

# CONFERENCE

## Connections

### The Year of Evangelism

**As I look across our diverse and vibrant territory, I am constantly inspired by the profound dedication of you, our pastors and lay members. You are the very heartbeat of our local churches!**

Your passion for sharing the love of Christ is the engine that drives our mission forward. In fact, by God's grace, we celebrated close to 1,500 baptisms and professions of faith across our conference in 2025! What an incredible milestone. It is a powerful reminder of the abundant harvest waiting for us when we intentionally and boldly share the everlasting gospel.

This year has been officially designated as the Year of Evangelism across our union and our conference. We are fervently praying for a massive harvest of souls. But friends, a harvest is biologically impossible without the rain. We can possess the best resources, build the most beautiful sanctuaries, and run the most engaging Sabbath School programs, but without the active, latter-rain outpouring of the Holy Spirit, human effort will only get us so far. Recognizing this, your conference leadership, alongside our dedicated pastors, have been praying and preparing to roll out a special initiative—one carefully designed to empower, equip, and enable you for transformative discipleship and evangelism.

Led by our Southeastern California Conference Ministerial team, this vision has steadily and beautifully taken shape. Over the past two years, we have laid a solid groundwork through writing



**LEFT: Jon Ciccarelli, discipleship pastor, demonstrates an illustration of abiding with Jesus. RIGHT: A group of young adults spend dedicated Immersion time together.**



a thoughtful curriculum, building strategic partnerships, holding inspiring rallies, and soft-launching pilot classes. Through these faithful efforts, we have already witnessed a beautiful, growing engagement in authentic discipleship taking root in our congregations.

Now, the time has come to take our next big step together. In September 2026, we will officially launch the Center for Discipleship and Evangelism, starting with an experience called "Immersion." Serving as a primary onramp into our discipleship track, Immersion flows from a deep, biblical conviction: God's deepest desire is to invite us into His shared life. Discipleship is not merely a checklist of activities we do for God on Sabbath; it is our daily, active participation in life with God. Immersion has been designed to help you slow down, anchor yourself in His presence, cultivate sustainable spiritual rhythms, and discern exactly how God is calling you to invest in others. To build on this foundation, this fall we will also offer our Introduction to Discipleship course alongside a

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**Jonathan Park**  
SECC President

**RIGHT:** Yvonne Clayton takes a photo with her daughter, Kelly, at the Tierrasanta church. **FAR RIGHT:** CD and Elliott Brooks, as sketched by Evelyn Carrillo, eighth-grade student at San Diego Academy.



## Treasure in Heaven Through 'Giving to Caesar'

**When Yvonne Clayton agreed to help clients with IRS forms after taking a tax course, she never imagined it would change her life.**

As she prepared returns, she began noticing patterns in charitable deductions. Some listed small offerings. Others carefully entered exactly ten percent of their income. But one client, Elliott Brooks, consistently gave far beyond tithe—and not just once, but year after year. Clayton found herself quietly impressed by this unseen generosity. "What makes the difference with this man?" she wondered.

Her curiosity became an unexpected answer to prayer when Brooks called one day. His wife was ill, and he asked if she could prepare the return at their home. When Clayton arrived, she noticed a horseshoe on the door engraved with the words: "We are Seventh-day Adventist Christians!"

Inside, she began preparing the tax return but couldn't resist asking, "What's an Adventist?"

Brooks warmly shared how his mother, impressed by Scripture's teaching about the seventh-day Sabbath, began keeping it long before she met other believers who did the same. The story intrigued Clayton. Soon, routine tax questions turned into Bible conversations. Whenever she called about paperwork, she would add, "All right, Mr.

Bible Guru—I've got another question."

To her surprise, Brooks always had thoughtful, Scripture-based answers. His calm explanations resonated deeply. Clayton, a lifelong Baptist who had been baptized as a child, found herself reflecting on ideas she had never fully explored.

One day, when she returned for signatures, Brooks handed her two gifts: a Christian magazine for her ten-year-old daughter, Kelly, and a book for her, *The Desire of Ages*. She planned to read it on an upcoming vacation flight. Captivated by its portrayal of Christ's tender, loving character, she couldn't put it down.

Soon Brooks invited her to visit his church. In May 1974, she attended an Adventist church in North Philadelphia. The Bible-centered worship and welcoming congregation stirred something deep within her. "This is exactly where I belong," she realized. When the

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sermon concluded with an appeal, she responded without hesitation.

Within two months, both Clayton and her daughter were baptized. What began with tax receipts had led to transformation.

Years later, Clayton would reflect on how God had used something as ordinary as a tax return to draw her into deeper faith. Elliott Brooks never preached a formal sermon to her. He simply lived his faith, quietly, faithfully, generously. The book of Hebrews speaks of believers who serve others almost “unaware” of the eternal impact of their kindness (Hebrews 13:2). Brooks’ faithful giving—both financially and spiritually—was exactly that kind of ministry. What looked like routine obedience on a 1040 form became treasure in heaven.

“Giving to Caesar” may look like a civic duty (Matthew 22:21). But in Brooks’ case, his faithfulness in earthly matters opened the door to eternal influence. His life is a reminder that when generosity flows from a heart surrendered to Christ, even the most ordinary acts can become instruments of grace.

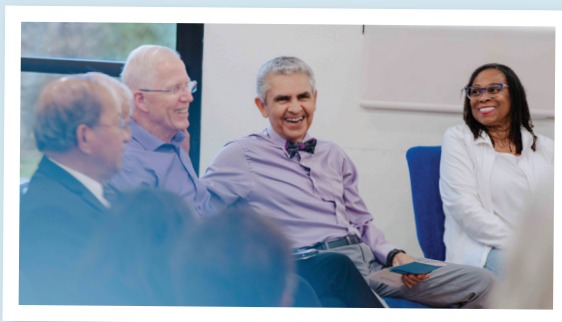
*By Richard Smith*

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deeply focused discipleship retreat.

We know that once a tree is deeply rooted, true fruit naturally follows. In 2027, we will introduce “Overflow,” an experience that will boldly launch our Bible worker and community



*Immersion attendees share about their devotional time experience.*

engagement tracks. Authentic witness flows organically from a life that is deeply connected to God. Mission is never manufactured—it overflows!

I firmly believe, with all my heart, that the work of God will never be finished by the clergy alone. It is only when pastors and laypeople unite, working hand in hand under the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we will finish the great work entrusted to us before Christ’s soon return.

I am asking you to please keep this initiative in your earnest prayers as God continues to guide our steps. For more information on how you can get involved and be equipped for service, please scan the QR code.



## **Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists**

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### **Conference Connections**

Taji Saleem, Editor

# kids konnect

## Faith the Size of a Seed



**On a bright spring morning, Mia found a tiny seed and planted it in her backyard.**

Every day, she checked the soil, but nothing seemed to be happening. "Did my seed die?" she asked her mom.

Mia's mom smiled. "Sometimes things look like they're gone, but God is still at work. Just have a little faith," she said.

Days later, a small green sprout pushed through the dirt. Mia's eyes lit up. "It's alive!"

"That's how God's promises work," her mom said. "Just like the seed, Jesus died and was placed in a tomb. It looked like the end—but then He came back to life!"

Mia thought about that as she watered her plant. "So, when people die, is it like a seed too?"

"Yes," her mom said gently. "We rest until Jesus comes again. And when He does, He will wake us up to live with Him forever."

Mia grinned at her little plant. "I guess waiting can be pretty amazing."

*By Taji Saleem*

## Word Search

Words can be found in any direction and can overlap each other. Use the word bank to find all ten!

W	T	J	S	J	W	H	A	V	T
J	X	E	L	C	P	E	W	N	O
E	A	C	E	F	R	D	B	W	M
S	N	O	E	O	O	O	X	F	B
U	G	D	P	L	M	D	S	A	B
S	E	I	A	L	I	V	E	S	H
K	L	D	A	P	S	J	L	R	O
R	G	N	I	S	E	E	L	I	P
X	A	S	U	R	P	R	M	S	E
E	M	H	E	A	V	E	N	E	V

- Jesus
- Tomb
- Alive
- Angel
- Cross
- Sleep
- Rise
- Hope
- Promise
- Heaven

