

CONFERENCE

Connections

Christmas is Coming

It's hard to believe we have come to the end of another year. I am overcome with gratitude as I look back on all that God has done for Southeastern California Conference (SECC) in the last 12 months. We have seen God's faithfulness and guidance in our churches and schools. We saw the Holy Spirit move with love and unity as we connected for our constituency session.

I am still humbled that the constituents of this conference have seen fit to vote the current officers to lead SECC for the next five years. God has truly blessed me to have the opportunity to do ministry with amazing officers and department leaders. Although we are called administrators of the conference, I know that we will serve as pastors and partners of educators to fulfill the great mission that God has called SECC to live out. Please continue to pray for us. Without your prayers, we may simply be doing our job; however, with your prayers, we are ministering to people with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Since October, the world has been getting ready for Christmas. Decorations, entertainment, and sales dominate the world's celebration.

But for Adventist Christians, Christmas should mean much more. It is a time when we remember and celebrate heaven's greatest gift, Jesus Christ. He came to the earth to save us from our sin and to demonstrate the Father's



great love for us. As His disciples, we are to share that great love with all those we meet.

Ellen White said, "Christmas is coming. May you all have wisdom to make it a precious season. Let the older church members unite, heart and soul, with their children in their innocent amusement and recreation, in devising ways and means to show true respect to Jesus by bringing to him gifts and offerings. Let every one remember the claims of God. His cause cannot go forward without your aid. Let the gifts you have usually bestowed upon one another be placed in the Lord's treasury" (*The Review and Herald*, Dec. 9, 1884).

It is my prayer that as we close this year, we do so in unity, love, and generosity. I want families to come together, churches to come together, old and young alike, and share the stories of how God has blessed us this year.

I also pray that in your gift giving you would remember the cause of Christ. We appreciate the generosity and faithfulness you have shown in your tithes and offerings. As you continue to partner with us and your local church, together we will continue to do great things for the cause of Christ—because not only is Christmas coming but Christ is coming soon also!

By Jonathan Park



Jonathan Park
SECC President



LEFT: Adrian hugs Mondak after his baptism. **ABOVE:** Adrian (fifth from right) stands with other baptismal candidates and staff.

From Troubled to Transformed

“It is my honor and utmost privilege to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” said Alexy Mondak, assistant summer camp director for Pine Springs Ranch (PSR). She was talking to her nephew, Adrian Duarte. Overcome with emotion, she found it hard to believe what God had done in one short summer.

Adrian grew up in church and went almost every Saturday. When the pandemic hit, he stopped attending church and began drifting away from God. Soon, Adrian's life began to spiral downward. Problems with friends and relationships popped up. It didn't help that he began smoking and drinking. He was a good young man, but his poor choices complicated his life. He did, however, make a choice this summer that would change his life forever.

Mondak offered him an opportunity to work at PSR. He must have felt God moving in the invitation because as he prepared to leave home, he warned his friends that he might not be the same when he came back from camp. He had no idea how true that statement would be.

From the time he got to PSR, things began changing for him.

“I would pray to God every day. If any inconvenience ever happened, I would just turn to God and let Him take control,” said Adrian.

One of his family members became sick; he

prayed fervently for them and miraculously they were healed. “He answered my prayers, so I had the mindset that He's always going to be there for me, no matter what, through thick or thin,” recalled Adrian.

There were so many things at PSR that God used to minister to Adrian. Before long, he wanted to give his life completely to Christ. He admits that when he was going to church before, it was because his grandmother made him go. But he was now coming into his own relationship with Christ and felt the call to go all the way with baptism.

As Adrian was baptized, “This is How I Thank the Lord” played in the background:

All of my deceptions
All of my duplicity
Now there is no record
You assume the best of me.

It was such a fitting song. God not only saw the best in Adrian but also brought out the best in him. When Adrian went home, his friends were able to see a difference. He is back in church, reading his Bible, and growing in God's grace.

“After camp, he was so different. I started to hear him laugh again. He became more social, and we rebuilt our relationship,” said Mondak. “God working through camp really does change people and I was blessed to see that change in my nephew.”

By Andrea King



The lobby is being prepared for its new upgrades.



This guest room is empty to make room for new furniture and air conditioning.

Partner with Pine Springs Ranch

This summer at camp, we saw 32 people get baptized at Pine Springs Ranch (PSR). However, the ministry of PSR is not confined to what happens during summer camp. As part of the staff that gets to live and serve here year-round, I am keenly aware of the privilege we have of revealing God's love to all who enter through the gates of our camp.

We get to provide a glimpse of heaven in a beautiful mountain setting, and we get to testify through our hospitality of the love and hope we have in Jesus. It is no wonder that we have been told by people of various religious backgrounds and life experiences that there is something special about this place. They feel completely at peace and soothed just by being here. We, of course, know that what they're experiencing is the presence of God.

This is why we feel that the Lodge Lift Campaign to renovate our lodge is so important. We have begun the work, and we hope you will help us complete it. Having an updated lodge will provide accommodations with improved amenities that will enhance our guests' retreat experience.

We are grateful for partnering together with you in this wonderful ministry. Please give this Christmas season to help us continue our renovations. Your financial support and continued prayers are what keeps transforming the lives of those who come to Pine Springs Ranch. You can give at LodgeLift.com, through Adventist Giving, or through your church's giving envelope.

By Carmen Ibáñez



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The Perfect Gift



Sabrina was in a real pickle. Not literally, of course, but she was stumped. She had no idea what to get her dad for Christmas this year! The problem was, she had used up all her good ideas. She had gotten him socks and a baseball cap from his favorite team. And last year, she had enough money to buy him a fancy coffee mug with his name on it. This year, however, it felt like anything she thought of was too expensive or not good enough. It had to be perfect!

But Christmas was only a few days away. Sabrina was out of time. So, she went to the crafts store with her mom and bought some materials. Paper, stickers, paint, glitter—the essentials! Back at home, she found a picture of her dad and herself when she was a baby. A few hours later, Sabrina had crafted a sparkly, colorful picture frame with the picture right in the center. It wasn't much, but it would have to do.

On Christmas day, Sabrina was nervous as her dad opened the present. "Oh, my goodness!" her dad exclaimed. "This is the best present ever!"

"Really?!" Sabrina asked. "Even better than your fancy coffee mug?"

"One hundred times better," her dad replied. "This one was made with your love and care. I'm going to treasure it forever."

Her dad gave her the tightest, warmest hug. Sabrina realized giving gifts wasn't about how fancy the gift was, but how it came from the heart.

By Megan Jacobs

Spot the Difference

Can you spot the ten differences in these two Christmas photos?



Answers: 1. Extra present by the tree, 2. Shirt on the boy on the right is blue, 3. Snowman doesn't have legs, 4. Girl with glasses now has two ponytails, 5. Boy on sled no longer wearing scarf, 6. Third red ribbon added to Christmas tree, 7. Bird on left facing the other way, 8. Cat has a red collar, 9. Added ornaments to Christmas tree, 10. Snowman's carrot nose is smaller.