

southernconnect



Gerard Kiemenev, D.Min., L.A. Metro Region Director

God's Transcendent Love

excess weight, lower our cholesterol levels, keep a consistent devotional life, become better organized, or finish that special project that we have been procrastinating on for years.

Now, the above examples are relatively inconsequential to the overall well-being of life. But sometimes, when the spiritual stakes are high, we may go out on a "spiritual limb," not being in touch with the axiom, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

In Matthew 26:33, we come face to face with an audacious confession of our brother Peter: "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (NIV). And so we wonder, "Wow, Peter, that is really bold. The stakes are pretty high; are you sure you meant to say that?"

As we read this confession, let us not forget that his relationship with Jesus was intensely personal—this was no academic avowal. This bold confession of Peter was rooted in a three-year intimate relationship with the best friend Peter ever had; it was rooted in the Person to whom he connected on the deepest level of his soul; it was rooted in the history Peter had with the Hand that pulled him out of the water as he was succumbing to the violent waves of a storm; it was rooted in the days, hours, and minutes of association he had with the One who had never let him down; and it was rooted

Have we ever made promises to God or others that we clearly intended to keep without really understanding the gravity of the situation? Sure we have! One such example of broken promises we make would be New Year's resolutions—we never seem to lose the

in the One who, when their eyes connected, brought great joy and laughter to Peter's heart. And so for Peter, as with all the disciples, to them, their word was as good as gold. How could they ever forsake this incredible Man from Galilee who had brought so much comfort to their being?

But then the moment happened, just as Jesus had said it would. Before Peter even realized what was going on, he was denying his Lord three times, denying Him without a second thought other than to save his own neck from what he perceived to be the upcoming execution of his closest friend. When the chips were down for Jesus, Peter did not lend a helping hand, as Jesus had done for him.

GOD IS ALWAYS OUR GREAT SHEPHERD & WE ARE HIS PRECIOUS SHEEP.

The prediction of Jesus to Peter and the other disciples came to pass. He had told them that, though they intended to remain faithful to Him, all of them—yes, ALL of them—would be scattered on account of Him, like roaches in the night scatter when light shines on them (see Matthew 26:31).

The Scripture says in Luke 22:60-62 that at the moment of the third denial, Jesus turned and locked eyes with Peter. That connection totally devastated Peter's heart, and the Scripture says Peter left the scene sobbing.

So, how would Jesus respond post-resurrection morning, to His "forsaken" disciples and friends? What would Jesus say? What would Jesus do?

We learn from John 21:9-10 that Jesus' response to His devastated team was to cook them a hearty breakfast! Really? A hearty breakfast? A hearty breakfast! A hearty breakfast coupled with a heart-to-heart conversation.

What would Jesus say? First of all, let's observe what Jesus did not say. Jesus did not say, "I told you so." Jesus did not say, "How could you do that to me? I knew I made a mistake calling

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This Jewish Adventist congregation welcomes their first Torah scroll



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Beth B'nai Zion Installs 1st Torah

BY DAVID GARDNER

Our Jewish friends consider it the most sacred and revered thing they have on earth, the Torah scroll. On January 5, Santa Barbara's Jewish Adventist congregation, Beth B'nai Zion, embraced and welcomed their first Torah scroll with awe and celebration. The name of this Jewish Adventist congregation means "The House of the Children of Zion." The scroll's much-anticipated arrival was observed with a special installation service and many guests from local synagogues, churches, and the community of Santa Barbara.

Dr. Alexander "Sasha" Bolotnikov, director of the Shalom Learning Center, a Jewish Adventist training center operated by the North American

Division, presented the scroll. Many of those present for the full-house event expressed their interest and joy as they examined the scroll close up and learned many interesting details and traditions about the care and reading of Torah scrolls.

Akivah Northern, Beth B'nai Zion member, spoke with deep respect and amazement about the Torah scroll, handwritten in Hebrew more than 200 years ago in Poland. "I am moved to think of the experiences, risks, and dangers this Torah endured in surviving the wars of Eastern Europe to come to us here today," she said.

Another congregant, Dr. Elizabeth Dexter, commented repeatedly how being in possession of this aged and



Examining the scroll. Photo by Kaia Chantal.

sacred foundation of faith for both Jews and Christians reminds her vividly of "how God has preserved His Word down through the centuries."

Alan Reinach, director of Public Affairs & Religious Liberty for the Pacific Union, a Jewish Adventist, gave a powerful and poignant testimony. "It was through the Torah that I learned Jesus was my Messiah and Savior," he shared. At Beth B'nai Zion, attendees will continue learning of Jesus through their "new" Torah. ●



Keziah Avana (Panorama Spanish club) pictured with her family. Photos by Steve Clement.

This year's Pathfinder convocation at the White Memorial church hosted more than 1,200 people with 52 clubs in attendance. From praise songs to the meaningful flag ceremony and pledges, the day was graced with God's presence.

Breath of Life church pastor Eugene Hamilton spoke on the theme of "community service." He shared an inspiring message from the story of

Pathfinder Convocation Inspires

BY LAUREN LACSON

the paralytic in Mark 2:1-5. He invited attendees to reach out to their community and be the type of friend who will personally bring someone to Jesus.

He ended with an altar call, to which 58 Pathfinders as well as a few adults responded using decision cards.

"It is our goal that every Pathfinder in Southern California have an opportunity to make a decision for Jesus," said Bob Wong, SCC Youth Ministries director. "This is why we have a convocation yearly. The name of each person who makes a decision is forwarded to their local pastor. When a person gets baptized, we ask that the director forward their name and date of baptism to us, and every Pathfinder gets a personal letter from the conference Youth Ministries director."

Another inspiring aspect of the program was the pin design contest. Pathfinders from all around the conference were invited to submit pin designs for a chance to win a ticket to this year's camporee. Steve Clement, SCC Pin Organizer, shared a variety of designs before revealing the winner.

The 2019 Pathfinder International Camporee will take place on August 12-17 in Oshkosh, Wis. More information and tickets can be found at www.camporee.org. ●



in transition

NEW EMPLOYEES

Voted February 14, 2019

Warren Tetz | Asset/Risk Management Interim Director, SCC Office, as of November 1, 2018.

Bie An "Fong" Tjia | Undertreasurer, SCC Office, as of October 29, 2018.

TRANSFERS OUT OF SCC

Voted January 10, 2019

Connie Jeffery | From Associate Director, SCC Office, as of December 31, 2018.

TRANSFERS IN SCC

Voted January 10 & February 14, 2019

Cherise Gardner | From Pastor, Long Beach church, to Associate Pastor, Eagle Rock church, as of January 1, 2019.

Bronson (Pono) Lopez | From Associate Pastor, Eagle Rock church, to Pastor, Long Beach church, as of January 1, 2019.

Nelly Martin | From Administrative Assistant, Glendale Adventist Academy, to Departmental Assistant, SCC Education, as of December 10, 2018.

Dileanny Jimenez | From Payroll Jr. Accountant, SCC Office, to Auditing Assistant, SCC Office, as of February 4, 2019.

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you to be My disciples and investing all My time and energy in you." Jesus did not humiliate them! He did not condemn them. Instead, Jesus reminded them of life's greatest lesson in our relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is not predicated upon our empty promises of fidelity to Him. Our relationship with God is not rooted in our ability to out-spiritualize anyone else. Our relationship with God is not predicated upon our feeling sorry for Him as He was "executed" on the cross. Jesus was not executed on the cross by anyone! Instead of execution, Jesus clearly taught that it was His love for all of us that led Him to sacrifice Himself for our sins. So Jesus asked Peter the question, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" It was a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit question!

Jesus reminded Peter, as He reminds all of us who betray Him through our words and deeds on a daily basis, that our relationship with Him is founded upon the solid rock of the Chief Cornerstone. A relationship of His love for us!

Friends, you may be struggling with having disappointed God by either your words or actions, but take heart, He has not forsaken you. He understands our weaknesses, and as our high priest, He intercedes for us (Hebrews 4).

In all our disappointments, realize that God is always our Great Shepherd and we are His precious sheep. God came into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world might live through Him. For God so loved—so *loved*—the world, that His appeal to all of us who don't keep our promises is an invitation to love Him because He first loved us. God is the One who takes us by the hand when we are sinking in the hardships of life and when circumstances seem to overwhelm us. He knows us through and through and calls us by name. Let us boldly come to His throne of grace and find His presence ready to lift us up into His loving arms. Behold, He stands at the doors of our hearts and knocks— let us open ourselves to Him! ●

"At this time, we have 43 churches signed up for the 2019 Spirituality & Health Initiative," said Betty Cooney, SCC Health Ministry coordinator. "Our goal is for 50 congregations to be involved with year-round health ministry outreach for their communities. We believe we will reach that number, because pastors and Health Ministry directors know that area residents, many of whom are either uninsured or underinsured, are really wanting help with their health needs."

SCC's Health Response Steering Committee, a volunteer group that meets monthly, planned for the venture. Adventist Health-Glendale helped with grant writing, and a \$50,000 grant was secured from the Pacific Union Conference Endowment Fund.

According to SCC Vice President James

G. Lee, Jr., the administrator overseeing the project, "The committee's plan involves two principles: First, invite churches to participate in a year-long health ministry initiative that includes spirituality as an integral part of health ministry, and second, target the community with each program offered. Addressing community need is the initiative's first priority.

Churches have begun working on their one-year commitment. Salvador Garcia, pastor of the East L.A. and Glassell Park churches, has involved both churches in the initiative individually. "My churches are too far apart to combine in one initiative," he said. "They are excited to reach their respective communities and share the health message. We will also have someone take the online Wellness Course at wellchurches.org." ●

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REGION NEWS

L.A. Metro Region

"The Lord Jesus Christ claims **the use of your body, your whole being, your complete personality**, so that as you give yourself to Him through the eternal Spirit, He may give Himself to you through the eternal Spirit, **that all your activity as a human being on earth may be His activity in and through you; that every step you take, every**



All Nations members participate in a vision meeting. Photo provided by Kevin Solomon.

word you speak, everything you do, everything you are, may be an expression of Christ, in you as man. (emphasis added)" (Major Ian Thomas, *The Indwelling Life of Christ*, p. 151).

Many L.A. Metro Region churches have taken the above holistic philosophy of Christian being of "God in us" to propel them to greater creative thinking for evangelism.

Vallejo Drive church has launched an initiative called "taking Christ to the streets." Members are invited to come to church on Sabbath, in everyday attire, and "take Christ to the streets" in the afternoon following the worship service.

All Nations church is launching a five-year strategic plan that involves "situational analysis and diagnostics," by which the local community is ministered to through identified needs, utilizing the callings and gifts of church members. Through these identified



needs, God's Spirit will work through every member to daily "connect with the hearts" of people.

Ellen White says the following with regard to the above evangelism method in *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143: "There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen."

God invites us all to partner with His Holy Spirit on a daily basis so that His mission of salvation and justice might be carried out in our daily living.

by Gerard Kiemeny, Region Director