

# southernconnect



**Gregory L. Hoenes, Ph.D.,** West Region Director

## The Meaning of God's Love for Us

God's love is not an abstraction. Though we dimly comprehend Godself revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit, the love of God is built into God's very nature as a social entity. This isn't self-love; rather, it is a love that encompasses triune unity as an eternal and dynamic subject of that love. This is how we can say love emanates from God's very essence and nature. We see it expressed in the ecstasy and generosity of creation itself. In the self-emptying love of God incarnate. In the promises to bring justice to the world and to make all things new.

In this brief reflection, I'm not referencing any particular kind of love (*eros*, *storge*, *phileo*, or *agape*), but rather love as ethic in action. God's love is an engaged and engaging phenomenon. It's active, not passive. Always relational, it purposes an intimacy that fosters the fullest realization of all creation, particularly created life, and lends perspective to all death. Its opposite is apathy and fear.

Jesus, the very enfleshment of God's love, demonstrated the love of God for humanity and the world (John 3:16) over and over as He breathed the air we breathe, walked the paths we walk, drank of Earth's waters (some of it turned to wine), and ate our Earth's foods. Jesus experienced the growth cycles we experience on the road to adulthood. He worked in our quarries, attended to His parents, and disciplined some of His own brothers as He began His ministry. We see the love of God through Christ's teachings, in His presence, and in the

forgiveness proffered as He was in the throes of death.

Despite these beautiful truths, I feel a hollowness when I hear, "Jesus loves you!" or "God loves you!" What is apparently meant by this sometimes trite sounding maxim is some version of this sentiment: "As worthless and debased as you actually are, God forgives you; Jesus loves you and wants to save you."

It's not that there's no truth here—it's that those who make this claim are not themselves really interested in me nor seeking a relationship. There's a cultured urge to have guilt assuaged—guilt generated over rather idiosyncratic "sins." In practice, too many who tout divine love are more interested in war than peace, gain than sacrifice, domination than true

freedom cultured through responsibility, entitlement and status over service, and the continued progress of the man-made world rather than the sustaining and life-giving nature of the God-made world. Christians "love" the Creator but, in practice, despise and abuse creation. Too many of us love the Savior but can't see the face of Jesus in the least of these.

God's love is known through God's creation of the natural world and the way in which that world provided all that was needed for human thriving and all the fabulous diversity of creatures that inhabited it. God's love is known in the giving of self. Love is not an abstraction. It is you and I showing the world we're followers and lovers of Jesus by the way we demonstrate real, relational, ethical love for one another and how we tend to God's creation. Love must transcend party politics and movements to power. It must supersede the allure of wealth. If love is to bear real meaning, it must be materialized and enfleshed, demonstrated in how we live and what we do. ●

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INSIDE



### High Desert Church

A damaged facility is repaired for the work of ministry.



### North Hills Church

School supply drive helps twice as many students in 2021.



### Ephesus Church

The message of Christ's love goes to the streets.

# Mojave Church Celebrates Remodel After Storm

BY LAUREN LACSON

This summer, the High Desert church celebrated a joyous reopening. But this was not only a reopening due to closure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as many churches have recently experienced. This was part of the occasion, yes—but there was also a second reason to celebrate.

In November 2019, the community in Mojave, where the church is

located, experienced a particularly harsh wind, rain, and snow storm that left the church facility significantly damaged.

The building, specifically in the fellowship hall, had flooded and the roof had collapsed in. With such extensive damage, the building was in no shape to host worship services.

Jose Gutierrez, pastor of the Lake of the Woods, High Desert, and

Tehachapi churches, began his role in May of 2020. The church leadership prayed for God's guidance in this large-scale project.

The grand reopening this summer was more than just a welcome back from the virtual pandemic worship experience. Although the repairs are not yet complete, the congregation has already hit the ground running to continue the work of ministry. ●

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JOSE GUTIERREZ



Photos depict the damage to the building due to the wind, rain, and snow storm of November 2019.



Construction crews work to restore the building.



The new, fully functional fellowship hall kitchen: ready for use.



Facility and pandemic challenges didn't stop God's work.

# North Hills Church Doubles Backpacks for School Supply Drive to Meet the Need in 2021

BY LAUREN LACSON

Every year as local students are gearing up for the school year, North Hills church partners with Hope Through Housing to provide backpacks full of essential school supplies for students in the community.

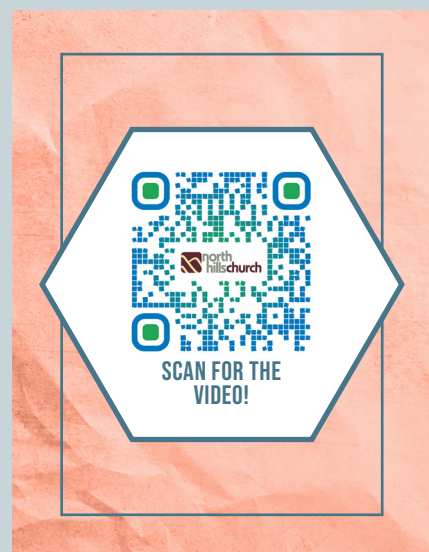
2020 was a rough year, and young students didn't have it easy. Returning to the classroom in 2021 was a bigger task than in previous years.

According to North Hills church Pastor Tim Cress, the church usually provides somewhere between 40-60 backpacks in the annual drive. But after COVID entered the equation, the

need became greater. "With a greater need than in previous years, we decided to provide 100 backpacks this year," Cress stated.

When the drive had concluded, the church raised nearly \$2,700 and provided 110 backpacks filled with necessary school supplies for elementary, middle, and high school students. Hope Through Housing helped distribute the backpacks in three different areas to the kids who needed them.

"They still have needs," Cress added, "but we were able to help 50 more kids than last year." ●



# Ephesus Church Takes Ministry to the Streets

BY DIEDRA MCALPIN

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the Ephesus church community service team, led by Diva Moses, strategically planned for November 28, 2020, to be a day when the church and the community would dine together—"outside the walls of the church"—in the church parking lot. However, the COVID-19 virus and its restrictions forced the team to make changes to their original plans.

The effort brought together an ethnically diverse group of predominantly women to serve the community in a different way. The team prepared and packaged 200 to-go containers of hot food (consisting of turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, gravy, string beans, rolls, macaroni and cheese,

dressings, and water) and prepared 150 tote bags (containing a note pad and pencil, two pairs of socks, a bottle of sanitizer, bars of soap, deodorant, washcloths, cookies, crackers, a toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, a mask, water, candy, Cup of Soup, pull-top tuna, Vienna sausage, lotions, chips, a comb, disposable gloves, Adventist literature, razors, and sanitary napkins), which they delivered to encampments in Service Planning Area 6 in Los Angeles.

By God's providence, this effort surpassed the original goal of taking God's message of love "outside the

walls of the church" into the church parking lot by "taking it to the streets" into encampments where people without homes are living.



On April 22, 2021, the team again headed to the homeless encampments in South Los Angeles, this time led by Sandy Sasso, who shares how grateful she is to be part of

this team. This work is very therapeutic. It allows us to take the focus off ourselves and focus instead on others. To God be the glory! ●

Read the firsthand testimonies of our Ephesus church volunteers with this ministry at <https://scc.adventist.org/ephesus>.

## in transition

### TRANSFERS WITHIN SCC

Voted July 2, August 12 & 26, 2021

**Young Rin Kim** | Ministerial Intern to Pastor, Olympic Korean church, as of August 1, 2021.

**Morris Barnes** | From Pastor, Antelope Valley church to Fifty-Fourth Street church, as of August 15, 2021.

**Moises Benitez** | From Pastor, Temple City Spanish/San Gabriel Valley Spanish churches to San Fernando Valley Spanish church, as of May 1, 2021.

**Alondra Carrillo** | From Kindergarten Teacher to Elementary Teacher, San Fernando Valley Academy, as of July 1, 2021.

**Deon Chatman** | From Temporary Pastor to Pastor, Normandie Avenue church, as of August 15, 2021.

**Ashton Hardin** | From Administrative Assistant to Registrar, SCC Education Department, as of August 1, 2021.

**Gustavo Mendez Pineda** | From Seminary to Pastor, San Gabriel Valley Spanish/El Camino/South Gate Spanish churches, as of August 15, 2021.

### TRANSFERS, CONTINUED...

**Nicholas Perez** | From Senior Accountant to Associate Treasurer, SCC Treasury, as of August 11, 2021.

**Rolando Rivera** | From Pastor, Newhall Spanish church to Los Olivos/Shalom churches, as of July 18, 2021.

**Donald Smith** | From Pastor, Alhambra church, to Associate Pastor, White Memorial church, as of August 29, 2021.

### RETIREMENTS

Voted July 2, 2021

**Martin Sun Hwa Hwang** | From Pastor, Olympic Korean church, as of July 31, 2021.

### LEAVING SCC

Voted July 2 & August 26, 2021

**Fred Warfield** | From Director, SCC Human Resources, as of July 31, 2021.

**Pono Lopez** | From Pastor, Long Beach church, as of August 31, 2021.

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Lauren Lacson

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1535 E. Chevy Chase Dr.  
Glendale, CA 91206

818.546.8400

info@sccsda.org

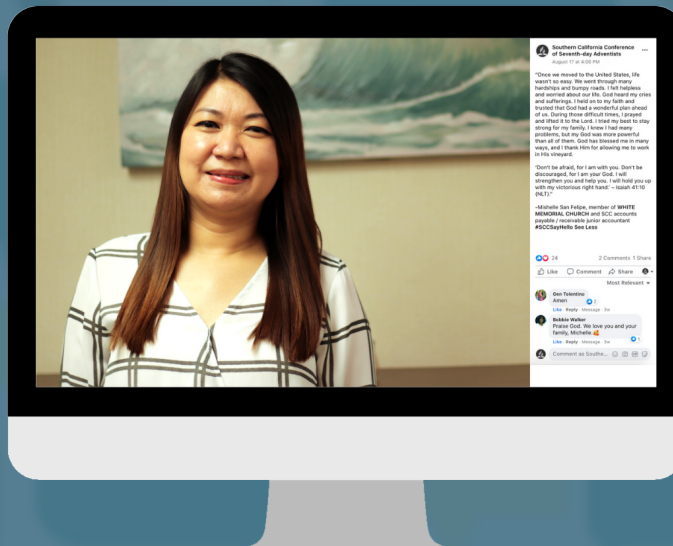
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