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# Conference

## PRIORITIES

## Transformation through Conflict By Jonathan Park

**A**s we, the pastors and members of the Southeastern California Conference (SECC), strive to live out our mission “to expand God’s kingdom,” sometimes conflict arises. Often, conflict brings with it discouragement, fear, and anxiety. The word for *conflict* in Chinese 危机 and Korean 위기 means *crisis and opportunity*. Thus, conflict can become an opportunity. It is a normal and inevitable part of relationships. There was even conflict in heaven! When it is handled correctly, conflict can renew the vision and mission of the church and help our congregations become healthier and more focused.

It is unrealistic to believe you can resolve all conflicts, so I hesitate to call it *conflict resolution*. Some prefer *conflict management*, but it seems to be passive to merely manage the conflict. I would prefer to be transformed by it. *Conflict transformation* provides an opportunity to address conflicts in such a way that it glorifies God and helps us to be transformed to do God’s will by experiencing forgiveness, collaboration, and synergic growth.

We want to experience this kind of conflict transformation in our conference. As a result, the conference administration and the ministerial department attended



*SECC officers come together for mediation training in Chicago.*

the Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders sponsored by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center near Chicago, Illinois. We had the opportunity to learn about conflict and mediation. I was impressed with our team as we learned new ways to listen and move toward win-win solutions.

We also had the opportunity to interact with pastors in other denominations. Many of them were lonely and had to address conflicts and difficulties in their churches alone. I am very grateful for our Adventist structure, where the conference can mentor pastors, mediate differences, provide needed resources, and journey with churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

“Attending this seminar removed much of the ‘fear factor’ of having to deal with church conflict. The group learned that a certain amount of disagreement in churches is to be expected, and

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LEFT: Camp staff signs “I love you” with Strait (seated second from right). ABOVE: Shakira (center) and Nicolette Reynoso, Deaf girls’ counselor, (left) converse during art class.

# First Deaf Youth Camp

Held at Sunset Lake

By Esther Doss

**D**arrell Strait, a member of the Arlington church in Riverside, was recently part of a historic event at Sunset Lake Camp in Washington Conference this summer. For the first week of the summer camp season, Deaf youth camp was held at the same time as the young adventure week. This was the first time that Sunset Lake had a week of camp for Deaf youth.

Strait’s wife is Deaf, and he worked as an American Sign Language interpreter for many years before retiring. His expertise and fantastic ability to interact with youth made him an essential part of the specialized staff for this Deaf youth camp.

Strait didn’t just interpret the evening programs. He also facilitated communication during activities. When a Deaf camper was in her BMX class, Strait was found on a bike riding the BMX tracks around camp with the group in case an interpreter might be needed.

Shakira, one of the Deaf campers, loved her first-ever camp experience. She loved the activities, made new friends, and grew closer to Jesus. Shakira shared a cabin

with girls who could hear and who did not know how to sign. She was worried about how awkward the whole week would be. But sweet friendships were forged as the young girls loved Shakira and learned how to communicate with her.

Deaf ministry and outreach have a lot of challenges that are unique to the Deaf community. One of those challenges is simply communication access. How difficult it would be for a Deaf child to attend a summer camp without being able to communicate with anyone! How

would camp staff share Jesus to a person who relies on sign language?

There are many Deaf youth who have no idea about God, let alone the plan of salvation and Jesus’ soon return. We must reach out to the Deaf youth in some way, and summer camp is one way to make a difference.

The Deaf staff are excited about returning to Sunset Lake next year, and so is Shakira! The 2023 summer camp will be held July 2-9, 2023, for campers ages 10-15. For more information, please email [camp4deafyouth@gmail.com](mailto:camp4deafyouth@gmail.com).

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that to help churches find mutually beneficial solutions to their problems is an opportunity for greater church health and growth afterward,” said Mark Tatum, the newly appointed assistant to the president.

This training was eye-opening and enlightening for us. It equipped us

to better handle conflicts that may come up in our congregations as they continue to grow and expand. SECC is committed to providing annual workshops on conflict transformation for our pastors and churches, so we are all better equipped to problem-solve and to take the opportunity to refocus, renew, and revitalize our churches.



LEFT: Yucaipa Spanish Church baptismal candidates profess their faith with Hispanic Conference Evangelist Pedro Rascón. BELOW: Mario Pérez, SECC's first vice president for Hispanic Ministries, smiles with wife Martha.

## SECC Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

By Yohalmo Saravia

National Hispanic Heritage Month is annually celebrated from September 15 to October 15 in the United States to recognize the contributions and influence of Hispanic Americans in the United States. The Southeastern California Conference (SECC) celebrates with almost 14,500 Hispanic members in its territory.

This celebration began in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week, under the administration of President Lyndon Johnson. Twenty years later, President Ronald Reagan expanded the celebration to 30 days beginning on September 15 through October 15. Since then, each year Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month by celebrating the history, culture, and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

The Adventist Hispanic work began in the Pacific Union back in 1899. In SECC, R.B. Stauffer led an evangelistic effort in National City that resulted in 14 Spanish-speaking families accepting the Adventist message in 1923. This became the first Hispanic church in SECC. These families had a collective total of 40 children, making the need for Adventist education

quickly apparent. The need was eventually met, though not swiftly. In 1929, Julia Benavides, mother of former SECC pastor Eliezer Benavides, became one of the first women Bible instructors in SECC and was instrumental in the establishment of the Hispanic work in San Diego.

In 1938, with the encouragement of T.E. Bartholomew and Henry Forcher, SECC established the Calexico Mission School near the Mexican border. It still operates and serves around 200 students, most of whom are not Adventists.

An evangelistic highpoint came when Joe Espinosa was appointed Hispanic evangelist for SECC in 1962. During his five years in that role, he conducted several major evangelistic efforts in connection with at least eight Spanish congregations throughout the conference. In 1964, for eight months, Espinosa had a half-hour television broadcast on a Mexican station in Tijuana that aired each Saturday night after the bullfight in Mexico City. In 1970, SECC appointed its first Hispanic coordinator, Manuel Nestares. By the end of the 20th century, the conference had 35 Spanish-speaking churches.

With immigration increasing the diversity of the population in its territory, the "minority" membership of SECC



constituted more than one-third of the total membership. As a result, SECC added vice presidents for ethnic ministries to its administrative structure. Although there were Hispanic coordinators that preceded him, Mario Pérez was voted in as the first vice president for Hispanic Ministries in SECC in 1992.

Today in 2022, the Hispanic Adventist work in the North American Division (NAD) keeps growing. The NAD reports a total of 1,424 Hispanic churches and companies, 235,800 members, and a total of 623 full-time pastors. Through the continued work and faithfulness of the Hispanic pastors, evangelists, and members in this conference, the work continues to grow in SECC also. To God be the glory!

# How To Love Your Pastor

By Jon Ciccarelli and Will Penick

There are many articles written on how to love your spouse, child(ren), neighbor, or even your enemy, but few tell how to love your pastor. Yes, pastors need love too. Pastors preach about loving others, but since you probably will never hear a pastor preach a sermon on how to love your pastor, this article will do so.

"I believe Adventist pastors are the loneliest people in the Adventist Church," states an Adventist pastor who has pastored for more than six decades. His statement is probably not that far from reality for many pastors. While pastors are very active in loving church members and those in the community, it is essential for our pastors to experience our love and appreciation for them too.

One way to show love to pastors is to pray for them every day. The devil, who roams around like a lion seeking who he can devour (1 Peter 5:8), has it out for pastors. Pastors need members who are devoted to daily intercessory prayer for them. Take the time to communicate that you are praying for your pastor through a text message, email, phone call, handwritten note, and in person. Choose a different way of reminding your pastor of your prayers each month.

Another way is to share a little gift with your pastor a few times a year that will communicate your love. This can be a simple inexpensive gift card for something, like a sandwich, or an online store, like Amazon.



Steve McHan, Michael Mupfawa, and Will Penick enjoy "A Day Away With Jesus."

One more way to express your love is to offer an act of service, such as washing their car. Plan a little surprise with other church members that communicates your love and care for your pastor. It is important for our pastors to know they are loved. The more creative you are, the more fun and meaningful it can be!

In the ministerial department, we are committed to supporting and appreciating pastors. Over the past year, we have created several spaces for pastors in the

Southeastern California Conference to feel appreciated, to connect with colleagues, and to get rejuvenated. Once a quarter, we hold "A Day Away With Jesus," where we spend a half-day in nature, Scripture, and prayer. We also have optional fun outings once per quarter. At our last outing, we took pastors paddleboarding in Coronado, California. Around 50 pastors and family members were able to attend. These are just a few small ways we are encouraging and loving our pastors in ministry.

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The Sandres family enjoys Pastor Fun Day at the beach.

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