

# CONFERENCE

## Connections

## The Blessing of Interim Pastors in SECC

**For many years, the Southeastern California Conference (SECC) has been blessed by the wisdom and ongoing dedication of numerous retired pastors.** These faithful servants, after decades of shepherding congregations, often accept the call to serve once again as interim pastors—veterans of ministry who willingly return to the field in times of need.

### Guiding churches through transition

When a church enters an “in-between” season—after one pastor departs and before a new one arrives—an interim pastor often steps in. These assignments may last anywhere from a few months to over a year. During this time, the stability, integrity, and spiritual leadership of an interim pastor play a crucial role in maintaining a church's health.

These interim pastors bring wisdom, experience, and efficiency because of their many years of pastoral experience. Whether chairing board meetings, counseling individuals and couples, or mentoring elders' teams, they offer steady, seasoned leadership to congregations navigating transition.

### Why interim pastors matter

The placement of an interim pastor ensures ongoing membership care and stability while the church awaits its next pastor or completes a careful search process. Their presence removes the pressure to rush, helping churches avoid hasty or compromised decisions.

Many congregations, initially

uncertain about welcoming an interim pastor, quickly discover their capability, professionalism, and love. In fact, interim pastors often become so cherished that church members hesitate to let them go when the time comes to welcome a new permanent pastor.

### Mutual growth and gratitude

Interim seasons are not just placeholders; they are opportunities. Churches often use this time to reflect deeply: “Who are we as a church? What kind of congregation do we hope to become?” Interim pastors skillfully guide boards and members through this process of self-assessment and visioning for the future.

The result is a mutual sense of fulfillment. Churches express deep gratitude for the service of their interim pastors, while the pastors themselves find great satisfaction in helping congregations prepare for their next chapter. When a new pastor is installed, interim pastors rejoice to see the church continue to grow and thrive, knowing they helped provide the stability and space for a healthy transition.

### Our interim pastors today

We are especially grateful to the 14 pastors who have faithfully served, or are currently serving, in interim ministry across SECC congregations. Their ongoing service reflects the truth that God is never finished with His servants. Through their dedication, both churches and pastors are blessed, and the work of God continues with strength.

Thank you, pastors, for your faithfulness!

*By Jonathan Park*



**Jonathan Park**  
SECC President



ABOVE: Vitug, LLFC senior pastor, encourages all the participants before the race begins.



RIGHT: All participants from the LLFC Run-Walk after finishing their race.

## LLFC Health Ministries Hosts First 5K Run-Walk for Fun

On a bright and breezy Sunday morning, the Loma Linda Filipino Church (LLFC) held its first-ever 5K Run-Walk for Fun—an event filled with energy, encouragement, and movement for all ages.

Hundreds of participants from the Inland Empire and surrounding communities gathered at Bryn Mawr Veterans Memorial Park to walk or run the 3.1-mile route along San Timoteo Wash. Children, parents, and seniors laced up together in a show of shared commitment to health and fellowship.

“This 5K is more than just a race,” said Rominic Ellazar, race director and co-organizer. “It’s about bringing our community together to celebrate healthy lifestyles and personal achievement.”

The event was inspired by the LLFC Walking Club’s quarterly three-mile walkathons, which resumed in August 2023 after a pandemic pause. The club has since maintained a steady rhythm of Sunday morning walks, encouraging members to get outside and stay active.

“We’re thrilled to see so many people support each other and push their limits,” said Sherwin Gagatam, physical therapist and co-organizer.

Organized by LLFC’s Health Ministries, the event also featured booths offering free health screenings, wellness resources, and fitness gear from local sponsors. Volunteers from the church, Pathfinders, and health department worked together to bring the day to life.

Among the runners was Magdalena Astrero, 79, who completed her first-ever 5K alongside her son, Allan. “It’s my first time running a 5K, and I loved every moment,” she said. “The energy was amazing! I thank God for keeping me healthy. I still can’t believe I finished the race. Praise God!”

All proceeds will support future LLFC health initiatives. The next 5K is already set for October 12, 2025.

“We’re grateful for everyone who walked, ran, volunteered, or prayed,” said Marifel Sigue, event coordinator. “This was a blessing from start to finish.”

To learn more about the next 5K in October, visit llfc.org or contact the Health Ministries team at LLFC.

By Danni Thaw



LEFT: The event coordinators and organizers (from left to right): Sherwin Gagatam, Dr. Gina Siapco, Marifel Sigue, and Rominic Ellazar.



FAR LEFT: Several families line up for food.

LEFT: Sharing smiles over a delicious taco dinner.

## Pastor & Family Summer Bash 2025

On August 3, the Ministerial Department of the Southeastern California Conference hosted a vibrant and joy-filled gathering for ministry families—the Pastors Connect Family Summer Bash.

Held on a warm summer evening, the event welcomed 120 participants from across the conference for a night of fun, food, and fellowship.

From the moment families arrived, the atmosphere buzzed with laughter and energy. Children raced to the water slides, cooled off in friendly splashes, and tested their skills in laser tag with their families. The rock-climbing wall became a hub of excitement as both kids and adults challenged themselves to reach new heights, while face painting booths brought colorful creativity to life.

A highlight of the evening was the appearance of Wild Man Dan, who captivated everyone with his live reptiles. His engaging presentation not only entertained but also educated people about the fascinating creatures he brought. Squeals of excitement (and a few nervous giggles) could be heard as children, and some brave adults, got up close to the snakes and lizards.

To beat the summer heat, families lined up for Kona Ice, savoring refreshing shaved ice in a rainbow of flavors. Delicious food stations provided plenty of options to enjoy a picnic-style dinner on the lawn, where groups gathered under the fading sunset to share stories and the simple joy of being together.

The Summer Bash created a meaningful opportunity for ministry families to pause from their busy schedules, reconnect with one another, and strengthen the bonds that sustain their shared calling. For pastors and their loved ones, it was a reminder that rest, play, and community are vital parts of a healthy ministry life. Special thanks go to the Ministerial Department for thoughtfully planning and hosting this memorable event. By bringing families together in a joyful setting, they fostered connection, shared mission, and gave encouragement to carry these leaders through the upcoming months.

By Jordyn Wright



Pastor Gustavo Mendez helps his daughter grab their Kona Ice.



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# kids konnect

## The Treasure on the Mountain



In a quiet village lived Eli. One morning, his grandmother gave him an old map she had hidden away. "It leads to a treasure at the top of Mount Promise," she said, "but only those who listen and obey will find it."

Eli set off, following the map. A sign on the trail read, "Rule #1: Stay on the path." Tempted by a shortcut he saw, he chose to obey the rule and stayed on course. Soon, he found a puppy tangled in thorns beside a second sign: "Rule #2: Help others." He freed the puppy and let it follow him.

The climb grew steep, and Eli wanted to quit—until a third sign appeared: "Rule #3: Don't give up." With determination, he reached the top.

Instead of gold, Eli found a scroll inside a wooden engraved chest. Unrolling it, he saw the Ten Commandments written in beautiful script—a faithful copy made long ago. The engraving read, "These are My rules, written so they would never be lost. Follow them, and you'll find the greatest treasure."

Eli returned home with a new heart, realizing the greatest treasure wasn't riches but living God's way—with love, kindness, and courage.

By Jordyn Wright

## Spot the Difference

Can you spot the 13 differences between these two photos?



- Answer Key:
1. Leaves are missing stems
  2. Extra flower petals
  3. Different color backpacks
  4. Different eye colors
  5. Different color dog
  6. No tree
  7. Grass patches
  8. Extra tree
  9. No rock
  10. Butterfly flipped
  11. Cloud outline flipped
  12. Missing flower
  13. Flower spots different color

