature an hour long evening of music from around the PSWD. This will be a collection of songs performed by musicians throughout the District as well as time to hear a bit about their faith and how that fills the music they share. This begins at 6:30 p.m.

On Sunday morning you are encouraged to worship with your church if you are back in your facility, or consider joining an online service from another PSWD church that you've thought might be inspirational to worship with. The PSWD website will carry a set of links to connect to those services the weekend of District Conference.

www.pswdcob.org/worship

Business Items:

The Policy Board is sending two items for action by the District Conference. The first is action to approve an Operating Budget of \$466,729 and a Church Planting Budget of \$84,180 for 2021. The second is to set the 2022 Operating Budget expense maximum at \$475,000, the same as it was set at for 2021. There will also be the calling of leadership for the District Policy Board and Moderator-elect. Nominating Committee has prepared a full slate of candidates for these positions. These items, plus many more reports, will be in the Conference booklet which will be available online as a PDF. Print copies may be requested from the district office.

www.pswdcob.org/delegates
www.pswdcob.org/business

District Youth Connecting Twice a Month On Zoom

It is a tough time to gather young people together in person for retreats, service projects, or camp. Both of the camps in the district had to cancel their summer schedules. A New Community Project learning tour that District youth were invited to attend on the Diné (Navajo) land didn't happen due to the serious nature of the pandemic there.



But the PSWD youth have been gathering via Zoom at 7:00 p.m. on the 2nd and 4th Saturday evenings of each month for a devotional, a sharing time, and a game. Most Saturday's have about 18-20 youth in attendance from five or six churches. There is room for many more youth to join in! If you have a youth who might be interested, reach out to Rafael Aranda, our PSWD Youth Advisor, at youth@pswdcob.org to get the link and password to join in. The youth cabinet continues to dream and plan about what might happen once they can gather in the same physical space, but for now it's Saturday Zoom time.

Ministry & Improvement Fund Passed 2019, Implemented 2020

Spring into Summer was used to work on the details related to the \$1.3 million that District Conference put into the *Ministry and Improvement Fund* last November in Arizona. What follows is an overview of the way the funds have been marked for access by local churches and pastors throughout the district. **The application process will be available beginning on October 1 at the district website**, and an insight session prior to District Conference will share more and answer questions regarding accessing the Fund.

Facility Repairs and Improvements – Each congregation is eligible for up to \$20,000 to put towards needed repairs or improvements to their church facility. These are available funds, and no matching funds are required by the church. The congregation can make multiple requests until they have reached the \$20,000 maximum. Congregations will need to provide a description of the project scope, provide quotes from contractors or a detailed budget for the project, and share about the impact the project will have not only on the building but on the overall ministry of the congregation. Areas funds might be used for include: structural or property repairs, cosmetic improvements, facility technology or energy saving upgrades as examples.

New Ministries in Existing Congregations – Seed funds to begin new ministries or expand existing ministries that help congregations engage their communities with the gospel, in word and action, will be provided through this portion of the fund. Congregations can apply for up to \$10,000 annually with funding available for a project to a maximum of \$25,000 over three years. Churches will need to provide a plan for the ministry, provide funding of their own to at least half of the amount requested, and show how the congregation is actively involved in the project. A portion of the funds may be used for staffing costs related to the project.

Pastoral and Leadership Support – The \$200,000 allocated for this area will be provided in three separate paths.

- \$30,000 is directed towards providing **Leadership Coaching** for congregational pastors. Each pastor is eligible to receive \$350 annually to support their engagement with a coach who can work with them on goal setting and professional development. Funds will be available for three years, but a report will be required annually before additional funds are sent.

- \$36,000 is provided for **Annual Conference Attendance Scholarships**. This money will be used to issue up to twelve \$1000 scholarships per year to encourage people to attend. These funds can be used to reimburse

travel, registration, lodging, or meal events. Applications will be taken in January of each year with priority given to first time attendees. A report after the conference will invite reflection on what they experienced and how their participation will enhance the local church.

- The balance of \$134,000 will be for **Conferences, Training, and Event support** over the next four years. The district will work with local leaders to discern areas of ministry that many congregations are needing and desiring to give attention to developing at any point in time. An initial survey of pastors around this was conducted in Spring 2020. We will work to identify a conference or event that is already planned, or create an event in the district, which provides training and assistance with growing ministry in that area. The cost for a local congregation to participate would be kept low, with the expectation that a team from the congregation would attend and commit to working together to help their congregation develop leaders for this form of ministry. 12-18 such events might take place over the next 4 years.

Youth – Monies will be used to help local congregations grow in ministry with youth through training and program development. Funds can also provide scholarship opportunities for youth to participate in Church of the Brethren programs like work camps, Christian Citizenship Seminar, National Youth Conference, and Brethren camps. There is a maximum allocation of \$5000 annually and funds will be provided on a 40% congregation / 60% District basis. For purposes of this fund “Youth” covers the ages of 11-27.

Faith in Action Grants

Camp Peaceful Pines, located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, received \$5,000 to fund a required geological assessment of the site resulting from the Donnell fire in Aug. 2018. The evaluation will assess the risk of landslides in the event of thunderstorms, and is required before the camp can reopen the cabins in 2021. The rest of the \$8,800 evaluation will be covered by camping fees, donations, and monies approved by the camp board.

Restoration Los Angeles, received \$5,000 to complete the building of a youth center. The congregation averaged approximately 200 people in worship before the pandemic. It began construction of a multipurpose youth room in January 2020.

Another round of grants is now available and interested congregations are encouraged to consider applying. www.brethren.org/faith-in-action

PSWD during Covid 19

By Russ Matteson

There are those who say that churches struggle to change. But if one looks around at the congregations that make up PSWD, 2020 has shown that they can change and even innovate when needed. As stay at home orders began in mid-March pastors and church leaders scrambled to figure out what they could do and how they might continue to connect and worship as the body of Christ while maintaining physical distance from one another.

Worship

The variety of responses has been inspiring to watch, and on most any Sunday, you can now join in with any number of our congregations for their worship service. Churches like **Live Oak, La Verne, Restoration LA, San Diego, South Bay, and Circle of Peace** can be found on their YouTube channels with a variety of worship styles. Some of these are prerecorded with music, sermons, prayers, and may utilize just one or a few participants. Others are livestreaming to YouTube with a few people from the church building or a mixture of live and recorded sections.

Other congregations have gone the way of Facebook to keep connected with the current congregation, and to expand beyond those who have been to their physical building. **Principe de Paz, Modesto, Glendora, Glendale, and Centro Ágape en Acción** have shared their worship services in this way, often on multiple days each week. **Principe de Paz** began a nightly prayer gathering on Facebook as the pandemic started and celebrated 100 days of prayer services on June 25. Many nights they had more than 100 households participating in the livestream prayers. They are now over 170 days and counting, and now others are sharing in leadership.



Still others have relied on Zoom as the way to gather for worship, and it has often been someone other than the pastor who has organized the church to come together on the video conferencing platform. The links to these services are not publicly published, but are shared by email with those who wish to attend. **Pomona Fellowship, Cristiana Elohim, Imperial Heights, Prince of Peace, Bakersfield, Pasadena, and Papago Buttes** use this method. **Cristo Sion** discovered that for their members a phone conference call

works just fine. In some places the pastor has made a worship service and sermon available by email or regular mail to members of the church.

And the reality is that most churches are finding more than one way to connect with each other. They may have women's or men's groups meeting in Zoom, prayers services on YouTube or Zoom, Bible studies have seen an increase in participation or even new ones have started. Several churches have taken in new members during this time, using video introductions or a special Zoom gathering.



La Verne CoB Pentecost gathering welcomes new members.

Starts and Stops

One of the challenges for churches is the length of time as closures have continued over the months. Early hopeful thinking was that by Easter, and then by Pentecost, gatherings in church buildings might be able to resume. In early June a few congregations began to gather again, implementing temperature taking at the doors, encouraging facial coverings, and having socially distanced seating. But then the states in which PSWD is present all began to experience a surge in the virus and soon the health officials were saying singing needed to stop when gathered together, and a few weeks later came the suspension of gathering indoors for worship. These are challenges for all as folks welcomed the chance to see one another in person and to be in a space which provides comfort and a sense of closeness to God.



Glendora CoB worships under the gazebo by their labyrinth and garden.

A few congregations are trying worship outdoors now, when the temperature isn't too hot. **Príncipe de Paz** is using their parking lot as a worship space while streaming the service on Facebook to those who don't feel safe returning yet or who are at a distance. **Glendora** has tried outside and has Zoom at the ready if it is going to be too hot. **Empire** is meeting on a member's front lawn out in the country side. Others are making plans to do this when things become a bit cooler (Arizona, Nevada, and California's Central Valley are warm this time of year).

The rest of the year seems likely to be more of the same with conditions improving for a bit, and then in local areas seeing increasing cases that require folks to return to strict physical distancing requirements.

Join another church with a Virtual Visit

Youtube channels:

- Circle of Peace Live
- La Verne Church of the Brethren
- Live Oak Church of the Brethren
- Modesto CoB
- Restoration L.A. - Live Stream
- San Diego First Church of the Brethren

Facebook Live

- Centro Ágape En Acción
- Glendale Church of the Brethren
- Glendora Church of the Brethren
- Iglesia Príncipe de Paz ✓ Santa Ana, CA
- Modesto Church of the Brethren

Zoom Services - to join send the pastor an email asking for the invitation

- Circle of Peace Church (welcome time pre service) - frontdesk@circleofpeacechurch.org
- Imperial Heights Church of the Brethren - link on website www.ihccob.org
- Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren - shanksterdon@gmail.com
- Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren - pastorlauren@mypomonachurch.org
- San Diego First Church of the Brethren (Sunday School hour) - shaldemanscarr@gmail.com

Conference Call

- Iglesia Cristo Sion

District Support

As the pandemic began and churches needed to stop gathering in person, the PSWD Stewards Commission met and proposed several plans to help churches weather the challenging time to come. First, any congregation was able to request a \$2500 grant to help with shortfalls in offerings or rents the church was no longer collecting. 14 congregations have taken advantage of this offer. Second, five churches have loans or mortgages with the District and

the offer was made to suspend payments and interest on those loans while the pandemic continued and offerings and rents are impacted, and four congregations are using this relief. And the district is ready to provide no interest loans to churches to help meet operating expenses, with repayment terms to be worked out at a later date. No congregations have needed this yet, but the offer is still available as a way to help churches weather the crisis.

The Ministry Partnerships portion of the district budget has also been active this year. Several congregations with high percentages of their membership who are lower income have received Mission Church allocations. In the Ministry Opportunity Partnership area the Congregational Vitality Task Group has approved funds to help both the **La Verne** and the **Príncipe de Paz** congregations take steps towards improving their ability to livestream and webcast, both now and as they make plans for a future new normal. The experiments we are helping to fund will provide helpful information and direction as other churches explore the best ways to be in their buildings and on the web at the same time. **Príncipe de Paz** also received support from the denomination's Brethren Faith In Action fund as they continue to build on a ministry they are calling *Principe en tu Casa*.

Brethren Disaster Ministries Grants

In May Brethren Disaster Ministries started a program to provide grants up to \$5000 to local congregations to address needs created in the wake of the pandemic. To date eight congregations or projects from PSWD have been approved for grants to address a variety of concerns. One of the key requirements was that the money is to be used immediately (defined as within two months) to meet peoples needs.

All six of our Spanish language congregations and projects were able to receive grants and the funds have been used to help their own members and community members with rent and utilities, provide food baskets and grocery store gift cards, help with funeral expenses, increase meal delivery ministries, and more. **Centro Ágape en Acción** (Los Banos) included a family dinner night as part of their grant. They provided Pizzas and Soda for forty families who drove by their new facility to pick up dinner.



Centro Ágape en Acción handing out family dinners



Also receiving grants were the **LaVerne** and **Circle of Peace** congregations. **LaVerne** expanded their connection with Hope for Home, a local homeless agency, and provided weekly meals to make up for organizations that had suspended participation during the pandemic. **Circle of Peace** used a portion of their grant to provide needed supplies to those working with the nearby Navajo Nation which has been hard hit, while also supporting their members and others in their community who have been impacted.



Another round of grants is now available and interested congregations are encouraged to consider applying.

<https://covid19.brethren.org/grants/>

Pastors

No one serving as pastors in our churches has any experience trying to do ministry in times like these. It is a challenge as most people who are called as pastors cherish the opportunities to connect with their members and others around faith. They are used to doing this work in person. They are used to being present with those who are dying and their families in those special and holy moments. They are used to praying with people, laying hands of healing on those they are gathered with, being able to read the whole person as they counsel or teach.

Now they are making more calls, trying to reach out in between because they don't have the chance to just see people on Sunday or Wednesday, or whenever the church would gather. They are organizing ways to keep people connected, and working with technology to share the good news of Jesus Christ at a time when people need to hear it and stay grounded in the hope of God.

Pray for your pastor. Encourage your pastor – to take time for rest, to nurture their own faith, to care for their family. Remember, they haven't done this before, just like everyone else.

Ministry Updates

www.pswdcob.org/churches

❖ **Alan McLearn-Montz** has resigned as pastor of the **Bakersfield** congregation effective the end of August having served there for the last 2 ½ years. Alan and his wife Brenda are returning to Iowa.

❖ **Don Shankster**, pastor at **Papago Buttes** (Scottsdale, AZ), has announced that he will retire in April 2021. Don will have served there for 13 years, and he and Karen plan to remain in the Phoenix area. The congregation's Leadership Team is beginning the process to call new pastoral leadership after Don's retirement.

❖ Former PSDW Executive Minister **Gene Hipskind** died on July 11 following a short time in hospice care. He was 78. Gene served the PSDW from the fall of 1994 through the summer of 2002. He was preceded in death by his wife, Linda, in 2016. Gene had been living in Idaho since his retirement in 2002.

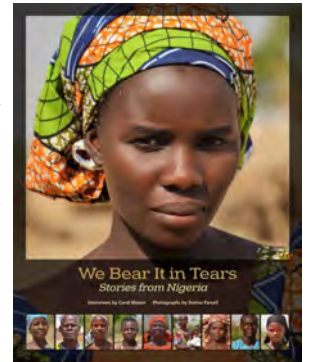
An Unforgettable New Book from Brethren Press

We Bear It in Tears

The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria has suffered untold violence from the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram. Several hundred thousand members of EYN (Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria) have been displaced. Thousands have been abducted or killed, including the 276 girls abducted from the Chibok school in 2014. Hundreds of church buildings have been looted, burned, or destroyed.

The outside world has seen the pictures and tallied the numbers but has not truly heard from those affected by the violence. This book attempts to share the experiences of those involved in the crisis of Northern Nigeria and gives voice to the women, men, and children who have suffered. By hearing their stories, we share their burden of tears. By seeing their faces, we witness an enduring faith and a commitment to nonviolence. These are not merely symbols of violence, but individuals with real stories, real families, and real pain.

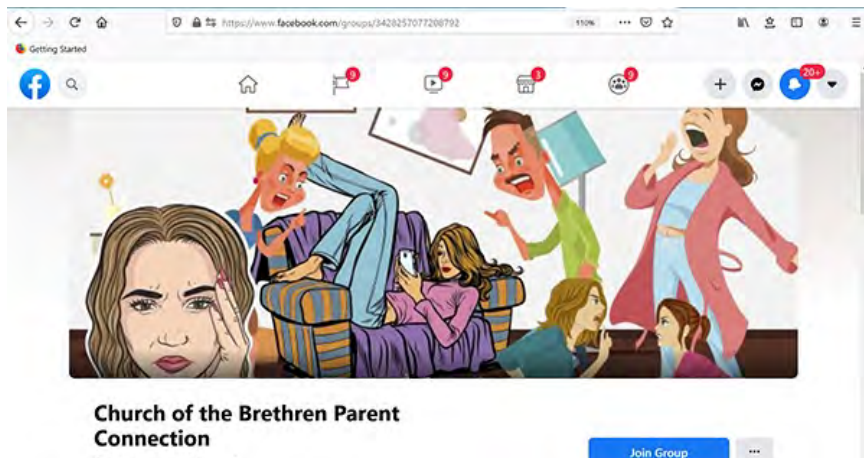
The collection was taken from direct transcripts of recorded interviews by Carol Mason from February 16 to March 29, 2017. Each person was asked two questions, "Where were you when the Boko Haram attacked and how did it affect you?" The stories widely represent various affected areas, types of experiences, and populations. Together they are a significant effort at establishing a sustainable peace in Nigeria. www.brethrenpress.com



Children's Disaster Services invites parents to new Facebook group

Church of the Brethren Newline – August 22, 2020

The Church of the Brethren Parent Connection Facebook group was created in Aug. 2020 by Children's Disaster Services to offer support to parents who are caring for children during the pandemic.



“We are ready to welcome new members to the Parent Connection Facebook group,” announced Lisa Crouch, associate director of Children's Disaster Services, a ministry within Brethren Disaster Ministries. The new Facebook group is found at www.facebook.com/groups/3428257077208792

Also newly available to parents is a “Parenting in a Pandemic” resource page on the Church of the Brethren website at <https://covid19.brethren.org/parenting-in-a-pandemic>

The page offers links to selected resources including videos, webinar recordings, presentations, and articles provided by a variety of organizations ranging from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology to PBS to the Humanitarian Disaster Institute of Wheaton College, among others. Topics include creating new rituals with children, new habits for working and schooling under one roof, children and family ministry at a distance, and many more.

Church of the Brethren Parent Connection

The new Facebook group is intended to offer support for parents who are balancing the work/school struggle at home this year. It will feature resources, webinars, discussion starters, and creative interactions to engage parents in a positive way. In the group, parents will find helpful resources and “a safe, faith-based place to connect and ask each other questions during this crazy time and beyond,” Crouch said.

The group is moderated by the Church of the Brethren's Children and Family Committee. The committee includes the project director for the Shine children's curriculum, an early childhood mental health educator, a local director of Children's Ministry, and the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Church of the Brethren.

For questions, contact Crouch at Children's Disaster Services, 410-635-8734 or 517-250-7449 or LCrouch@brethren.org

Newline article:

<https://www.brethren.org/news/2020/church-of-the-brethren-congregations-worship-online-2>

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Home COVID-19 Congregations Resources Volunteering EDF Grants Give

Parenting in a Pandemic

Grieving the Loss of Normalcy during COVID-19 (click below)



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Your District Conference 2020 Checklist:

- Read this issue of New Life to learn more about what is planned
- Visit pswdcob.org/dc2020/ to learn even more and see the most current information
- Register by October 23 to be a part of the conference from your own home (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
- Send Service Project knitted blocks to: PSWD
Service Project, Attn: Mary Kay Ogden,
2705 Mountain View Drive #224,
La Verne, CA 91750
- Plan to participate in one of the DC Zoom
Practice sessions (links will be sent) on:
Thursday, Nov. 5, 7 p.m. PST / Saturday,
Nov. 7, 9 a.m. PST / Monday, Nov. 9, 10
a.m. PST

We can't wait to see you at the
PSWD Virtual District Conference!
Mary Kay Ogden, Moderator
Moderator@pswdcob.org

