

southernconnect



Velino A. Salazar,
President

A Purpose-Driven Conference

The early Christian church was a purpose-driven community of faith, especially the Jerusalem and Antioch congregations. As we read the book of Acts, we find key indicators describing the way of life of these new believers. They had frequent gatherings with genuine camaraderie, exciting fellowship, common potlucks, openhanded hospitality, intentional seasons of prayer, collective worship, transparent conversations, and accessibility that meant others could join if they wanted to (Acts 2).

We can encapsulate this lively atmosphere among these first Christians by saying they were “Embracing Community in Christ.” They did everything to honor their Savior, Jesus Christ, and benefit their immediate neighbors. And, because this was their motivation and goal, along with sharing their joy in encountering a Savior, many “realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NKJV).

This relational and spiritual dynamic among these new believers, with an unprecedented witnessing *modus vivendi*, created a domino effect on other towns and cities, and thousands accepted Jesus as the risen Savior. (See Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:12; 6:1, 7; 9:31, 42; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 14:1, 21.)

This ripple effect reached groups of people as never before, obviously creating challenges, obstacles, and

concerns for the growing Christian community. For some, distrust, resistance, and rejection were the immediate reactions. However, for others, these outcomes became opportunities, convenient moments, and favorable circumstances to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

However, the book of Acts (chapter 15) registers that representatives of other early church congregations got together in a council meeting at the Jerusalem church. This heterogeneous group of believers received missionary reports, faced mission challenges, reached a collective consensus, decided on a relevant solution, and sent representatives back to their communities after a heartfelt season of prayer.

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They focused on the essential elements of the new Christian faith. They became a healthy church—a purpose-driven community of believers whose mission was to expand the kingdom of heaven among their surrounding neighborhoods. They wanted to make a “community in Christ.”

This biblical picture has inspired the Southern California Conference leadership to look at and aspire for its church mem-

bership to reflect this way of life in our neighborhoods. And as a reminder, we have chosen this concept as our vision statement: “Embracing Community in Christ.”

As I look at the membership composition of our conference and the dynamic synergy of our local churches and schools, I see some similarities that can encourage us to pursue the model the early church had. Our diverse

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INSIDE



Ellis Flores Is Ordained

Flores shares his journey to pastoral ministry as his call is affirmed by ordination



Gustavo Mendez Is Ordained

Mendez reflects on God bringing him to ministry, celebrates ordination

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Ellis Flores Is Ordained

BY ARAYA MOSS

“I knew that God had called me to ministry when, after much searching and asking,” Pastor Ellis Flores said, “I heard God’s voice through the words of Ecclesiastes 11:1: ‘Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days’ (KJV).”

At the age of 19, Flores accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. Soon after, he contemplated how he could share the gospel with others. While reading Ecclesiastes one day, Flores was at first not sure what God was asking him to do. But through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, His message became clear: “Preach the Word.”

This pivotal moment in Flores’ life happened in late 2002 as he grappled with choosing between pursuing a career in education or answering

the divine call to ministry. Though he sought advice from elders, church leaders, and pastors whom he trusted, Flores knew he needed to hear from God Himself. The following year, by God’s direction, he enrolled in the religious studies program at La Sierra University. God’s call on Flores’ life was affirmed 20 years later at his ordination service last December.

During the ceremony, after receiving his new credential and certificate signifying his newly ordained status, Flores thanked the various influences throughout his journey: his family, spiritual mentors, and members from the previous congregations where he served. His wife, Patty, and sons, Ellis and Ethan, also gave special music during the program.



SCC President Velino A. Salazar offers the ordination prayer over Flores and his wife.

For years, Ecclesiastes 11 has remained influential in Ellis’ ministry. “Ministry can be really challenging and at times you can get discouraged if you don’t see that outcomes that we humans expect,” Flores shared. “The words of Ecclesiastes 11 are always a reminder that my only duty is to be faithful to the message and the preaching. God takes care of the rest.” ●

Gustavo Mendez Is Ordained

BY ARAYA MOSS

In a full-circle moment, Gustavo Mendez was ordained to the gospel ministry at the very church he began his ministry as a youth pastor 10 years prior.

Though Mendez recognized from a young age God’s call to ministry in his life, he still had doubts growing up. At 15 years old while at a youth camp, a near-tragic accident changed his perspective. While swimming in the river,

he began to drown but was saved by four young people. Mendez wondered to himself, “Why did God save me?” He understood this event as a response to his questions in childhood. That day, Mendez dedicated his life, his dreams, his plans—everything—to God’s service.

From Tabasco, Mexico, to Chicago, from Los Angeles to Andrews University and back to Los Angeles again, Mendez’s relationship and understanding of God continued to grow. He acknowledges how God has placed mentors and colleagues in his life to shape and mold him as well.

“My faith allowed me to believe that God had called me to serve Him far away from my homeland,” Mendez

recalled. “Like Abraham, I went forward by faith into a land unknown. I left home. As Abraham left his land with faith, knowing that God had called him and that God Himself would be with him, I humbly listened to God’s voice.”

Mendez was deeply moved and humbled by the overwhelming support at his ordination service last December. He knows God has called him to bring to the feet of Christ those who are suffering, who are in need, who are weeping, and who are alone in a dark world.

“The role of the pastor in our day is becoming more and more relevant,” Mendez said. “The pastor is called by God to lead His people to the promised land.” ●



SCC President Velino A. Salazar presents Mendez with his ordination certificate.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE YOUTH RUSH



Want to do something exciting this summer? Come join Youth Rush! We're currently looking for willing missionaries who want to serve others with us in the fields of Southern California, and we want YOU to be a part of the team!

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Discover how to share your faith • Become a missionary in your backyard
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Southern California Conference
of Seventh-day Adventists

WEEK OF SPIRITUAL ENCOURAGEMENT

to be one 

MARCH 9-16, 2024

Join us for a week of spiritual encouragement as we look at the biblical meaning of unity and learn together what it means to live in unity.

STREAMING NIGHTLY
7PM  

in transition

NEW EMPLOYEES

Voted December 14, 2023

Enoc Calderon | Pastor, La Voz Spanish church, as of November 16, 2023.

RoAnn Corrales | Departmental Assistant, SCC Office, Asset and Risk Management, as of December 11, 2023.

TRANSFERS WITHIN SCC

Voted November 9, 2023

Jose Manuel Toledo | From APC, El Rio Spanish church, to Pastor, Panamericana Spanish church, as of March 1, 2024.



66th Constituency Session

September 29, 2024
White Memorial church



2024sccsession.org

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demographic population, culture, and views and perspectives are some factors that allow us the opportunity to practice what the early church did and become a heterogeneous, harmonious church.

In seven months, on Sunday, Sept. 29, 2024, with the theme “Embracing Community in Christ,” about 900 delegates from our churches and schools will convene at the 66th SCC Constituency Session to receive missionary reports and discuss mission challenges of our territory.

Let’s aim and plan for this day to follow the early church model. Let’s plan to reach a collective consensus, decide on relevant solutions, and return as Christ’s ambassadors to our communities after a heartfelt season of prayer.

May God help us make this a reality in close and wide circles. ●

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Submit a story
Email us at:
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Seventh-day Adventists**

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REGION NEWS

Asian-Pacific Region

In 2023, the Asian-Pacific Region established five unique zones for its churches. These zones connect churches located close to one another to foster growth and collaboration. Visit scc.adventist.org/asian-pacific-region-zones to learn more.

Looking forward through fall 2024, the zones have begun strategic work to support the region’s upcoming evangelistic effort. Leadership Connect events, Christmas Family Fairs, and youth gatherings all have been preparing the regions for parenting seminars and evangelistic meetings in each zone this year.

Follow the region on Facebook [@sccasianpacificregion](https://www.facebook.com/sccasianpacificregion) to stay connected with the latest happenings.

TOP: Attendees are pictured here at the Christmas Family Fair event at the United Filipino group campus in Baldwin Park. Four San Gabriel Valley zone events brought together 200 families.

BOTTOM LEFT: Vinh Nguyen, Asian/Pacific Region director, is pictured speaking at a Leadership Connect event in November 2023 with 60+ leaders in attendance. Leadership Connect events bring together lay leaders from each church by zone, allowing for meaningful networking and practical learning.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The L.A. Eastside Korean church Christmas Family Fair had games, food, and fun activities for the whole family. This event brings communities together in a unique way, as churches from throughout the zone participated at each location.



PHOTOS: ASIAN/PACIFIC REGION FACEBOOK PAGE

