

A REASON TO CELEBRATE

By Linda Sommerville

It's time to celebrate. God has been on the move in the Pacific Southwest Conference, and His fingerprints are everywhere – particularly on the many new and growing churches that have been launched in the past fifteen years and on the many established churches that have helped launch them. What began in the early 90's as a desire to reach more people for Christ has blossomed into a full-fledged church planting movement.

According to Evelyn Johnson, Superintendent of the PSWC, "Church planting is one of the most effective tools of evangelism that we have." This is why our Conference is so committed to it. This is also why we have so much to celebrate as we look back at what God has done in and through our churches.

Gary Walter, President of the Covenant, agrees. "I know of no group more effective (at planting churches) in California and Arizona than the PSWC," says Walter. "Church planting, in combination with the effective ministry of our established churches, is making a real difference in real lives, in real places, in ways that are nothing short of remarkable."

The visionary leadership of our Conference staff and Executive Board has been a key to getting this movement off the ground, but the movement would be nowhere without the gifted and godly church planters who have answered the call to go into the "fields that are ripe for harvest." To a church planter, the word "go" is not a verb – it's a way of life. These modern-day apostles are compelled by the Great Commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Greg Yee, Associate Superintendent of the PSWC, calls church planters the "green berets" of the faith, going to places where some of our more traditional churches are not able to go.



"I want to express my deep appreciation for the people that have chosen to do church planting – may their numbers increase!"

John Notehelfer

To help us celebrate what God has been doing in our midst through church planting, we've filled this booklet with stories and snapshots of all the new churches started in our region since 1994. In the pages that follow, you'll be treated to glimpses of God's greatness, using ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for His kingdom. But as you read, don't be surprised if you sense a longing to get involved – after all, as many in our Conference have discovered, church planting can be contagious.

The Birth of a Movement

As with most big moves of God, this one began with a stirring in the hearts of His people.

According to John Notehelfer, PSWC Superintendent from 1987-2000, church planting had been perceived as more of a distraction than an asset due to the financial drain it placed on the Conference and the lack of lasting fruit. But there were a handful of people, including Notehelfer, who weren't content with this assessment. These people still believed that starting new churches was necessary and important, and their holy discontent moved them to action.

"We agreed that we would seek outside help," explains Notehelfer. So in the early 90's, he and the Executive Board invited a church consultant named Dr. Bob Logan to spend a day helping them assess what it would take to begin planting fruitful new churches.



"Church planting is one of the most effective tools of evangelism that we have."

Evelyn Johnson

After meeting for several hours, Logan dropped a bombshell. “I don’t think church planting will ever happen in this Conference,” he stated. Then he shocked everyone by explaining his reason. “I sense no passion for lost people! The only thing that drives church planting,” he said, “is a passion for lost people. Nothing else will do. I think you need to get on your knees and pray.”

This bold assertion startled those at the meeting. Notehelfer wondered if perhaps it startled Bob Logan, too. “I still believe those words popped out of Dr. Logan’s mouth before he even knew what he was saying,” shares Notehelfer. “All of us looked at each other with questioning eyes as to the validity of his observation.”



However, everyone in the room did go to prayer right then and there, asking God to reignite their passion for lost people. Logan’s challenge became a defining moment for those leaders, with his wake-up call fanning the flame of their desire to pursue the Great Commission.

“The Executive Board was not remotely satisfied with the status quo. They were passionate about the church planting movement and at every board meeting we’d move it forward.”

Dave Hanson

Turning-Point Decisions

That day was a turning point for church planting in the PSWC. Following the recommendations of Dr. Logan, pastors and churches were encouraged to heighten their prayers for lost people. The Executive Board was also challenged to bring on a Director of Church Planting who could give full-time attention to this ministry.

The Board saw the wisdom of this idea. However, as with most new ventures, they had more enthusiasm than resources. There simply wasn’t enough money in the existing budget to fund an additional full-time position in the Conference, but they didn’t let this small obstacle stop them.

With some creative re-budgeting and some “above-and-beyond” giving by local churches and individuals, the PSWC was able to bring Dave Olson on in 1993 as the first regional Director of Church Planting in the Evangelical Covenant Church. This strategic hire proved to be another turning point for the Pacific Southwest Conference, with Olson bringing a wealth of church planting expertise to the table.

The Vision Emerges

One of the first issues Olson addressed was the need to create a process for finding the right pastors to plant churches. Previously, there had been some terrific pastors who had been asked to plant churches, but church planting wasn’t part of their gifting or calling. This led to some rocky church starts and some discouraged pastors.

John Engstrom, Chair of the Executive Board at that time, remembers that “Dave Olson helped us understand the importance of getting the right person to start a church.” Engstrom says he came to see that, “The church planter has to be your number one draft choice, someone who takes risks. Good church planters are a breed unto themselves.”

Dave Olson worked closely with Gary Walter (the Director of Church Planting for the Covenant at that time) in addressing this critical issue. They launched the Church Planter Assessment Center – a week-long, intensive assessment of pastoral leaders and their spouses to determine whether they have the right gift-mix and calling to serve as church planters. With the advent of the Assessment Center, the success rate for new churches and their leaders dramatically increased.



“I’m thankful for all the pastors and lay people who wanted to listen to the voice of God.”

Dave Olson



“My passion and heart is that every church in our conference would be continuously involved in parenting or partnering in church planting.”

Wayne Carlson

In addition to addressing leadership issues, Olson began to assess the needs and opportunities for church planting in the PSWC. He discovered a great deal of what he called “NIMBY” thinking (Not In My Back Yard). “People were very receptive to church planting,” he says, “but they didn’t know how and they didn’t really want it in their backyard.” So, another one of Olson’s tasks was to help existing churches overcome their NIMBY thinking and begin to think more strategically about building on our strengths by planting churches in clusters.

To accomplish this, Olson and Notehelfer began traveling the Conference, attending pastoral cluster meetings, and casting the vision that our churches are all mission outposts on a common mission field. They helped pastors and lay people understand that the PSWC needed to continue expanding and reaching more people for Christ, and one of the best tools for doing that was church planting.

Olson also targeted a number of existing churches that he believed were ripe to become “parent” churches, and began meeting with the pastors and leaders of those churches to see what God might do. “My goal,” says Olson, “was not simply to start a bunch of churches, but to start many healthy, parented churches.” He recognized the need to have a few, solid success stories that could then become the model for how we start healthy new churches in our Conference.



A Few Solid Plants

First Covenant Church in Sacramento Gives Birth to Lakehills

One of the earliest examples of a solid, parented church came out of First Covenant Church in Sacramento. Pastor Ted Smith saw the need for more churches in the region and began to think strategically about how to do it. The first thing he did was to hire Ray Johnston who was working as the Director of Youth Ministry for the ECC and developer of the youth ministry program at North Park College at the time.

“I hired Ray as an Associate Pastor,” says Smith, “and told him to make as many friends as he could, and take as many people with him as he could to help start a new church.” After several months of core group development, Johnston began to sense God leading him in other directions, so Ron Short, a veteran Covenant Church planter, was brought on to continue developing the core group. Shortly after his arrival, Short took a solid core of about a hundred people with him to help launch Lakehills Covenant Church in nearby El Dorado Hills, CA.

Smith admits that “the Sunday we had a hundred people leave was a scary Sunday for us.” But he was also thrilled to see how God was doing a new work in the region. “Anything that helps reach people for Jesus Christ in a lost world is worth it,” shares Smith. “The pain is worth it. Anything that gets people into the kingdom is worth it.” However, what truly amazed Smith was the way in which God blessed their desire to grow the Kingdom. “The first Sunday after the Lakehills core group left,” he says, “our attendance was actually up by about a hundred people, and our offering went up as well.”

“We have learned that the move to have ‘partners’ as opposed to strictly ‘parent’ churches has been a very good move. Local churches that don’t necessarily have a group of people that can go out, can still be involved in church planting.”

Evelyn Johnson

The Sacramento Cluster & Redeemer Covenant Give Birth to Bayside

Early on in the development of Lakehills, Ray Johnston began to sense a call to start a church in the nearby community of Granite Bay. The Sacramento Cluster of Covenant Churches all joined together

to provide prayer, support, and resources to help birth what is now Bayside Covenant Church in Granite Bay. However, due to its proximity, Redeemer Covenant Church in Orangevale took the lead in partnering with Johnston to launch Bayside.

"I believe Granite Bay was a Holy Spirit led movement," shares Mark Novak, Superintendent of the North Pacific Conference and pastor of Redeemer Covenant at the time Bayside was launched. "At Redeemer, we celebrated what Bayside was able to do that we were not able to do. Ray would call and say, 'Forty people came to Christ this week,' and we would celebrate what God was doing. It was encouraging, and it also encouraged our people to reach out. It was a very healthy time in the life of our church."



"After watching people become Christians in our services every weekend for the past fifteen years, I am more convinced than ever that the best strategy for reaching the world is to plant new churches."

Ray Johnston

Both Ted Smith at First Covenant and Mark Novak at Redeemer Covenant led the way for the Conference in overcoming NIMBY thinking and showing that when we give ourselves away, God blesses us. According to Novak, "Territorialism has to die." He remembers how some of his best friends at that time said to him, "did you know that they're planting a church ten minutes away from you?" His response was, "Yeah, it was my idea."

For Novak, it's a matter of understanding God's call on your life. "Theologically, it goes back to knowing who you are in Christ," he says, "being aware of your limitations as well as your giftedness." It was that kind of kingdom-mindedness that helped church planting gain momentum in the PSWC and give Bayside such a strong start.

The fruit of that willingness to sacrifice and support new churches has been multiplied many times over in the past fifteen years. Under Johnston's leadership, Bayside of Granite Bay was launched in 1994, and not only has God brought thousands of people into the kingdom through that church, but Bayside has also started or reignited ten additional churches. Johnston's vision and passion to reach lost people has propelled Bayside to become an anchor church in Northern California, planting multiple churches and impacting thousands of people with the Gospel.

Montecito Covenant in Santa Barbara Gives Birth to Ocean Hills Covenant

Another solid, early church start emerged in the Santa Barbara area through the ministry of Montecito Covenant Church under the leadership of Pastor Curt Peterson (now serving as Executive Director of World Mission for the Covenant). Peterson's heart to reach more of the Santa Barbara community for Christ led to the vision for parenting a new church just four miles away.

"As we saw the impact of church planting in Sacramento and a few other regions, those examples of how God was working became a challenge to the rest of us pastors," Peterson remembers. "We felt that if we were serious about evangelism, we needed to find more ways to reach out, including church planting. So we sent our visionary Associate Pastor, Jon Ireland, and a core group of about one hundred people to help launch Ocean Hills Covenant," says Peterson. "This was our commitment to going more public with the Gospel. It was a painful to see young families go, but a great experience to see many people come to Christ through the ministry of the new church."

However, starting one new church was not enough for Montecito Covenant. Prior to planting Ocean Hills, they also helped the ECC adopt a small church in Goleta, now called Community Covenant Church, which has continued to grow and thrive. Montecito and Community Covenant then partnered to help plant Fuente de Esperanza Covenant Church in Isla Vista, a



"Our motivation for planting churches has always been evangelism. The rate of conversion is so much higher. It's just the greatest way to expand the kingdom."

Adam Edgerly

Spanish-speaking church targeted to reach the growing Hispanic population in the region. In addition, through the Hispanic church these churches helped launch a Community Development Corporation as an outreach that provides a food bank, health screenings, and other services to the community.

Peterson is amazed at the ways God has worked in that region. "When I first came to Montecito in 1980," he shares, "there were about 120 people in the church. Now there are four churches partnering to reach the area with more than 1,300 people. These churches," says Peterson, "have a very strong presence in the region and a reputation of being a community of grace."



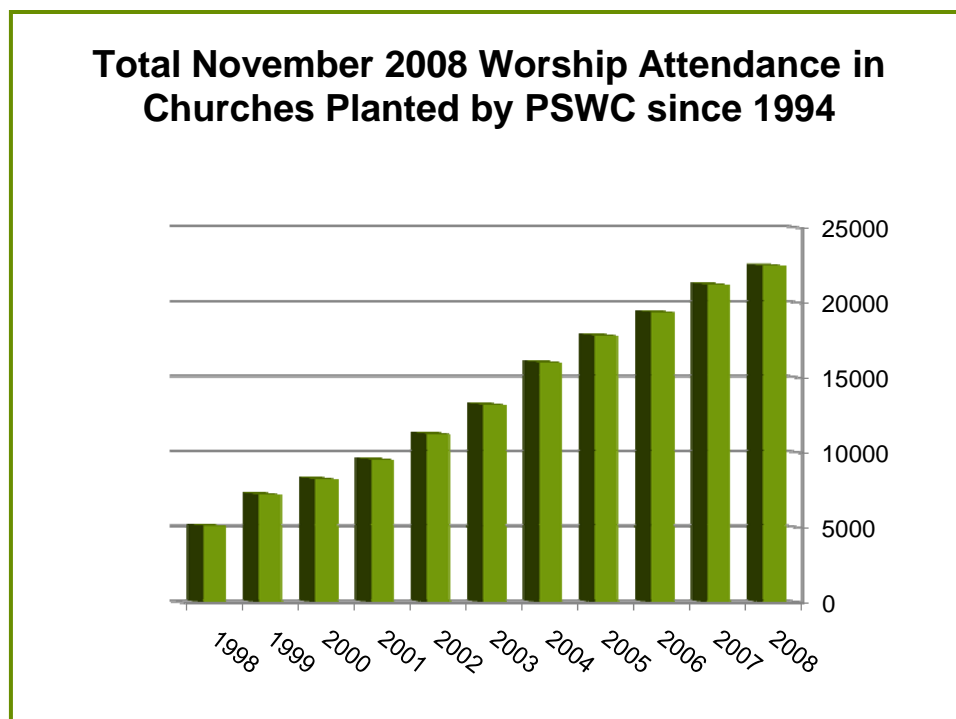
“Evelyn took the baton, and is now taking our Conference to a whole new level in terms of networking, empowering pastors, coaching, and permission-giving to those leaders she has recruited and blessed to lead!”

John Notehelfer

Momentum And Diversity

Under John Notehelfer and Dave Olson’s leadership, church planting in the PSWC moved from an occasional event to a full-blown movement. Now there were ongoing Assessment Centers which allowed us to find the right pastors to plant churches, followed up by ongoing training and coaching. Also, existing churches were now catching the vision of what God was doing, and this lit a wildfire in the Conference. But this was just the beginning.

In 2000, John Notehelfer retired as Superintendent, and Evelyn Johnson was called to take the baton and move the Conference forward. Not only did Johnson have the right mix of gifts and experience to lead the PSWC, but she also had the distinction of being the first female Superintendent in the Covenant. Her prior experience in denominational leadership with youth ministry and multi-ethnic ministry also gave her a unique ability to connect with many church planters and younger leaders. In addition to being biblically-based, Johnson says that the Covenant’s intentionality in becoming ethnically diverse played a role in the decision of many younger leaders to join the denomination.





“Hispanic pastors are taking the call of God so seriously that that nothing holds them back. Even when they may be losing their homes, they get another job and say, ‘praise God, He’s still in control.’”

Walter Contreras

In 1999, Dave Olson also left the PSWC to become the Director of Church Planting for the Covenant, and Adam Edgerly was called as the new Director of Church Planting for the PSWC. Edgerly also brought a unique dynamic as the first African-American to provide leadership in the PSWC, helping us continue to build a strong and diverse Conference team. Adam’s passion to fulfill both the Great Commission and Great Commandment initiated another wave of church plants focused on both evangelism and compassion, mercy, and justice. Being a young leader himself, he connected well with new networks of emerging leaders.

This was a very fruitful time for church planting in the PSWC. Thanks to Notehelper and Olson, the ground had been tilled and seeds had been planted. Now as many as eight to ten new churches were being started every year, up from only two to four per year in the early to mid-90’s.

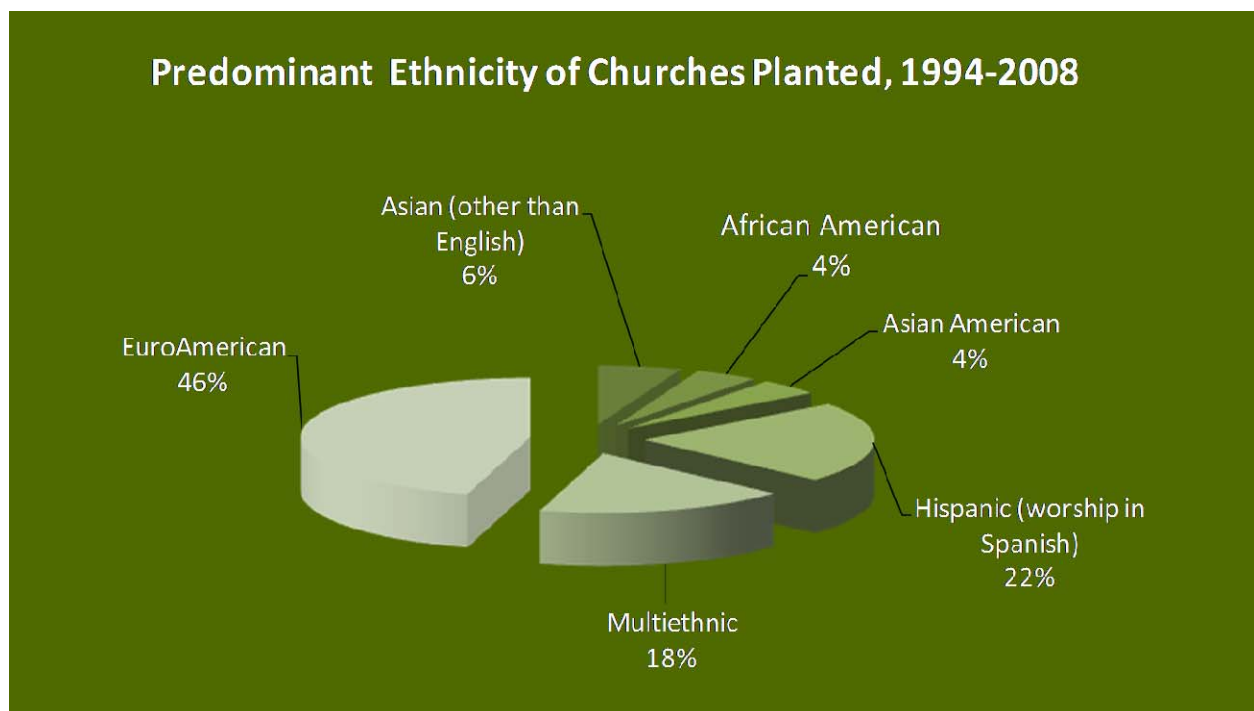
Reaching the Hispanic Population

Although the rate of church planting at that point was truly exciting, Edgerly notes that “these new churches were still primarily suburban and Anglo.” The need to expand church planting into more urban and ethnically diverse areas became a priority. There was a particular need for strong leadership in reaching the growing Hispanic population, and once again, God provided just the right person. Walter Contreras was brought onto the Conference staff to support the existing Hispanic churches and help launch new ones.

When Contreras began in late 2000, there were only twelve Hispanic churches in the PSWC – now there are twenty-nine Hispanic churches in our Conference. God has indeed blessed this arena of church planting in our region, and it continues to grow exponentially.

What many people may not realize, according to Contreras, is that the Hispanic community, by its very nature, is multi-cultural. “This means working with twenty-seven different sub-cultures.”

Our Conference has pastors from all over Latin America, many coming from indigenous church planting movements in their own countries who are now here helping the growth of churches in the United States. “They are on fire for Jesus,” says Contreras. “This is the wind from the South.”



To fulfill their sense of calling while providing for their families, many of our Hispanic church planters are bi-vocational. Many are also without health insurance since their churches cannot afford to provide for it. While the PSWC continues to look for ways to address issues of providing adequate support, our pastors are not letting these challenges slow them down from pursuing the call to reach lost people.

A Dynamic and Diverse Team

As church planting expanded in our Conference, Evelyn Johnson continued to be intentional about building a team of highly gifted and diverse leaders to better serve our increasingly diverse region. This move toward diversity also affected the Executive Board. Dave Hanson, who served on the Executive Board at that time (now CFO for Bayside Church), remembers that “the PSWC Board was one of the first to address the issue that we’re not going to be just an Anglo board. This move toward diversity,” says Hanson, “helped shape the direction of church planting as well. And this all really took shape when Evelyn came on.”

The Conference staff also continued to grow and expand. In 2001, Wayne Carlson joined the team as the Associate Superintendent, serving as the leader for the church planting team which included Adam Edgerly and Walter Contreras.

Carlson’s passion for church planting came out of his experience as Pastor of Valley Hi Covenant Church in Sacramento. This predominantly Anglo church helped plant a Hispanic church and a Mien church, both of which shared Valley Hi’s facilities. The “church within a church” model of church planting helped Valley Hi reach out to the rapidly growing Hispanic and Southeast Asian populations in their area and remain relevant and vibrant in their community.

According to Carlson, “when an established local church engages in the work of planting a new church, the very process invigorates the mission of the established church. This way there’s mutual benefit, not only for the new church but also for the existing church.” Carlson observes that “the more missional a church becomes, the more they will become energized, and the bigger impact they will make on their own community.”



“New churches are needed everywhere, all the time, in order to better connect with every new generation and ethnic group, and the changing demographics in a region.”

Wayne Carlson



“What has become a recent history of church planting is only the beginning of what God wants to do. We’re not done. There’s nothing more fulfilling than that commitment to mission and seeing the multiplication of disciples.”

Curt Peterson

Advancing the Mosaic

To remain relevant in our rapidly changing region, the PSWC continued to look for ways to plant more churches in diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural settings. When Adam Edgerly answered the invitation to plant Newsong LA, an urban, multi-cultural campus of Newsong Irvine, Wayne Carlson became the PSWC Director of Church Planting, and Greg Yee was brought on as the new Associate Superintendent, after having planted the Covenant’s first Asian-American church in Chicago.

Greg recognized the critical nature of his calling to help “Advance the Mosaic” within our Conference. “We’ve learned that we must change or die,” says Yee. “Change is constant. But it’s not just population change,” he notes. “It’s generational change. It’s demographic change. It’s technological change. If the church is really going to be the church,” says Yee, “then we’ve got to embrace these realities and understand how to do church differently

to reach the people God is bringing to our region.”

One church that is taking this new reality seriously is Newsong Church in Irvine, CA. Under the leadership of Pastor David Gibbons, this church attempts to live as “3rd Culture Christians,” defined by Gibbons as “the mindset and will to love, learn, and serve in any culture, even in the midst of pain and discomfort.”



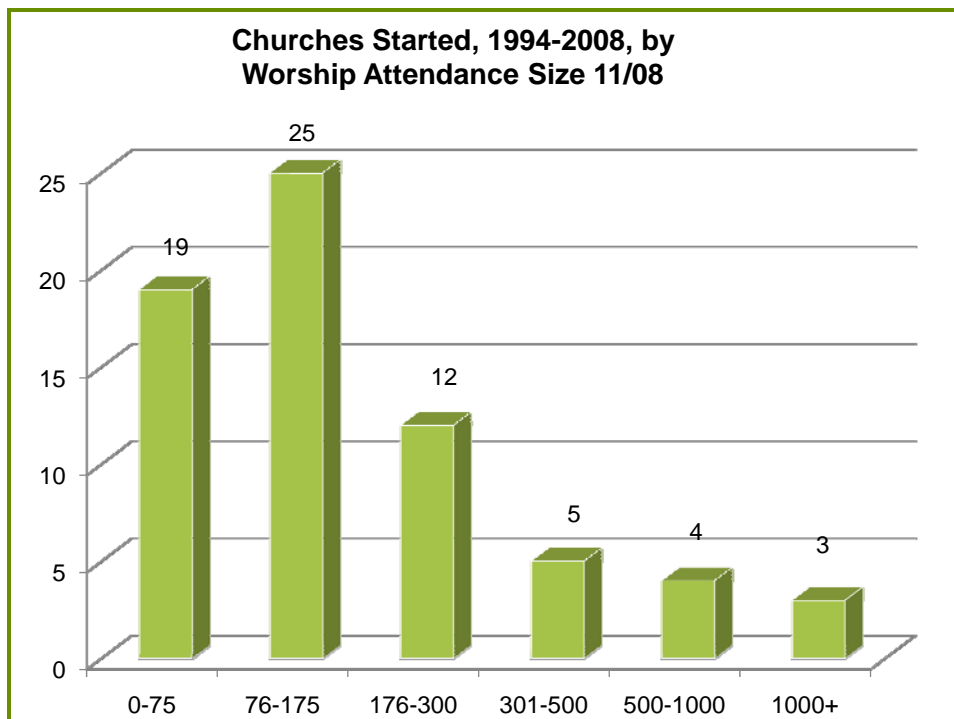
“Gone is the day of ‘build it and they will come.’ We need to go to unlikely and uncomfortable places, not just the usual places that are familiar. And we have to collaborate.”

Greg Yee

Newsong has truly embraced the 3rd Culture concept, taking any steps necessary to reach people for Christ. Gibbons shares that, “we’ve moved over thirty times to different rooms and locations. We’ve met in other churches, hotels, a park, a nightclub, and even the Elk’s Lodge. Today,” says Gibbons, “Newsong has grown into a dynamic, multi-ethnic church with at least fifteen different races represented in our congregation. The Asian population is the largest in our church, but the Caucasian, Latino, and African-American crowd is growing every year.” Gibbons explains that, “We are intentional and committed to being a church that represents the beauty, mystery, and diversity found in God.”

Greg Yee calls this “messy church,” and he’s excited that there are a growing number of churches within the PSWC that are learning how to do “messy church” and reach across barriers. Bayside of South Sacramento – or BOSS, as they like to call themselves, is an example of this. Parented by Bayside of Granite Bay, and pastored by Sherwood Carthen, BOSS is intentionally multi-ethnic in every area of church life, from worship style to volunteer teams. In just four years, BOSS has baptized hundreds of new believers, grown to nearly 2,500 in worship, and is roughly 35% African-American, 35% Caucasian, 20% Latino, and 10% Asian. As Carthen says, “it’s like a little bit of heaven here on earth.”

The Covenant was blessed by yet another new church committed to diversity. This new mission outpost was embraced in 2001 when the state of Hawaii – the most ethnically diverse state in the United States – was added to the PSWC. Wellspring Covenant Church in Aiea (near Honolulu) was planted in the spring of 2001, with an ethnically diverse team of four pastors (Dale Vallejo-Sanderson



serving as the lead church planter). All of them were well-rooted in the island culture and community. Carlson writes that “Wellspring is truly a multi-ethnic church that not only establishes a Covenant presence on the island, but also opens the door for expanded mission throughout the Pacific Rim in years to come.” In 2006, Puna Congregational Christian Church in Kea’au (near Hilo) was adopted into the Covenant family, continuing to build our ministry in the region. Both churches are engaged in ministries of compassion, seeking to flesh out the gospel in places of great human need as well.

In order to further reach across barriers, a growing number of our churches are also creatively engaging in ministries of compassion and justice. Some are forming Community Development Corporations, providing ministries of food, counseling, tutoring, and so on. Others, such as Newsong in North Orange County, are going to every social service agency in their area and finding ways to partner and support these organizations in meeting the needs of the community.

However, in doing “messy church,” our young churches are not just thinking locally, they’re also thinking globally. Within our Conference, there are Hispanic church plants that have partnered to start new churches in Mexico and Nicaragua. They had connections with people in these countries in areas where the Department of World Mission is not currently working, but that didn’t slow them down. They’ve raised their own funds and support to help start churches beyond our borders.

Another innovative church plant is taking place with Chinese Neighborhood Covenant Church in Rosemead, California. Through a four-way partnership between the PSWC, the Dept. of Church Growth and Evangelism, the Dept. of World Mission and the Covenant Church of Taiwan, this new church is reaching out to first-generation Chinese immigrants.



The PSWC church planting movement has unleashed the power of diversity.”

Ron Short

Our Conference has made some significant advances in the past fifteen years in terms of becoming more diverse. In 1994, fifteen of our churches were either multi-ethnic, or a specific ethnic group (other than Euro-American); this represented about 10% of our total attendance. However, by 2009, 62 of our churches were either multi-ethnic, or a specific ethnic group (other than Euro-American), representing 27% of our total attendance. As Pastor Ron Short of Lakehills Covenant observes, “It’s fun watching how inclusive we’ve become, far more than we ever were. Our Conference is now more a reflection of the body of Christ.”

Challenges to Overcome

While we are doing well on so many fronts, there are areas that still need to be addressed. Evelyn Johnson observes that we have a challenge in reaching out to the African-American population and need to expand our networks to recruit key leaders.

Another area of challenge involves understanding how to do effective ministry in urban communities, especially among the urban poor. As Wayne Carlson explains, “There are unique challenges to planting churches in those settings because you have less financial resources and more social issues to overcome. These are difficult and at times even dangerous places to plant churches.”

According to Wayne Carlson, another factor to address as we go forward in church planting is the fact that in our increasingly post-Christian world, there is considerably less religious memory or



“The place we want to be is between two forces. First we want to be pushed by the Gospel, and second, we want to be pulled by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel pushes us into the future, it directs us forward. But the Holy Spirit is the One who is tilling the ground for what God wants to do next. We have to be aware of both forces and let them direct us.”

Dave Olson

knowledge. “In terms of our outreach,” he says, “we’re dealing more with people who have very little knowledge of the Bible and Jesus.” He believes we will need to find new models for church planting because “we can’t do so with the same set of assumptions and approaches that we could ten to fifteen years ago.”

In addition to these challenges, Evelyn Johnson is concerned with our “need to identify those young leaders who will be part of the leadership team.” She believes that, “Recruiting for the next generation of leaders will require lots of prayer and insight and networks.” As Dave Olson taught our Conference in the 90’s, finding the right leaders is crucial to effective church planting.

2020 Vision

The past fifteen years are certainly filled with amazing stories of God’s work in our Conference, but Pastor Ray Johnston of Bayside Church says, “You haven’t seen anything yet.” Johnston, always the visionary, believes that the next wave of church planting will take place through “individual churches planting scores of churches, which means we could see hundreds or thousands of new churches launched by 2020. That’s what I call 2020 vision.”

In terms of the whole movement, Evelyn Johnson says, “we need to be intentional about encouraging each church, regardless of their age or size, to be a multiplication center to expand the movement.” Dave Hanson of Bayside Church agrees and says, “you don’t have to be a big Bayside to have passion for lost people. You don’t have to go very far to find people who are lost or hurting, and you can help them.” Wayne Carlson believes that “Every church – small or large, young or old – has within it the seed of a new church.”

A tremendous example of this is Life Covenant Church in Torrance, California. This very young church has been committed to starting new churches, and within their first four years of existence – when their church was at 125 in attendance, they had already planted two additional churches and intend to plant one new church each year. “At Life,” says Pastor Tim Morey, “we are attempting to redefine what church is, and to help people see themselves as missionaries, sent intentionally and strategically into their particular workplaces, classrooms, and homes.”



“If we’re going to continue to be a region that impacts people for Christ, we simply have to be involved in and committed to church planting.”

Wayne Carlson



“The name ‘Covenant’ really means ‘in it together.’ Church planting is a great illustration of how the entire Conference, and the entire ECC, comes together to support the expansion of the work of Christ in the world.”

Gary Walter

Morey says this vision has been costly, but worth the price. “As we’ve planted churches,” he shares, “I’ve been amazed by the joy people display as they sacrifice to make it happen. Last year when we planted our second church, even as they were writing checks people were asking me, ‘We’re doing this again next year, right?’”

This kind of joy is infectious, and Evelyn Johnson would love to see all of the churches in the PSWC have the opportunity to experience it. “We need to develop more partnerships,” says Johnson, “because not all churches can parent, but all churches can be involved in some way.” This kind of partnering will enable our Conference to propel the church planting movement forward with “2020 Vision.”

Johnson also points out that we have tremendous opportunities to move more intentionally into Nevada – particularly Reno and Las Vegas, as well as Arizona – particularly Phoenix and Tucson. She sees that “with the strength-



“Churches need to remember that we were all church plants at one point. In order to reach the rapidly growing population in our region, we’ve got to continue planting.”

Greg Yee

However, these numbers also reveal that the church planting task has never been more urgent or more fruitful. “We must keep praying that we may be carried along by the fast current of God’s will,” says John Notehelfer. Mark Novak also encourages us to remember that “there are always communities in need. Just be watching and listening for those places where the ground is broken up and ready for new seed.”

The opportunities for planting new churches in our region are incredible. According to Dave Olson, “the Covenant is in a valuable place for how the world is changing. America is becoming more post-modern, post-Christian, and multi-ethnic.” However, he believes, “the Covenant is in a unique position of being able to address these issues. How we understand Scripture and theology, our core values, our understanding of women in ministry, our embracing of multi-ethnicity, all help us address that. When I look at the younger generation,” says Olson, “and how they’re going to respond to the gospel, it seems that God has sovereignly and supernaturally brought out of our history the opportunity for us to be stewards of this for the future.”

May God allow us to continue being good stewards of the Gospel as we pursue His call in the Pacific Southwest Conference through planting new churches.

ening of the Sacramento churches, the potential to move into Nevada is much stronger than we once thought,” since the existing churches can provide partnerships and resources. Pastor Ron Short sees the same potential in Arizona, observing that “Phoenix and Tucson are currently where Sacramento was about fifteen years ago,” in terms of readiness for a new wave of church plants.

How We Are Different Now

In the past fifteen years, the PSWC has become more diverse and we have almost doubled in size, going from a November 1994 roster of 83 churches (72 of which still exist) to 151 churches as of March 2009. There are now more than 22,000 people attending one of our new churches planted since 1994. According to Evelyn Johnson’s guesstimate, “At least 60% of those people have either made a first time commitment to Christ, or have come back to church.”

These numbers reveal that God is on the move in our Conference, giving us incredible cause to celebrate.



“We’re never done. It’s never over. There are always communities in need.”

Mark Novak