



IN THIS
EDITION



Ellen White for a
New Generation



Church Retreat at
Pine Springs Ranch

Conference PRIORITIES

Mid-Term Sessions: God is Still at Work

Recently, we held five mid-term sessions in the five counties of Southeastern California Conference (SECC): Imperial, San Diego, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino. Our bylaws, or the rules that help us run as an organization, require that we have a meeting halfway between constituency sessions. These meetings provide opportunities for our members to propose agenda items to be considered for our upcoming constituency session.

Seizing the opportunity given by the bylaws, we spent this time sharing how God has been at work in our conference over the last two and a half years. We also had the opportunity to listen to our constituents and learn better ways to serve our local churches.

Our conference membership is richly diverse and strong. Executive Secretary Patricia Marruffo reported on our membership trends and numbers. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges we have never seen before, God is still at work throughout our conference territory in significant ways. We praise God that in the midst of these challenges people continued to seek God and declare Jesus as

their Savior. Since our last constituency session, there have been 2,399 baptisms. By the grace of God, our communities of faith will continue to grow and thrive as we remain centered on our mission and on God's heart for His people.

We have also seen God bless us financially as a conference. Verlon Strauss, our conference treasurer, was happy to announce that over the past three years we have been able to present balanced budgets to our executive committee. The 2021 annual budget included a plan to send 0.5% of the tithe back to each church. During the pandemic, we provided over \$2 million in additional funds for education. Though we experienced hard times due to the pandemic, God has blessed us financially through the faithfulness of our members. Our need to use endowment earnings for our operations has decreased.

Another place we have seen God moving is in our ministerial department.
Led by Ministerial Director Jon

*Continued on
page 4*



Constituents at the Imperial County meeting.



SOUTHEASTERN
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FAR LEFT: Lila Cervantes sings during the play.



LEFT: Patricia Marruffo shares the Sabbath sermon.

Ellen White for a New Generation

By Andrea King

In late September, the Victorville Pathfinders hosted a special Pathfinder Sabbath in which they paid tribute to Ellen G. White.

Marilyn Hood, the Victorville Pathfinder leader, wrote a short play about Mrs. White. Hood wanted to inspire young people to investigate who this woman was. The play included vignettes about young Ellen, how the Lord provided for the needs of the White family, and the discovery of land in a small town called Loma Linda where God revealed a school should be built.

"It is so important for us to remember that she was a real person. She was a loving wife, a mother, a neighbor, a church leader, and friend. And she was far ahead of her time in the matters of health and family," Hood told those who attended.

The program featured Pathfinders past and present. Dylan Siregar, a current Pathfinder, read the Scripture. Chalsea-Lee Sweet, a former Pathfinder, played Ellen G. White. She grabbed attention as she began the presentation with the shout, "You will see the Lord a-coming!" Sweet shared the stage with Lila Cervantes, a recording artist who flew in for this event. Cervantes shared several musical selections during the production.

Kaitlyn Parks, another former

Victorville Pathfinder who now serves as a part of the Pathfinder staff, also helped with this special day. In describing this program about Ellen G. White, she believed the program helped to "educate others about her struggles, triumphs, and devotion to the people in her community and the all-giving God she served."

The congregation was also blessed to hear a sermon from then Associate Youth Director, now Executive Secretary Patricia Marruffo. She laid a challenge before them. "Imagine what the world would look like today if every single Pathfinder and follower of Jesus Christ lived in the reality of God's priorities, serving and loving.... What might the world see in us if we became one-way missionaries right here, right in this community, where you live, in your neighborhoods, in our churches, in our communities. What would our world look like?" Marruffo queried.

In addition to highlighting the ministry of Ellen G. White during the program, some of her books were made available for people to enjoy. The day ended with a dinner to thank the sponsors of the Pathfinder Club. Deputy

Director John Hood gave a prayer, and Sweet led the Pathfinders and sponsors in the Pathfinder song. Recounting the day, Margie Hood said, "The Pathfinders were amazing. You felt the Holy Spirit, and the church was on fire!"



Chalsea-Lee Sweet plays Ellen G. White.

Church Retreat at Pine Springs Ranch

By Dana Urquhart

The Los Alamitos congregation, under the leadership of Pastor Lynn Martell, spent the first weekend in October in the mountains at Pine Springs Ranch for a refreshing retreat from the business of everyday life. Since there is no cell service up in the mountains, the weekend was spent getting to know fellow church members and experiencing God's wonderful nature.

The theme for the retreat was "Christ Is Coming Soon." Michael Blackburn, a Los Alamitos church member and a history teacher at Citrus Hill High School in Perris, Calif., was the speaker. He shared his belief that we are close to Christ's second coming, what happens when Jesus comes back, and how to prepare our families for these last days. Appeals were made at the conclusion of the messages, and several decisions for Christ were made. "It really was a mountaintop experience," said Jennifer King, one of the retreat participants.

The retreat was filled with music, encouraging and challenging messages, family fun, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The weekend getaway was a blessing not only for adults but also for children, who were able to learn about God through nature and from their Sabbath School teachers.

On Sunday morning, there was a special anointing service for healing. A large number of people participated and expressed great appreciation for the blessing. A special prayer was also given for a commitment to



The Joshua family singing.

service. "The retreat truly blessed our family. The special dedication of our family for service was powerful," said Michelle Nealy.

At the end of the retreat, many were indicating a desire to make the retreat an annual event. Several shared how they were blessed and refreshed by the beautiful scenery and the encouraging messages. Tim Bui said, "I am thankful that so many had a transformational experience that will last way beyond the Pine Springs Ranch retreat!"

Retired Pastor Don Vollmer summed up the weekend by expressing what many felt: "Through all the activities of the weekend—the meals, the hikes, the

games Saturday night, not to mention the music, the testimonies, the inspired Word, and worship—we drew nearer to God and each other than we might have in a year of Sabbaths!"



Michael Blackburn preaching.



Special prayer for the Nealy family.

"I am thankful that so many had a transformational experience that will last way beyond the Pine Springs Ranch retreat!"

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*Continued
from page 1*

Ciccarelli, alongside Will Penick, the associate director, this department pastors our pastors. The heart of what they do is to encourage pastors to abide deeply in Christ, from whom all life-transforming ministry flows.

The Journey, a series of six retreats over a two-year span at Pine Springs Ranch, is one way we do this intentionally. Each retreat includes time alone with God, praying and caring for one another, and strategic planning for the mission God has called us to. A new blog for pastors



Vice President Yohalmo Saravia reporting at the Riverside County meeting.



San Bernardino County members in breakout groups.

by pastors, visits, Zoom prayer calls, and a pastoral spouse care program are other ways this department shepherds our pastors.

Our ministerial department is also instrumental in developing our pastors. They recruit and interview undergraduate theology majors. They mentor and prepare pastors for ordination and have been instrumental in the ordination of 13 pastors in the last year and a half. We praise God for their ministry.

I believe the conference exists to help our local churches share the three angels' messages, build God's kingdom, and make a difference in their communities. We do this through our four strategic priorities. We call these priorities our compass. These were birthed from listening to various groups of people, including laypeople, young people, elders, pastors, and different committees. Our compass includes engaging, evangelizing, educating, and equipping.

We ENGAGE next generation leaders as

a welcoming Christian community, through thriving ministries for youth and young adults, and in the development of leadership opportunities to serve that shape our shared future.

We live out our calling to EVANGELIZE in new and creative ways, intentionally participating with love and grace in the shared life of our communities, proclaiming the everlasting gospel through our public ministries and individual lives.

We EDUCATE for lifelong faithfulness and success, embracing the highest standards of academic excellence, sustainability, and accessibility throughout our Christ-centered and distinctly Seventh-day Adventist Christian educational network.

We EQUIP members of every age to embrace their calling to mission and service, empowering discipleship through mentoring, training, and resourcing.

We are still in a period of transition, but we request your prayers. With Christ as our True North, we know He will lead us in the right direction.

TOGETHER

WE CAN FULFILL THE MISSION!

Find out how you can continue building the kingdom of God.

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