

# **Southwest California Synod**

## **Report of the Central Coast Conference**

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021**

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Greetings to our fellow ELCA congregations of Southwest CA:

With smoke, fire, pandemic, and a reckoning on race and racism in America, the **Central Coast Conference** continues to persevere in the care of its communities with the love of God. Our core practices of faith remain intact -- gathering in virtual spaces and safe places, mutual prayer, dwelling with the Word, accompaniment with many different kinds of journeys, and advocacy for the most vulnerable and underserved. Everything has changed. And yet, the more we look to history and the struggles of the saints before us, the more we see ourselves mirrored in the pages of the Bible. May our crucifixions, imprisonments, and shipwrecks be transformed for the glory of God and the life of God's people.

Some of the highlights in service include the following:

#### **Bethania Lutheran Church -- Solvang**

During the pandemic, they focused on an emergency food distribution, which is feeding on average 1,400 people a week. They also converted part of their space into a food pantry.

#### **Bethel Lutheran Church -- Templeton**

Their North County NeighborAid coalition supplied over \$100,000 to local residents for immediate needs like rent and gas and health care costs and more. This included securing an \$80,000 grant from the Immigrant Resilience Fund for the undocumented residents of their region.

#### **Calvary Lutheran Church -- Morro Bay**

In addition to their work in calling a new pastor, they created "caring callers" to keep connected and respond to immediate needs.

#### **Gloria Dei Lutheran Church -- Orcutt**

They work closely with Iglesia Luterana de Santa Cruz offering vital supplies, hands-on assistance with feeding programs, and friendship through these difficult days.

#### **Hope Lutheran Church -- Atascadero**

They continue to be an essential partner to the local homeless shelter and meal program. They too are in the midst of calling a new pastor.

#### **Iglesia Luterana de Santa Cruz -- Santa Maria**

Pastor Esteban Salazar with his wife Angelica continue to faithfully serve and bless their tri-lingual community. Once a week, they continue their Feed my People Thursday tradition when they head to the fields with hundreds of sandwiches and words of prayer.

#### **Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church -- San Luis Obispo**

While calling a new pastor, they continue to keep families and children at the core of their ministry with digital programming. In addition, they have done fundraising projects for Iglesia Santa Cruz and the SLO Food Bank and hosted two blood drives.

And while not a geographical home to the **Finnish Lutheran Ministry of the ELCA**, we are a home to the leader, Rev. Jarmo Tarkki. The Finnish Lutheran Ministry is an 11-point ministry, serving Finnish communities west of the Mississippi and Mexico. Pr. Jarmo writes, "We continue to worship as we

are able and with the help of Zoom and also have three separate confirmation classes, 15 students in three different locations (Dallas, Silicon Valley and San Diego), all via Zoom at this time. Currently we have three pastors, three musicians and a 1/3-time administrative assistant. I am the only full-time employee."

The Dean- Rev. Amy Beveridge

# **Southwest California Synod**

## **Report of the Channel Islands Conference**

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021**

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The Channel Islands Conference comprises congregations in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Like congregations everywhere, we have been adapting what it means to be church in the midst of a pandemic. Most of our congregations have been providing remote/online worship this year, and some have begun transitioning to in-person, outdoor services.

Major transitions in the Channel Islands Conference:

- TEEM Candidate Jade Ortiz began serving at Redimidos (Oxnard), which is a bilingual, multi-ethnic mission start and synodically-authorized worshipping community established in December 2019.
- Trinity (Ventura) extended a call to Pastor Todd Iverson, who began serving as senior pastor in December 2020.
- Pastor Truls Person retired from Trinity (Santa Barbara). Pastor Mark Marius is serving as interim senior pastor alongside Pastor Thomas Voelp, whose call to Trinity began in 2019.
- Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty announced his retirement from California Lutheran University after more than 20 years serving in campus ministry. His last day is May 21st, 2021.

Ministries we celebrate in the Channel Islands Conference:

- The conference continues to value and embrace our interfaith and ecumenical partnerships. In particular, we are grateful for the Call to Common Mission between the ELCA and Episcopal Church. This partnership is lived out in the blended congregation of St. Paul's/Emmanuel (Santa Paula), as well as with Episcopal Priest Julie Morris serving Mount Cross Lutheran (Camarillo) and ELCA Pastor Steve Simpson serving St. Patrick's Episcopal (Thousand Oaks).
- New Hope (Agoura Hills) invested in improvements to lighting, sound, and camera systems for the sanctuary for online worship. Since most people are now using video conferencing, the congregation also committed to making the hardware available for video conferencing in our classrooms, meeting spaces, and areas used by support groups.
- Ascension (Thousand Oaks) completed an Early Childhood Center in August 2020. 120 children are now enrolled.
- At Shepherd of the Valley (Simi Valley), the weekly free hot meal program, Still Waters Café, transitioned to a food pantry-only model due to the pandemic. The pantry now provides free groceries that feed nearly 400 people each week.
- Our Redeemer (Oxnard) and mission start Redimidos (Oxnard) host a diaper pantry that provides free diapers to families in need.

Submitted on behalf of the congregations of the Channel Islands Conference  
Pastor Jennie Chrien, dean of the conference

**Southwest California Synod  
Report of the Foothill Conference  
33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021**

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**Foothill Conference**

Southwest California Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
1700 Foothill Blvd  
La Canada, California 91011  
818-790-1951

*Reverend Scott C. Peterson. – Dean*

2020/2021 was a year of a few leadership transitions in the Foothill Conference of our beloved Synod. Here is a brief rundown of some of the leadership and other changes:

- Pastor Mark Witte has retired – Christ the Shepherd, Altadena, but will continue to serve as our Synod Council Representative until his term ends
- Pastor Ruth Sievert continues to serve Trinity Lutheran, San Gabriel
- Pastor Violetta Sanders was officially installed at Eagle Rock Lutheran, Eagle Rock
- Pastor Kathleen Richter has retired – Solheim Senior Community, Eagle Rock

We are still looking for a Chair of the Conference, as of our Spring Assembly. Pr. Deborah Andersen continues her service as Secretary/Treasurer. Deborah continues to encourage congregations to remember their commitment of minimal dues payments to further the work of the Conference.

Our Collegium meetings continue to be held on Zoom and we are meeting every 2 weeks for support and updates. The Conference continues in its ministry to the people of the Foothills region as the pandemic goes on. A number of the congregations of the Conference are exploring ways in returning to in-person gatherings.

As Dean, I am yet again grateful for all of the Rostered Leaders who serve the congregations of the Conference and I ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen each one of them as well as those Rostered Leaders within the Conference who are currently without call or who are retired. Moreover, I know that I, and all of our Rostered Leaders, give God thanks for the lay leaders within each of our congregations who steadfastly rejoice in doing God's Work with (Their) Hands as together we seek to Make Christ Known in the Foothills and beyond.

Many of our Conference congregations have discovered hidden talents by way of creating virtual worship and gatherings, as the State and County mandates prohibiting indoor worship continue. Those congregations unable to provide online offerings have benefitted from the continuing opportunities to join virtually with other congregations in the Conference and abroad.

As we continue in this time of COVID-19 and into a future that continues to take shape, we take solace in God's presence and the Body of Christ lived out through our lives as God's people. May we be held in grace, hope, and love.

INJ,

The Rev. Scott C. Peterson – Dean

# **Southwest California Synod Report of the LA Metro Conference 33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021**

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## **LA Metro Conference Report - 2021 Synod Assembly Dean Rev. Caleb Crainer**

It has obviously been a challenging year for the congregations of the LA Metro conference, but with God's persistent grace, we have responded to the pandemic with overflowing love. Los Angeles county entered lockdown in March 2020 with strict limitations on in-person worship as Covid-19 spread in more populated areas. LA Metro congregations quickly adapted our regular gatherings in a variety of ways. Bethel live streamed worship from their courtyard. Ascension and Another Level created a Drive-thru style worship, a Drive-in style worship, and a Wednesday Prayer-Line to remain connected during lockdown.

It was also clear early on that the pandemic was disproportionately affecting communities of color and those where many people worked in essential service industries. Our churches responded to God's call to serve our neighbors across the metro area. Chapel of Peace distributed Pre-Thanksgiving food- including turkeys! St. Paul's held food drives for the Westside Food Bank. Hollywood organized food delivery to vulnerable people in the community. My Friends House in particular is to be commended for their incredible service feeding and helping others get what they needed in the Park Mesa Heights Neighborhood and beyond!

Many congregations drew upon their creativity and innovation. ADORE held virtual prayer sessions and book clubs and Hope used social media to share Digital Devotionals. Messiah held a Bible Study series on the theme "12 Ways To Keep Your Church Alive" and Lenten Supper Lessons around the theme "We Are Family: Getting Back to Our Roots." First Lutheran in Inglewood published a podcast called "Active Faith in a Modern World" with a variety of topics. St. Andrew's helped sponsor a Slow Streets program in their neighborhood and connected with an ice cream truck for weekly visits during the hot summer. New City Parish presented The Seven Last Words of Christ online for Holy Week featuring many clergy and lay leaders from the whole coalition. Iglesia Angelica presentó un ciclo de Estudios Bíblicos Temáticos: "Demonios y endemoniados frente a Jesús." ¡Que fantástico!

Of course, kids faced special stresses this year. Westchester's School saw a lot of educational challenges on top of everything, but with God's help they continue to serve students and families. Holy Trinity held monthly Youth Check-Ins to build community and lift each other up in prayer. St. Mark's welcomed a Pre-School on their campus and organized a Drive-through Halloween event for their neighborhood. Church of the Master held virtual baptisms and welcomed new people online!

Restoration remained a constant goal for LA Metro congregations. Grace's own "Grace Diner" program grew ten-fold, now serving over 1,000 meals a week to neighbors struggling with hunger and homelessness and connecting them with resources. Community Lutheran organized a "God's Work, Our Hands" food-distribution event and also hosted the Annual MLK Celebration with a fantastic virtual Worship Experience for the whole synod. Village completed necessary (and complicated) building repairs. Recently, Mt. Olive hosted a Vaccine Clinic in their parking lot in partnership with Community Corporation of Santa Monica. Many congregations participated in protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and continued the work of racial justice, equity, and education.

While none of our congregations closed during the pandemic, many have had to make difficult choices in the midst of a difficult year. Pastors faced incredible stresses and demands; leaning on each other for support. Not being able to hold funerals or visit ill members in the hospital was a tragically familiar story among our churches. Many congregations fell into scarcity/survival mode at some point or another. God comforts us in our grief and journeys with us as we heal. Still, there is much to celebrate in LA! We joyfully celebrated the call of Pastor Drew Stever to Hope Lutheran Church in Hollywood. (Pastor Drew previously served as the vicar at St. Paul's, Santa Monica!) Of course, there is much more to share, yet with God's constant shepherding, LA Metro churches continue to blaze a trail of love into the unknown future.

# Southwest California Synod Report of the South Bay Conference 33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021

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## Conference Report for July 2020 - June 2021

Greetings in the Name of Our Lord & Savior,

The church year beginning in July was nondescript. But as things drastically changed with the onset of the Coronavirus, all our churches were impacted greatly. The Lutheran Churches in the South Bay had to make critical adjustments to minister to the people they were called to serve.

We learned how to use social media in ways that many of us had not thought about or had attempted to do prior to Covid-19. As the apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians: 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*, I believe this became the motto for the congregations in the South Bay as well as the Synod. Congregations discovered new ways to use Facebook and Zoom.

The South Bay pastors have met for weekly lectionary study every Tuesday, which was even more important to gather through Zoom and reflect on the texts each week. To enhance our relationship with one another, we added a Conference Meeting every other Wednesday, to check in and just share updates and challenges due to Covid-19. We have continued to offer the Zoom meetings, and I believe that they have been beneficial to everyone who has participated in those meetings. Our gatherings lead us to have a Conference Lenten Service on Wednesday nights via Zoom which was well attended.

During the past 12 months we have been blessed to fill two pastoral vacancies at Trinity Lutheran in Hawthorne, Pastor Kevin Bergeson and Trinity Lutheran in Manhattan Beach, Pastor Douglas Barclay. Olivet Lutheran is currently being served by a TEEM candidate, Johnel Barron. We are grateful for their presence and the gifts they bring to our Conference and Synod. We are looking forward to the Ordination of Maria Paiva at St. John's in Gardena in May 2021. Praise the Lord and let the entire church shout, **"Thanks be to God!"**

At the Spring Assembly on April 14, 2021, we elected Margarita Gonzalez from First Torrance as the South Bay Conference representative to the Synod Council and Pastor Christopher Lindstrom as the Dean of the South Bay Conference.

We are looking to build from the momentum that has been created by our Zoom gatherings to provide new and exciting opportunities for the South Bay Conference.

In Christ's Humble Service

Rev. Dr. Christopher Lindstrom, Dean of the South Bay Conference

# Southwest California Synod Report of the Tehachapi Conference 33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021

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## Church Together:

The Tehachapi Conference encompasses Kern County and North East Los Angeles. The conference includes four congregations and El Camino Pines Lutheran Camp:

- **Lutheran Church of the Master**, Lancaster – Pastor Jeffrey Berg
- **St. Stephen Lutheran**, Palmdale – Pastor Christopher Hogstad & Deacon MeganHogstad
- **Redeemer Lutheran**, Bakersfield – Pastor Jon Christenson
- **El Camino Pines LRCC**, Pine Mountain – Meredith Smith
- **Emmanuel Lutheran**, Bakersfield – Pastor Dawn Wilder, Conference Dean

## Conference Highlights:

Redeemer Lutheran: Like every other congregation in the synod, Redeemer has been hit hard by this pandemic. Currently, in addition to online worship, we are also holding outdoor worship early in the morning. The good news is that we have been in contact with each other via telephone shepherds and Bible study attendance is actually up. We are taking advantage of technology and mail to continue Sunday School and we post frequently on social media to reach members and our community.

"O Trinity of love and pow'r,  
Your children shield in danger's hour;  
From rock and tempest, fire, and foe,  
Protect them where-so-e'er they go...

Lutheran Church of the Master: Lutheran Church of the Master in Lancaster is a great group of people who are trying to find different ways to be the Church of Christ in the midst of pandemic. We are streaming worship every Sunday morning on Face Book and You Tube, boosting the posts in the hopes that we will reach more of our neighbors. We continue to live out our passion to help our diverse, low income neighborhood. We give out food from our pantry, we participate in Crop Walk for Hunger. And most exciting we will soon be doing a drive through food give away. We have sources to provide about 50 pounds of food per household in need hoping to give to 100 families each month.

"The churches in the conference continue to reach out to local neighborhoods, offering food ministries, Vacation Bible School, and other services impacting local children.

*Respectfully Submitted by the Rev. Dawn Wilder, Conference Dean*

# **Southwest California Synod**

## **Report of the Twin Valleys Report**

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly (e-Assembly)-June 4-5, 2021**

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Twin Valleys Conference  
Report for Synod Assembly 2021

The coronavirus pandemic continued to strongly impact the life and ministry of the churches of the Twin Valleys Conference in 2020 and early 2021. Nearly all of our congregations adapted to the need to worship distantly by offering on-line worship in various ways. Some successfully created very meaningful, community-building worship using the Zoom platform (i.e. St. Luke—Woodland Hills, Bethel—Encino, American—Burbank, Church of the Foothills—Sylmar), Others prerecorded worship elements prepared by different staff and members, and deftly edited them into moving worship experiences (i.e. Shepherd of the Valley—West Hills, Prince of Peace—North Ridge, St. Andrew's—Van Nuys, Central—Van Nuys, Emmanuel—NoHo, All Saint's—Sun Valley). Others experimented with parking lot worship (Emmanuel—NoHo, Faith—Canoga Park). Still others livestreamed services with small worship teams, and offered live worship with limited seating, mostly outside (Bethlehem—Granada Hills, The Church of Hope—Canyon Country, St. Matthew's—NoHo). With the rise in vaccinations and decline in Covid-19 cases, several of our congregations have resumed in-person worship with social distancing. And through it all four of our congregations that have their own preschool or school ministries, have maintained this important educational service to families (Shepherd of the Valley, Emmanuel, Bethlehem, and All Saints).

The pandemic did slow our plans to formally launch the new Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish, a collaboration of many of our congregations around shared ministries including addressing sustainability, youth and young adult ministries, Latinx ministry, and poverty and homelessness. The board of the new non-profit recently reconvened and will be submitting its 501 (c) (3) paperwork this summer.

And yet, our collaborative work has continued. We will be confirming 6 youth from 4 different congregations on the Vigil of Pentecost (May 22) who have completed two years of our shared confirmation program (on-line for the past 15 months). Under the leadership of TVLP president Pr. Marsha Harris, we have mounted monthly rotating food drives to support the 3 food distribution ministries on our territory: at Central-Van Nuys, Lutheran Social Services (at the former Valley Luther/San Pablo site), and at The Church of Hope. We have also forged very hands-on collaborations between congregations in our notable poverty and homelessness ministries: Shepherd of the Valley provides core volunteers that assist with Central's Monday food distributions; Emmanuel Lutheran provides hot meals monthly for the drop-in access center for people experiencing homelessness run by St. Matt's—NoHo's non-profit, NoHo Home Alliance. Churches have also collaborated with mid-week services and Vacation Bible School.

God's vision of justice is central to our ministry in the Twin Valleys. St. Matthew's-NoHo has focused much its justice work this year on addressing racism and creating equity in

our church and communities, thanks to the leadership of its new Racial Equity Group. In the coming season, several congregations will be working together to move through the RIC process and to expand and strengthen our shared commitment to LGBTQIA+ equity in the church.

The Twin Valleys Conference is deeply committed to discerning how the Holy Spirit might be leading us to even closer shared ministry in the ever-changing context for churches in SoCal. We are holding a series of gatherings this May and June that help congregations imagine sharing resources and staff by developing configurations such as two-point calls, or sharing non-pastoral staff, or forming geographic cohorts of 2-3 churches that might share staff and complement one another in ministry areas. We invite the other conferences in the synod interested in imagining similar configurations that amplify ministry and support sustainability to connect with us so that we might do holy experimentation together.

Our conference is also experiencing some pastoral transitions. We were profoundly sorrowed by the passing of our friend and colleague Pr. George McCleary in June 2020. Pr. George had helped establish one of the most interesting, faithful ministries in our synod, The Church of Hope, which runs and worships in its Thrift Store and Food Pantry ministry. Later this year will also be poignantly celebrating the retirements of two long-time pastors in our synod: Pr. Kenny Bowen, who has been serving as interim at All Saints, and Pr. Chuck Bunnell, the long-time pastor of the only two-point call in our synod: St. Andrew's and Prince of Peace. We will thus have 4 part-time vacancies in our territory this coming season.

We ask God to pour wisdom, love and inspiration upon our entire conference as we continue to discern how the Holy Spirit might be leading us to new ways to witness together to God's love and vision of justice.

In Christ's service,

Pr. Stephanie Jaeger  
Pastor/Redeveloper, St. Matthew's—NoHo  
Dean, Twin Valleys Conference