



## Despite Physical Distancing, NCC Members Connect



Each week, people throughout the Northern California Conference find ways to connect with each other in fellowship—both in person and online. Here are a few recent examples:

### **“A Ministry that Feels Natural”**

*by Daisy Stephens*



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The Placerville church's fire bowl serves as an outdoor gathering place for fellowship and ministry, thanks to the efforts of the church's over-50 group, called Alegria (which means "joy").

For a long time, several of the Placerville church seniors had dreamed of creating a place for groups of all ages to come together in a comfortable environment and worship God in nature. Fred Stephens launched a fire bowl project planning team, but they had no money or adequate resources. Stephens and the team prayed that God would make a way for the project.

The Lord answered them by sending all the resources needed at little or no cost. Greg Fridley and Lemoin Brewer cleared the land. Lowell Spiva provided the timber for the benches, milled it, and delivered it at no cost. Bo Stewart at El Dorado Truss Company provided the steel for the legs and did the welding. Brandon and Jerry Dennis bored the holes for the rivets and poured the concrete for the walkway. Jim Shoun and Wally Cordis built the fire pit. Many others volunteered to sand and stain the benches, as well as paint bench legs.

The work began in August 2019 and finished in March 2020—one week before the pandemic lockdown. Life changed, and the newly finished gathering place sat dormant for many months. Eventually, groups began to worship and spend quality time together at the fire bowl, located near the church's pond. "Being able to be outdoors, get fresh air, and build relationships has been essential," said Brandon Kharns, Placerville church associate pastor.

"The fire bowl was a perfect place for us to create a ministry that feels natural," said Stephens. "To many people,



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their time at the fire bowl was a brief moment in a chaotic and scary time that felt normal and relaxed.”

### “Don’t Forget Me!”

*By Julie Lorenz*

In mid-April, the NCC Prison Ministries Rally and Training Day took place at the West Sacramento church. The theme of the day was “Don’t Forget Me!”



More than 70 people attended the event in person, following NCC COVID guidelines, while others watched online to learn ways to reach the incarcerated and recently released.

A variety of speakers gave presentations, including Virgil Childs, director of African American regional ministries for the Pacific Union Conference; Michael Ashley, founder/director of Touch of Love Ministries; Aaron Brieno, deputy chief of staff for California State Senator Ben Hueso; and Loland Moutray from Blade of Hope Ministries.

This past year has been difficult and lonely for people in prison. “I am grateful that our incarcerated brothers and sisters have not been forgotten during the pandemic,” said Willie Johnson, NCC prison ministries coordinator. “Letter writing has increased, giving them hope. Bibles and other Adventist books and literature continue to flow into the prisons.”

One of the day’s attendees was Victor Beale, head elder at the West Sacramento church, who has been involved in prison ministry for 33 years. He encourages others to get involved with this important outreach. “Prison ministry is what Jesus called us to do,” he said. “I believe that every call He makes, He equips us for.”



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### **“The Opportunity to Be Together”**

“Give Everything to Jesus: He Is Able!” was the theme of the annual Hispanic Women’s Retreat, held online in April.

Psychologist Yaqueline Tello and nutritionist María José Hummel provided hope and encouragement during their presentations, while Addi Yin and Sandra de Hernández blessed attendees with their music.

So far, the recordings have received more than 2,000 views.

“We received a blessing from the speakers, musicians, and the opportunity to be together, even though we were meeting online,” said Teresa Leal, Hispanic women’s ministries leader. “We look forward to being together in person next year at Leoni Meadows.”



### **“A Reunion of Brothers”**

On April 30 and May 1, men from around Northern California and beyond gathered online for the 34th Christian Men’s Retreat (CMR). Doug Tilstra, vice president for student life at Walla Walla University, spoke on “The Perils and Possibilities of Power.”

Usually held at Leoni Meadows, the CMR is an annual inspirational event for men ages 16 and older. “Each year our mission is to give men the opportunity to fellowship together, to listen to dedicated Christian speakers, and to establish a closer relationship with Jesus Christ,” said organizer Keith Stafford, who planned the retreat with Bill Whitted, Alvin Cacho, and with the support of the NCC communication and development department. “We want to help men be better husbands, better fathers, and better men of God in the community.”

Stafford invites men from throughout the union to attend next year’s event, April 29 to May 1. “It’s like a family reunion of brothers from all cultures and all backgrounds,” he said. “When you form a friendship through this retreat, it’s everlasting.”

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*source "Northern Lights."*