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A Weekend of Witness and With-ness

November 10-12, 2017

Gathering together with a worship focus on the Beatitudes, the 54th Annual PSWD Conference brought together folks from 23 of our congregations for time in worship, study, business and fellowship. Friday evening's sermon was brought by author and public theologian Brian McLaren. His message was an examination of the Beatitudes that invited us to consider that what divides us today is not so much our differences, but rather the spirit in which we hold our differences with each other. McLaren invited us to find in the beatitudes a teaching from Jesus that shows us a new way of being with one another that might give us a way of staying together.



McLaren shared as the opening preacher, and he provided the leadership for the pre-conference continuing education event which was attended by about 30 ministers and congregational leaders around the conference theme. On Thursday he shared the Fasnacht Lecture on Religion and Public Life at the University of La Verne with a focus on what he has called the Great Spiritual Migration taking place in society. It was a partnership between the University and the District that brought McLaren to California for these events.

Business Saturday was once again conducted around tables inviting delegates from across the district to meet and share with one another on items of faith and business. The opening Bible study was one that Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr used throughout the year in various settings, inviting participants to reflect on a favorite Jesus story of theirs and then relate how Jesus was a witness in the story, and then in a second sharing



how Jesus showed with-ness in the story. While participants shared they wove together play-doh ropes into tapestries that formed the centerpiece of their table, recognizing in the stories of Jesus our connections with one another.

Many reports were shared as a part of conference. Special focus was given to renewed efforts in developing new congregations and included an introductory report from the Church Planting Task Group and the welcoming of the new Los Banos project (see separate article p.2).



Update District Contacts

As you update your church directories for the new year, be sure to update the phone numbers for the District Office:

- Phone Tree: 909-406-5367
 - Russ Matteson: 909-406-5370 de@pswdcob.org
 - Joe Vecchio: 909-406-5368 frontdesk@pswdcob.org
 - Gilbert Romero: 909-406-5371 mtc@pswdcob.org
 - Bookkeeper: 909-406-5369 bk@pswdcob.org
 - Nohemi Flores youth@pswdcob.org
- Visit our new office located in the Pomona Fellowship Church of the Brethren, 875 W Orange Grove Ave, Pomona CA 91768
Post Office mail stays the same:
PO Box 219, La Verne CA 91750-0219

The delegates also received a special invitation to consider serving with Brethren Disaster Ministries through the District, and an encouragement to have their congregations apply for district *Ministry Partnership Funds* and take a risk to reach out into their community with the love of Christ.



Insight sessions engaged participants in the conference theme with a Bible study by Richard Zapata, a presentation from the University of La Verne Interfaith Fellows, and sessions by an Islamic scholar on Muslim Christian relationships and understanding. Other workshops focused on spiritual practices, congregational growth and leadership, congregational ethics, and Board responsibilities.

Delegates approved a 2018 budget of \$425,000. This represents a reduction by half of the overall spending from five years ago as the District Board looks to stabilize district finances and provide for a longer term security for the district to work to support congregations. A 2019 expense maximum was also approved by the delegates.

Worship Saturday evening provided for a district Love Feast that included feet-washing, a simple meal, and communion. Many were touched by an interpretive dance shared by Elizabeth Piazza as we came into the feet-washing portion of the evening. Sunday morning worship included the consecration of leadership for the year ahead, reaffirming the licensed ministers in PSDW, and recognizing ordination anniversaries. The Sunday offering of more than \$5000 is being given to the Puerto Rico District as a witness and with-ness in their response to the impact of Hurricane Maria on their island home.

Policy Board Reorganizes



On Sunday morning of District Conference weekend the Policy Board gathered to call out leadership and organize itself into commissions. Returning and new members of the Board held where they might feel called to serve in their prayers over the last month. Following conversation and a time of introductions they offered their names for service and the following leadership was affirmed for 2018:

- Board Chair - Nelda Rhoades Clarke (Tucson)
- Board Vice-chair - Dot Hess (La Verne)
- Ministry Commission Chair - Tom Hostetler (La Verne)
- Ministry Commission Members - Katherine Boeger Knight (Live Oak), David Flores (Cristo Sion), Norma Sexton (Prince of Peace), Cindy Slaughter (Glendale), Joanne Wagoner (La Verne), Clark Youngblood (Circle of Peace)
- Stewards Commission Chair - Joel Price (Empire)
- Stewards Commission Members - Christi Bowman (Church of the Living Savior), Brenda Dickson (South Bay), Eddie Hernandez (Modesto), Elizabeth Piazza (Live Oak/Youth Rep)
- Congregational Vitality Task Group Members - Cheryl Crane (Prince of Peace), Richard Keeling (Bakersfield)
- Additional members of the Policy Board include: Rudy Amaya (Principe de Paz), Mario Cabrera (Principe de Paz/Youth Rep), Jaime Farrar (Modesto/YA Rep), Julie Wheeler (La Verne)
- Also serving are Moderator Karen Pierson (Church of the Living Savior), Moderator-elect Bob Morris (Glendora), and Clerk Karen Cosner (Modesto)

The first meeting of the new Board takes place Saturday, January 13 at Hillcrest in La Verne.

www.pswdcob.org/ministries/board

Welcome to Los Banos!



There is a new church taking shape in Los Banos! Started at the beginning of 2017 by Rigo and Margie Berumen, who were previously part of the Principe de Paz congregation in Santa Ana, the group has grown to about 30-40 in worship over the last year. Friends from Principe de Paz have encouraged the new congregation, and over the summer and fall of 2017 the leadership of PSDW was invited to join in support and care for this new church.

Rigo and Margie were welcomed at District Conference as they were introduced to the assembled delegates by Pastors Richard and Becky Zapata. A prayer of blessing for the continued growth of the ministry was offered by Moderator Sara Haldeman-Scarr. Hold this group in your prayers as the Berumen's begin their ministry training in 2018, and the core group of leaders begins to focus the vision and structure of this new group of believers.

WOW Retreat Returns!

May 18-20, 2018 ECCO Retreat Center, Yosemite



The Weekend of Wonder Women's Retreat was so much fun in 2017 that they are going to do it again! Women are encouraged to make plans to join their sisters the weekend of May 18-20, 2018 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 \$187 (3 to 4 per room), \$197 (2 per room), or \$287 (private room). Sara Haldeman-Scarr, Karen Pierson, and Cindy Slaughter are coordinating the planning for the event. Email Cindy at cindybadell@gmail.com to get on the information list. An updated flyer and registration portal are available now on the PSWD website.

www.pswdcob.org/events/wow



District Youth & NYC 2018

Every four years Church of the Brethren High School youth gather for an uplifting and inspirational week of faith building in Fort Collins, Colorado. Bound Together: Clothed in Christ is the focus of the 2018 experience. Youth should be making plans now to be there July 21-16, 2018. The cost for the week is \$500, and registration opens on January 18th. The PSWD has money budgeted to help youth from PSWD get to NYC. Those plans are still being made, but it would help if each congregation would send information as to who an adult contact person from your church might be and how many youth may be going to the district office at de@pswdcob.org. Everyone in the church can get involved in helping to raise funds to support your youth in attending. For more information go to www.brethren.org/nyc Help make NYC 2018 a part of your young people's Jesus experience!

Ministry Happenings!



Dawna Welch was called to be the Pastor of Spiritual Formation at the **La Verne congregation**. Dawna began this work in July, having previously been part time on the La Verne staff as Minister of Children and Families.

Alan McLearn-Montz has been called by the **Bakersfield congregation** to begin serving as their pastor effective in January 2018. Alan has served congregations in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Alan, his wife Brenda, and their son Jesse will be arriving from Des Moines, Iowa. Welcome to them all!

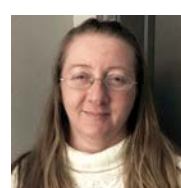


Ordinations to Celebrate



On July 30 **Thomas Dowdy**, pastor of the **Imperial Heights congregation**, was ordained to the ministry in the Church of the Brethren. Previously we had recognized his ordination from the Baptist tradition he came to us from.

On November 19 **Joshua Longbrake** was ordained at the **Circle of Peace congregation**. Joshua has served the last two years as their associate pastor, and is now in Chicago exploring the possibilities of a new church project.



On January 7 **Angela Asamoah** will be ordained at the **Circle of Peace congregation**. Angela graduated from Fuller Seminary (Phoenix) in 2016, and has been called to serve as pastor of the Bear Creek Church of the Brethren in Southern Ohio District.

Congratulations on this first call and best wishes as you move to Ohio.

Ministry Training Coordinator

In September **Gilbert Romero** began work as the **PSWD Ministry Training Coordinator**. Gilbert brings a breadth of experience in the Church of the Brethren and a commitment to working at growing our capacity for ministry growth with Hispanic sisters and brothers. Gilbert will be focusing on supporting and motivating our licensed ministers who are participating in SeBAH and EFSM-español. This will include checking in with them regularly to see how they are doing in ministry, studies, and life. Gilbert's email is mtc@pswdcob.org and his direct line is 909-406-5371.

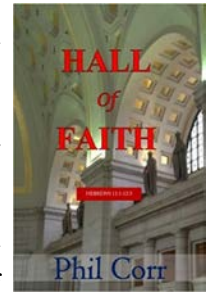


Nohemi Flores called as PSWD Youth Advisor



Nohemi Flores has been called to serve **PSWD as the District Youth Advisor** beginning January 1. Nohemi is a licensed minister and member of the Cristo Sion congregation in Pomona. She is a student at the University of La Verne majoring in math with plans to teach High School math following her graduation and credentialing. Nohemi has served as a Young Adult representative on the Policy Board and provided English to Spanish translation at Annual Conference on many occasions. Her first work will be gathering the Youth Cabinet for some planning and coordinating with District churches on NYC 2018 plans.

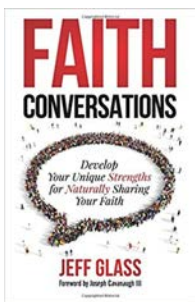
Hall of Faith: A Devotional Commentary on Hebrews 11:1-12:3 by **Phil Corr** – provides a vivid look at the meaning of faith and many of the faithful people found in the Old Testament. After learning the definition of faith and commendation of faith, you will rejoice in faith in the Creator, explore ordinary people who took extraordinary steps of faith, and know that you are being cheered on by a faithful cloud of witnesses. Available through www.Amazon.com



Growing in God's Garden: 2018 Devotional for Ash Wednesday through Easter by **Erin Matteson** – Brethren Press' lenten devotional invites readers to reflect on images of gardening and other metaphors through the journey towards Easter. Available through www.Brethrenpress.com

Congratulations PSWD Authors

Several of our ministers have recently published books or devotions on a variety of subjects. Learn more below, and order a copy if the topic sparks your interest!



Faith Conversations: Develop Your Unique Strengths for Naturally Sharing Your Faith by **Jeff Glass** – Jeff walks the reader through a fictional journey as a church class on evangelism transitions from a confrontational, sales model of personal evangelism to helping each member develop their own unique personal style. Utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder discover and craft a style

of evangelism that is unique to you. Available through www.Amazon.com

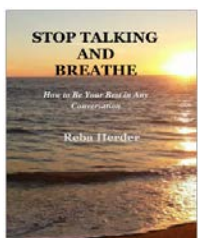
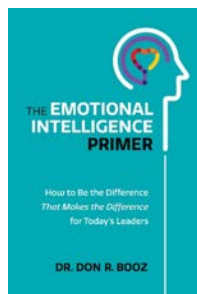
Lindsay Congregation Closes

With beginnings in 1911 and a rich history of service and worship, the Lindsay (New Harvest) congregation voted to close this past fall due to their small size and the difficulty of continuing in ministry as a result of that.

The congregation was aware of another church that was looking for a permanent church home and might be interested in purchasing the Lindsay property. In November the sale of the property to Vision Calvary Chapel of Porterville was completed with the congregation and the district as joint sellers, and after making some needed repairs to the facilities Vision began to worship there in December 2017.

While the closing of the congregation is a sad thing, we celebrate their faithful service through the years and the many who came to know Jesus through the Lindsay church's ministry. The church members are pleased that the buildings will continue in use as a church in their community.

The Emotional Intelligence Primer by **Don Booz** – this practical primer provides hands-on guidance for applying emotional intelligence in the workplace. Learn how to really listen, disarm your inner critic, recognize and deal with multiple messages, avoid triangles, and more. Includes exercises for each skill. Available through www.Amazon.com



Stop Talking and Breathe: How To Be Your Best in Any Conversation by **Reba Herder** – powerful, practical tools for change utilizing the Enneagram and the Nine Arts of Healthy Conversation that will help you create better conversation, give you better choices, and better results. Available at www.conversationstrategies.com



Renewal for Pastors and Spouses



Encourage your congregation's 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 11-15, 2018, is when the group will gather at the Serra Retreat in Malibu, CA. The leadership for the spiritual renewal is Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine sister,

author, and retreat leader who makes her home at St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas. This time together continues to be a blessing to our pastors and through them to the congregations they serve. Registration materials will be available in January.

www.pswdcob.org/events/pastors

Bethany and EYN Form Educational Partnership

Bethany Theological Seminary and Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) have entered into an historic relationship, the first of its kind between the Seminary and a Church of the Brethren group outside the United States. Conceived as a way to facilitate theological study at Bethany for EYN members, the program is a joint effort between the Seminary and EYN.



The first course will be "Global Perspectives on Scripture: 1 Corinthians," currently scheduled for January 2018. Reflecting the importance of collaboration in this new partnership, this course will be taught by both Dan Ulrich, Wieand Professor of New Testament Studies at Bethany, and Pandang Yamsat, chief executive director of the Center for Value and Attitudinal Reawakening. A New Testament scholar, Yamsat recently retired from the faculty of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. The two met at

Bethany early in May to begin planning the course.

Key to the program's success will be a new technology center at the Boulder Hill Compound in Jos, Nigeria, where EYN students will take all their classes online. Plans for the facility call for two large flat-panel screens and multiple cameras and microphones, similar to the technology now available in one of Bethany's classrooms. Students on campus at Bethany, students in Jos, and faculty in both locations will share the live classroom, able to see and hear each other in real time. Construction began on the technology center in July 2017. Progress updates at www.bethanyseminary.edu/eynpartner

While the center will belong to EYN, Bethany is assuming responsibility for raising funds to cover the construction cost of \$150,000. To date approximately \$136,000 has been raised. An additional \$50,000 needs to be raised to cover the costs of desks, computers, an upgrade in the campus electrical system, the internet connection, and teachers. Ongoing support is also needed as program costs will continue.

As the program develops, Bethany plans to offer accessible courses in theological and historical studies, ministry studies, and peace studies. Developed or adapted in conversation with Nigerian church leaders, these courses will be designed to encourage mutual learning on topics of interest to students in Nigeria as well as America. Courses will be offered in intensive formats so that students can complete them during a short stay in Jos.



Musa Mambula and Mark Lancaster are always willing to speak with individuals and congregations about how God has moved the Seminary to embrace this unique partnership with EYN. Contact Mark Lancaster with questions about the program or how to support this effort: Lancama@bethanyseminary.edu 765-983-1805 (work), or 510-809-6721 (cell).



THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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

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18 QUESTIONS FOR 2018

Tim Shapiro, from the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, believes that vibrant congregations exhibit a commitment to increasing congregational capacity. As demands on congregations grow, clergy and laity struggle to “maintain agency over their problems rather than the problems having hold on them.”¹ Through the learning process, congregations can discover how to solve a challenge that once outran them. Based on his congregational theory of development, he explains that the first step is defining the challenge. The following exercise helps members identify their goals: what they already know, what they still need to learn, and how their plan fits into the church’s overall mission.

Questions to Ignite Conversations

Ask members of the governing board or any leadership group in the congregation to review these eighteen questions.² Invite them to select three questions they believe are most crucial for the congregation to discuss. At the first meeting, take a tally of the questions that were chosen. This tally alone will indicate if leaders are focused on the same issues or are concerned about a quite diverse group of questions. Have a conversation about the three questions that received the most votes. Over the course of several meetings, help the group to identify their top questions or concerns. Next, assess the congregation’s level of capacity. Before taking any action steps, determine if the leaders need more information, training, education, or transformation.³

1. What is the distinctive theological message this church seeks to send? What words do we use to define our core values and identity? Do our pastor and lay leaders find agreement and unity around this message?

2. What will be the number one driving force for the allocation of scarce resources (such as time and energy of volunteers, staff time, money, building use) in the future planning of our church’s ministry? Local or world missions? Children’s ministry? Becoming a more diverse worshiping community? Maintaining

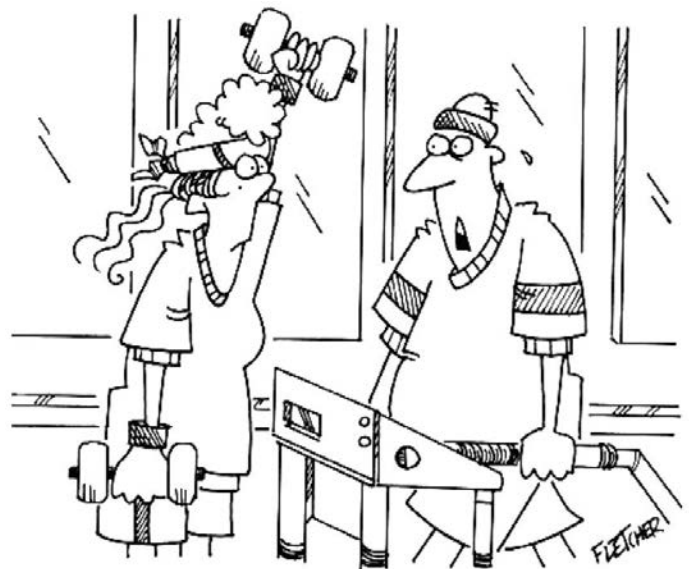
harmony? Satisfying the preferences of our current members?

3. What size is God calling this worshiping community to be? Does our current building and location limit or facilitate our size goals? Are there strategic decisions that we could make about buying or selling property or other assets that could benefit our long-range vision?

4. Are our programs, governance, and staffing consistent with our current size? Do we have a sense of how we compare to other churches of our size in terms of leveraging resources for ministry?

5. How strong is the desire for community among current members? How does this preference balance with those who feel more comfortable with anonymity? Do these contrasting preferences inhibit decision-making about church growth, outreach, or staffing priorities?

6. What approach is best for our congregation to design worship experiences that meet the spiritual needs of multiple generations? How does worship connect to the teaching ministries of the congregation?



"MY CHURCH IS BIG ON
CONTINUED LEARNING FOR ADULTS
OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL JUST SPENT TWENTY-THREE WEEKS
FINISHING AN 8 WEEK STUDY OF JONAH."

7. How committed is our congregation to continued learning for adults? How many adult classes or groups do we want? When and where will they meet? Who will lead them? Do we have a mechanism for the creation of new groups or classes?

8. How many “congregations” make up this church? In a typical church, about one in three participants regularly attend, give generously, and volunteer many hours in church programs and ministries. Another “congregation” consists of less committed members who attend worship but who rarely serve as leaders or participants in church programs. They tend to give only when they attend. The third “congregation” consists of members who demonstrate minimal involvement and rarely attend. What percentage of your church membership falls into each of the categories? Has this changed over the past five years? What factors could explain these patterns?

9. What proportion of the operating budget should we allocate to increase the church’s visibility and to invite new people to participate in our church’s ministries?

10. Does our congregation reflect the racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of our neighborhood or region? If not, what barriers keep newcomers from becoming active participants in our church?

11. Are we a regional church, neighborhood church, or something else? What is our primary calling in this geographic location?

12. What assumptions underlie our current church-staffing model? Does our mission depend on staffing at least one full-time ordained clergy person? How might a bi-vocational, part-time, or second career pastoral leader enhance our effectiveness?

13. What do we anticipate the church’s challenges and opportunities to be ten years from now? What ministries are likely to become more important or less important because of those changes?

14. What is the greatest impediment to designing and implementing a new five-year plan? Is one of the obstacles a high level of contentment with the status quo? Another possibility is a long list of attractive alternative courses of action and the reluctance to choose out of fear of making the wrong choice.

15. Does fear play a role our decision-making? For example, in some church locations, fear arises from incidents of vandalism and crime in the neighborhood. In other instances, fear stems from a sense that the church lacks measures to address future potential problems. Does our congregation allow members to

express their fears and are there processes to acknowledge practical realities in our future planning?

16. How does our congregation respond to disappointment? Can we describe some setbacks and what we learned from the experience? Did we find an alternative path forward?⁴

17. Will the passage of time expand our range of attractive choices? In general, the best time to strengthen and reinforce ministry is the present. What immediate actions would allow us to take advantage of multiple options?

18. Are our congregation’s best days ahead of us or behind us? What evidence points to our “best days” as a congregation? Are our criteria consistent with our core religious commitments?

Could Something Be Better?

Our theological views and commitments color the ways we think about the past, present, and future of our congregation. And as American churches embrace broader narratives about our nation’s history, their own church story reflects those themes. For example, historians find two distinct American “jeremiads”—stories of decline, like the prophecies of Jeremiah.⁵ The traditionalist jeremiad sees the past as virtuous and the present as full of problems. On the other hand, the progressive jeremiad sees the past as the source of our best ideals or principles, upon which we can build a better future. Both jeremiads acknowledge our present problems. But the traditionalist jeremiad asserts that the best approach to overcoming present challenges is to return to past ways of believing and behaving. Whereas the progressive jeremiad finds heroic examples of people facing predicaments and overcoming injustice. Both views reflect a tension between despair in the present and a hope for the future. Disappointment in the present is central to the American narrative and central to what drives churches to take on their next challenge.

1. Tim Shapiro, *How Your Congregation Learns: The Learning Journey from Challenge to Achievement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield: 2017), 4-8, xv.

2. Many of these questions are similar to ones asked by church consultants Lyle Schaller and Herb Miller in their ministry with congregations.

3. Shapiro, 36.

4. *Ibid.*, 77.

5. Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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New Life

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District Conference November 9-11, 2018

At Hillcrest in La Verne, California
Registration opens in September 2018
Moderator Karen Pierson
Moderator@pswdcob.org

“Focus on Jesus!”

Matthew 14:22-33

Peter sees Jesus walking on water, and as long as Peter's focus is on Jesus, Peter can walk on water. But as soon as Peter's focus is on the waves he sinks. In my life, the life of my family, the life of the church, when we are focused on Jesus, life is good, maybe not easy, but good. But when we focus on problems instead of Jesus, we sink. God has been placing this truth in front of me for more than a year now. **So let's focus on Jesus!**

Karen Pierson

