

southernconnect



Iki Taimi, Senior Youth & Young Adult Ministries Director

The Meaning of *Christmas*

It's that time of year again. Christmas lights colorfully warm the dark nights. Festive music blares from department store speakers with familiar jingles. Santa figures of all shapes and sizes on every corner solicit funds for the North Pole. Then, of course, there are all the pine trees, tacky sweaters, interesting family members, road rage, holiday expenses, seasonal weight gain, and the anxiety of buying gifts.

Oh the hustle and bustle of the season...*SIGH*. Christmas is exhausting! Before you call me a scrooge, I do love this season, if for nothing else, for the way we tend to be a little more caring toward each other (unless you find yourself in a Costco parking lot).

But let's be honest. The enterprise of Christmas is a stark contrast to the incarnational myths of the Christ Child. Jesus was not born into extravagant circumstances. There were no manger scenes in front of homes awaiting Him. No seasonal carolers melodiously announcing His soon arrival. No great gatherings of merry people drinking warm apple cider while bantering eloquently over the existential meaning of a baby Messiah subverting the status quo of our normative lives.

No. Just Jesus, swaddled with cloth, laying in an animal trough with the smell of fresh livestock wafting into the cool evening air. His parents displaced, with no proper housing. His mother Mary, all alone, no sisters or mother to help her through this painful and risky journey of childbirth. His father, Joseph, wrestling with the incredibly troubling idea that the firstborn is *not* his child. If that's not challenging enough, the

government will soon be searching for them. They will face a long journey to cross the borders of another country for safety. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, explodes onto the human scene as a fragile, vulnerable, whimpering baby who would be affiliated with poverty, displacement, and immigration — no wealth, power, or circle of influence.

Through it all, according to Luke, Mary just "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Her motherly instincts, amplified by her divine appointment, told her that in the broken, unsavory little animal feeder lay the most magnificent thing in the universe.

**"YOUR STORY MATTERS,
AND GOD HAS NOT
FORSAKEN YOU."**

I leave you with three humble challenges. The first is for the displaced, lonely, discouraged, poor, or marginalized. I challenge you to reread the nativity story. May the Advent season become an Advent hope for your life. May you see Jesus in your story! Your story matters, and God has not forsaken you. While some may look at you as if you are objectionable, remember that God sees something magnificent in you.

The second challenge is to those of us who are considered mainstream, normal, or privileged. May you be a forceful agent of God, drinking deeply from the well of our Savior's compassion. May those with a voice use it to speak for the voiceless. May those with privilege use it for the underprivileged. May those with power and influence use it to change the tide of segregation, hate, and exclusivism.

Finally, this Advent season, I pray we commit to one another. May we re-experience the Word becoming flesh to dwell among us, drawing us closer to each other and to the lives of those whose predicament resonates closest to that of our Savior. In so doing, this season, we will experience glad tidings and great joy for all mankind. ●

INSIDE



VBS in the Navajo Nation

International church reaches the Navajo community through VBS



"You Guys Are the Real Deal!"

GGCC builds relationships in the city of Gardena through service

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VBS Reaches Navajo Nation

BY CONNIE JEFFERY

A group of 13 children, ages 11 to 17, from SCC's International church of La Verne and Loma Linda Filipino Socio-economic Uplift, Literacy, Anthropological, and Developmental Services (SULADS) in SECC, went for their annual VBS outreach to the Navajo Nation in Page, Ariz., in July. "These children have been doing this program for three years and have established friendships with the Navajo kids," said Romeo Canales, pastor of the International church. "The purpose of this outreach is to befriend the American Indians and at the same time fulfill the great commission as fishers of men."

Every day, the team took the VBS van and visited the homes of Navajo

children. They were transported to and from the daily activities, and the schedule was divided into segments of learning. The Navajo children learned stories from the Bible during the story hour. At workshop time, they were taught to do crafts and write Bible texts. There was plenty of fun outdoor time playing games with the VBS team. During prayer time, the Navajo children were taught to pray—by themselves and by leading the congregation in prayer. The week included time spent gazing into the night sky to count the stars and by the bonfire singing and giving testimonies.

"The yearly outreach in the Navajo nation has been making a difference in the lives of our children," Canales



Photo provided by Romeo Canales.

said. "When they come home to their mother church, they also make a difference in the lives of the congregation with their testimonies." Some of the children have preached at the child-preaching Sabbath services at the International church of La Verne.

The children's experience in the Navajo Nation has challenged the International church children's ministry to encourage more children to go and share the joy of service to the Navajo kids every year. ●



Photos provided by Iki Taimi/Derrick Cruz.

This year, the Gardena Genesis Community Church (GGCC) participated in the City of Gardena's harvest festival for the fifth year in a row. Each year, the church has contributed in a different way, from offering

GGCC Is "the Real Deal"

BY LAUREN ARMSTRONG

medical services to free goodie bags and giveaways. This year was the first time that GGCC was in charge of running sound and emceeding for the entire event. This included providing a band for live music.

At this year's harvest festival, one man approached Pastor Iki Taimi with compliments about the music and was shocked to find out that GGCC's worship band was sacrificing their morning service at church to assist at the event and bless attendees. "I have never, ever heard of a church that would sacrifice their highest hour of worship, anywhere, for a bunch of strangers!" Taimi recalls him saying. As he was walking away, the man added, "You guys are the real deal!"

When it comes to this type of sacrificial love, actions speak louder than

words. This is why GGCC has invested so heavily in these relationships. "We have become Gardena City's go-to church for events," Taimi said. "We are invited to a majority of major events in the city just because they see value in our presence, and oftentimes, we will be a big part of the process. The city doesn't realize it, but the Adventist church is pastoring them through a good portion of the year."

GGCC Associate Pastor Derrick Cruz has been instrumental in his role as a community liaison, nurturing these relationships and connecting the church with the community. "His leadership has been such a big force for our church community," Taimi notes.

Community ministry is important because it's our purpose: We are here to take His message to the world! ●

in transition

TRANSFERS IN SCC

Voted August 23 and September 27, 2018

Joseph Benjamin Guerrero | From Pastor, Temple City church, to Associate Pastor, Vallejo Drive church, as of September 1, 2018.

Gustavo Cruz | From Pastor, Ebenezer and Silver Lake churches, to Pastor, Ebenezer and Mid City churches, as of October 16, 2018.

Sam Del Pozo | From Pastor, Culver City and Hawthorne churches, to Pastor, Glendora Spanish and Pomona Valley Spanish churches, as of October 16, 2018.

Arturo Escudero | From Pastor, Glendora Spanish and Pomona Valley Spanish churches, to Pastor, Carson Spanish church, as of October 1, 2018.

Giddell Garcia | From Pastor, Glassell Park and East L.A. Bilingual churches, to Pastor, Culver City Spanish and Hawthorne churches, as of October 16, 2018.

Salvador Garcia | From Pastor, Baldwin Park Bilingual church, to Pastor, Glassell Park and East L.A. Bilingual churches, as of October 1, 2018.

Yonny Jimenez | From Pastor, Carson Spanish and Mid City churches, to Pastor, Glendale Spanish church, as of October 1, 2018.

Claudiner Mockiuti | From Pastor, Paramount Spanish church, to Pastor, Baldwin Park Bilingual church, as of October 16, 2018.

Iki Taimi | From Pastor, Gardena Genesis Community church, to Pastor, Gardena Genesis Community church, and Director, SCC Senior Youth and Young Adult Ministries, as of September 2, 2018.

NEW EMPLOYEES

Voted August 23 and September 27, 2018

Rabel Ortiz | Departmental Assistant, SCC Education, as of July 2, 2018.

Lanston Sylvester | Pastor, Tamarind Avenue church, as of September 1, 2018.

ALIVE
a journey to health & hope
Southern California Conference Convocation 2017

Offering Report

Your offering helped with recovery efforts for Hurricane Maria that struck Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017 — three days before SCC's conference-wide Alive convocation at the Greek Theatre. We collected an offering that day for relief efforts for this disaster as well as Mexico's Puebla earthquake that hit on September 19, 2017. We collected more than \$8,800 for Puerto Rico and more than \$9,100 for Mexico. And donations are still coming in! The money sent has aided relief efforts, and we recently received a video report from the church in Puerto Rico about their use of the funds. Visit <https://scc.adventist.org/alive> to view the report!



The view from a helicopter over Toa Alta, a town outside San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Oct. 6, 2017. Andres Kudacki for TIME

<http://time.com/4980306/found-family-hurricane-maria-puerto-rico/>

SPOTLIGHT

Weaving a Tapestry of Prayer

Janet Lui, leader of SCC's Prayer, Spirituality, and Renewal Team, is laying plans to work more intentionally with all SCC Prayer Coordinators in 2019. "Our desire is weave a tapestry of prayer in SCC," Lui said. "Realizing we live in uncertain times, our HOPE is to return to Houses of Prayer Everywhere. Our greatest need today is the infilling of the Holy Spirit, who guides, transforms, and unifies converted individuals. This is a work of God and not man. Together, we can seek His face and grow into His image."

Two separate prayer requests were recently answered in a unique way. Earl Spangler, Canoga Park church member, was praying for more work for his telecommunications business. The following Monday, he received a call from a church in Los Angeles whose phones were down. Pastor Benjamin Del Pozo had been praying



that God would put him in touch with the best person to fix the phones at the White Memorial church. He was surprised to find that he called the only Adventist telecom company in Southern California. Another example of God's care and attention through a tapestry of prayer.

Lui's team prays by phone each Thursday. The first Thursday of the month, they meet face to face and are invited to pray with SCC AdCom. "We also provide spiritual retreat days for pastors," Lui said.

Every church in SCC is encouraged to appoint a prayer coordinator to attend a time of inspiration and training on January 27, 2019, at the Vallejo Drive church fellowship hall. For more info, text or call Janet Lui at 310-963-2578. To stay in touch, like and follow @SCCPrayer on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram! ●

REGION NEWS

Greater L.A. Region

Many wonderful, opportunities are on the horizon. Several evangelistic meetings concurrently are being held at several of our churches, and we are also excited about the possibility of a global outreach initiative. In October, I visited Mae Sot, Thailand, where Fedly Bonneau, Breath of Life church member, is as a volunteer missionary. GLAR hopes to collaborate with the Mae Sot Adventist church to help build a school and a health clinic and to organize practical ministries to combat growing health issues for those who are unable to receive basic medical attention.

Also, GLAR is preparing for the inaugural AJK (Anthony Jeremiah Kelly) Memorial Golf Tournament, a charity golf tournament to raise money for Christian education. The tournament

will be held at the Palos Verdes Golf Club on January 28, 2019.

We also welcome our newest pastors. To the Tamarind Avenue church, we welcome Dr. Lanston and Raquel Sylvester; and Pastor Trevor Stewart to the Smyrna church.

by *Royal L. Harrison, Region Director*

L.A. Metro Region

At West Covina Hills church, there is nothing more important than relationships! Under the leadership of Dr. Rogelio Paquini and Pastor Jillian Lutes, the focus has been on connecting people through Lifegroups. The groups meet during the week at various locations such as homes, the church, restaurants, and parks. Each group studies a lesson guide based on the current message series, followed by a need-based prayer session and a friendly meal. The last Lifegroup session had eight groups, ranging in size

from five to 25 people, with amazing results. Relationships have grown, and people are ministering to one other in moments of need. So far this year, Lifegroups have led to nine baptisms. Praise the Lord for His blessings!

by *Gerard Kiemeny, Region Director*

Asian-Pacific Region

In October, Daesung Kim, retired pastor and former Korean Union Conference president, held a Daniel & Revelation seminar at L.A. Central Korean church. Paul Soontae Kim, senior pastor, reports an outstanding response. Average attendance each night was 110-120, with 78 non-members attending. Pastor Paul Kim is following up with a weekly Bible study class, and Pastor Daesung Kim has many following up with Bible study on his website. God is truly blessing the L.A. Central Korean church.

by *Samuel Lee, Region Director*

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