

southern connect



Loving My Neighbor

Within the Southern California Conference mission statement is a call not only to be community minded but also community engaged. In the Gospel of Luke, we find a conversation between Jesus and an unnamed lawyer. In the heart of their colloquy, the lawyer asks the question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus, in His concise and breviloquent

way, responds by asking, “What is written in the law? How

readest thou?” The lawyer replies, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus says, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:25-28, KJV).

The Southern California Conference is committed to loving our neighbors, which is why we have made community engagement one of our strategic objectives for healthy churches.

Community engagement is more than just lip service. It is much like what educator Michael J. Graham once wrote: “Service is what prayer looks like when it gets up off its knees and walks around in the world.” In other words, community engagement is more than outreach; it is how the church becomes rooted in the places and among the people God has called it to serve.

In far too many of our churches, it has been said that it is easy to become so caught up in *doing* church that we

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forget that our ultimate calling is to *be* the church. To be the church means more than simply standing on the sidelines; it means being willing to get involved and engaged in the communities we serve. Healthy churches recognize that their purpose is not only to

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Royal L. Harrison
Executive Vice President



Southern California Conference
of Seventh-day Adventists

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serve the people within their walls but also to serve and care for those outside their walls.

Jesus said to the lawyer, "This do, and thou shalt live." I want to emphasize those two simple words: "do this." Jesus did not say, "Plan this," even though planning may be necessary. He did not say, "Vote on this," although the church may need to vote. He did not even say, "Pray this," although I would certainly encourage the church to pray. Instead, Jesus said, "Do this."

In other words, after the planning, after the voting, and after the praying—do something! Far too many of our churches never get around to taking action because they have a

chronic condition called "paralysis of analysis." As a result, the church suffers, and so does the community. I want to encourage our churches to move beyond simply doing church and start being the church by becoming actively involved and engaged in our communities, loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

One of the ways the Southern California Conference will inspire and prepare our churches to become more involved in their communities is through our upcoming conference, Impact26: Inspiring Members to Impact Their Communities. The conference will be held at White Memorial church on Sabbath, September 19, at 4:00 p.m. We hope to see you there! •

IMPACT26

INSPIRING MEMBERS TO IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITIES

Visit scc.adventist.org/impact or scan the QR code to register & learn more.

SEPTEMBER 19

WHITE MEMORIAL CHURCH

4:00 P.M.



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Southern California Conference
of Seventh-day Adventists



Celebrating | Cultivating
Our History | Our Future

EST. 1901

This fall, the Southern California Conference celebrates 125 years since its organization. We have much to celebrate throughout 125 years of rich history—and as we move forward, cultivating our future together is about every church and every member engaging in the mission. Check out a sneak peek of the history here!



OCTOBER 10, 2026



1873 The California Conference, headquartered in Oakland, was established with seven churches, 238 members, and \$2,151.51 tithe. J.N. Loughborough was president.



1932 After several territory changes in the state, the California Conference was dissolved, establishing the current structure: Northern, Central, Southern, and Southeastern California Conferences, plus parts of Nevada-Utah.



1901 The Southern California Conference was established as the first conference to be created within the California Conference. The rest of the state remained under the California Conference.



The Southern California Conference headquarters moved to its current building in Glendale—its eighth address.

1953

Marco Topete Is Ordained

BY ARAYA MOSS

“I remember telling my pastor,” Marco Topete recalled, “once upon a time, way before I ever did any form of full-time ministry, I said, ‘I want to become a pastor.’ And he said, ‘Why do you want to become a pastor?’ I replied, ‘Because I love preaching.’ And he shared with me after I made that comment that that was the smallest part of the job description. And I’ve always remembered what he said, but I never really understood it, obviously, until I became a pastor myself. Seeing people grow spiritually is the reason why I’m a pastor today.”

Topete’s ministry began with Youth Rush in the Central California Conference in the summer of 2014. His time spent door to door talking to people about God was the stepping stone for a career in ministry. He gained further experience at the local church as a youth leader, an elder in training, and as a Bible worker in that conference before being called to serve in Southern California Conference’s literature ministries department beginning in 2017. In 2023, he transitioned to pastoral ministry, first as pastor at Van Nuys church and currently as pastor of Palmdale church. Everywhere he went, mentoring people in their spiritual growth was embedded in his ministry.

Palmdale church was packed with family, friends, and colleagues for Topete’s ordination service this spring to affirm the call God placed on Topete many years ago.

At the ceremony, Tony Rodriguez, pastor of Lancaster church,

whom Topete cites as his mentor, spoke of this new beginning in Topete’s ministry.

“As baptism is pivotal in the life of a believer, for the gospel ministry and gospel minister, ordination is essential,” Rodriquez shared. “But in both situations, it’s just the beginning. As you hold onto Jesus, as you hold onto your wife, as you hold onto your boys, God will continue the good work that He started in your life days and years ago.”



After being presented with new credentials and his ordination certificate, Topete poses for a photo with his wife, Lisa, and administrators from SCC. From left to right: Royal Harrison, SCC executive vice president; Kathleen V. Diaz, SCC treasurer/CFO; Lisa Topete; Marco Topete; Danny Chan, SCC executive secretary; and Branden Stoltz, SCC West Region director.

standing on how I can communicate these things. Because if these little glimpses of love, light, and hope are impacting me, just imagine if I’m able to communicate these things effectively to my congregation and how those things will also affect them.” ●



Ordained ministers lay hands on Topete as Royal Harrison, SCC executive vice president, prays the ordination prayer.

Sharing the love of Jesus with others has been such an integral part of Topete’s life, and as his ministry evolves, he’s hopeful about the ways God will continue to guide that mission.

“Looking into the future, I definitely want to continue to grow in my understanding of God’s love and grace,” Topete said. “I want to grow in my under-