



IN THIS  
EDITION



San Diego Tierrasanta  
Church's Long-lasting  
Relationship with  
Domestic Violence Shelter



HeartChild  
Ministries  
Changes  
Lives

# Conference PRIORITIES

## Leaning on God this Year

**W**e are several weeks into the new year of 2021. What hopes, dreams, and intentions we had for this past year! The fog of 2020 was heavy; it left us exhausted with constant life stresses, difficult ministry environments, and so much loss of anything that was familiar and normal in our lives. We grieved losses of loved ones and celebrated new heroes in our frontline workers, our digital natives, and our volunteers who tirelessly served. We hope for a better year; yet still, the fog lingers and there is so much uncertainty ahead.

Visioning and planning sessions in our churches, schools, and conference office are filled with ideas that are all subject to the circumstances this year will hand us. We learned in 2020 the need to be flexible, adaptable, and innovative. We saw God work, we felt God's comfort as we grieved losses, we kept our eyes on Him as

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"

(Isaiah 41:10, NIV).

we sought answers on how to best move forward with our mission and ministry. This past year was a walk of faith—day by day, paying attention to the movement of God, making difficult decisions, and trusting that God was with us.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Christ the Redeemer statue on Mount Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during a pre-mission trip. As we drove through the city with our host, it was a magnificent sight to see the statue

hovering over the landscape. Standing 98 feet tall with a span of 92 feet between the outstretched hands, this was one of the must-see sights in the country. We climbed up all 220 steps, and as we ascended, I kept looking up, mesmerized by the beauty of the monument. As we got closer to the top,

*Continued  
on page 3*



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In December of 2019, members of the San Diego Tierrasanta church organize the gifts for the mothers and children who are staying at the domestic violence shelter.

## San Diego Tierrasanta Church's Long-lasting Relationship with Domestic Violence Shelter

By Tricia Murdoch Zmaj

For 30 years, the San Diego Tierrasanta church has been ministering to the South Bay Community Services Domestic Violence Shelter. Church members Carol Fredricksen and her daughter, Shan Corrigan, began this ministry and have continued to be hands-on organizers through the years.



Carol Fredrickson and her daughter, Shan Corrigan, are church members at the San Diego Tierrasanta church. They started the ministry between the church and the South Bay Community Services Domestic Violence Shelter.

Fredricksen was inspired to start the program from personal experience. She is 94 years old today, but she still feels the scars of living in an abusive home as the youngest of three girls. Her daughter explained, "My mother's father was an alcoholic who would become verbally and physically assaultive to my grandmother." After Fredricksen's mother bravely left the abusive situation, she raised her three little girls as a single mother in the middle of the Great Depression.

In 1990, Fredricksen and Corrigan reached out to the Domestic Violence Shelter through South Bay Community Services, and, 30 years later, they are still true to this ministry that honors their mother and grandmother. "We have had anywhere from 35 to 72 mothers and children in the shelter at any one time throughout the years," Corrigan said. "And occasionally we have a father or two who will leave a physically abusive situation."

Each December, Tierrasanta church members bring wrapped gifts for the mothers and children to display under a Christmas tree at the front of the church. According to Gary McCary, pastor of the church, the response from the congregation is always enthusiastic. "There are years that there are so many presents up front that I can barely fit on the stage to give the sermon," McCary said. "Our church

members are always looking for avenues to give."

This Christmas, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the church provided the mothers and children with generous gift cards to Walmart and Target. With donations from the church congregation, Fredricksen and Corrigan purchased large food baskets for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners through Costco for the celebratory meals.

Corrigan emphasizes that the church continues to serve the needs of the shelter after the holidays are over. "The church provides back-to-school clothing, shoes, and socks for the children in the fall and new shoes and socks again in the spring," Corrigan said. "We have purchased cribs, playpens, pots and pans, bathroom towels, rugs, shower curtains, and bed linens." Additional treats include a one-pound box of See's candy for all of the mothers in the domestic violence shelter program every Mothers' Day. "We have purchased as many as 70 pounds of See's candy," said Corrigan. "We buy whatever the need calls for."

Fredricksen and Corrigan feel blessed to have been a part of this ministry for the last 30 years. "The needs are ongoing," Corrigan shared. "We love that 100% of gifts, offerings, and donations go straight to the people living in the shelter."

## Virtual Hispanic Men's Retreat a Success

By Tricia Murdoch Zmaj



Marvin Eduardo sings for the Sabbath afternoon concert during the virtual Hispanic men's ministry retreat.

SECC's Hispanic ministries department hosted a virtual men's retreat from November 20-22. According to Yohalmo Saravia, vice president for Hispanic ministries, the department hopes to connect people and transform lives, and these retreats serve a vital purpose in advancing this goal.

The Hispanic men's retreat is a popular tradition and, according to Valencio Robinson, coordinator for Hispanic men's ministries, prior to this event there have been 13 retreats held at Pine Springs



Gabriel Velazquez, pastor in the Baja California Conference, which is in northern Mexico, is one of the main presenters during the virtual Hispanic men's ministry retreat.

Ranch. These retreats are always well attended and usually attract between 350-400 members from churches within the conference and a few from outside SECC's territory.

This year, organizers were challenged due to the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. As the normally in-person event was not able to happen in its traditional format, Robinson and his team chose to hold a virtual event. The presentations were streamed on Facebook and YouTube. Changing to a virtual event had immediate benefits, as it brought together over 2,900 attendees who joined from across the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America.

The title of this year's retreat was "Un Varón Conforme a Su Corazón," translated into English as "A Man After His Heart." The title was inspired by 1 Samuel 13:14: "The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart." During the weekend, various presenters spoke on topics such as maturity, purity, and

self-esteem. According to Robinson, "The overarching mission of this retreat was to challenge men to mold their lives after the heart of God."

The weekend also included a health feature. Organizers invited Jose Loredo, M.D., to join, and he educated participants about COVID-19. After his presentation, he answered questions about the pandemic, how to stay safe and healthy, and other topics focused on health.

Since this event was virtual, it allowed organizers to invite presenters and musicians to participate from their homes. For example, Gabriel Velazquez, pastor in the Baja California Conference, which is in northern Mexico, was one of the main presenters during the men's retreat.

According to Saravia, "Even when the social distancing restrictions are lifted in the future, we will continue to plan some virtual events. We have seen how successful this new format can be, and through it we can continue to expand the kingdom of God."

**Continued from page 1** clouds rolled in quickly and the statue suddenly disappeared. There were occasional small breaks in the clouds that gave us a quick glimpse of a hand, the head, a part of the garment. In the fog of the clouds, we weren't able to see the entire statue from the base we had climbed up to, but we got partial glimpses.

I am reminded of that experience as I reflect on 2020. The clouds were thick and turbulent. The fog was real. But we also knew that God, our Rock, was there, as

steadfast in His love, mercy, and grace as ever, with arms outstretched, continuing to welcome us into those scarred hands.

2021 will be another year of trusting that He is still present.

We plan as a conference. We continue to work on next action steps from our strategic plan, *A Compass of Our Future*, and will set priorities for Engage, Evangelize, Educate, and Equip. We continue the dialogues that lead to action towards racial justice and equality, impact on our communities, and offering hope

to all people. We continue to focus on expanding the kingdom of God. This is not easy work, especially in the fog of uncertainty, when plans need to adapt and change on a moment's notice. This is not easy work, as we have limitations on gatherings and as we seek to care for each other and our communities in love. But it continues to be OUR work.

We continue to do this sacred work as we lean into and gaze upon our Savior, while we trust Him day by day throughout the new year.

# Called to Adopt

By Suzanne Ocsai

**F**or Mueni Mutinga and her husband, Chweya Masongo, adoption had always been in the back of their minds. But it wasn't until about 10 years into their marriage that they began to pray for a sign that this was the path God would have them take. One Sabbath, the couple decided to visit the Mt. Rubidoux church, and as they walked into the lobby, they saw a literal sign with the word *Adoption* written across the top. Mutinga remembers being brought to tears as she sat through the church service on the same topic put on by the church's HeartChild ministry. She knew in that moment they were meant to adopt.

The ministry was founded by adoptive mom Nicole Bailey a few years earlier. Bailey had watched a local program about adoption and seen a little girl crying while begging for a home for her brother and herself.

"It really hit me hard," said Bailey. "No child should have to beg for somewhere to live."

Remembering the directive in James 1:27 to care for orphans and widows, Bailey was convicted by God to do exactly that: care for orphans in her community by becoming an adoptive parent. She began the process to adopt her first child, and it



*Mueni Mutinga and Chweya Masongo share a happy moment with their son, Michael, shortly after they adopted him.*

wasn't long before she was the mother of a beautiful baby girl. Bailey didn't have any intentions to start a ministry until she was invited to share her story with the church one Sabbath. At the end of the service, she found a line of members waiting to talk with her. It wasn't long until HeartChild was formed in 2012.

Since then, the ministry has been a beacon of support for those adopting and thinking of adopting—and those who might have never thought about it before but are willing to reach out and care for children in need of safe and loving homes. Through support groups and church programs like the one Mutinga and Masongo attended, the church hopes to continue inspiring individuals and families to adopt.

"We have the specific goal of increasing the numbers of Black families who are open to adoption, to help mitigate the disproportionate numbers of

African-American children who are in the foster care system," said Tamari Jenkins, director of HeartChild.

During National Adoption month on November 21, HeartChild hosted an online program with

"It really hit me hard. No child should have to beg for somewhere to live."

motivational speaker Les Brown as the guest of honor. Brown shared the story of his own adoption and answered questions from the viewers.

"The suicide rate among young children between the ages of five and 11 has soared over 70 percent. They need love and caring," said Brown during his talk. "As much as you've chosen to be here, you were chosen by God to do the greater work. You have something special. You have greatness in you. I hope you'll open your heart and make the choice [to adopt]."



*Les Brown, motivational speaker, shares his adoption story with attendees during the November 21 HeartChild event.*

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