

southernconnect



Salvador Garcia,
*Youth Ministries
Director*

Love on the *Move*

In 1962, when Karl Barth, one of the greatest theological minds of the 20th century, visited the University of Chicago during his lecture tour of the U.S., he was asked to summarize his whole life's work in theology in a sentence. The famous theologian responded, "Yes, I can. In the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

As humans, we often use the word "love" for many things. For example, I love spaghetti. I love ice cream. I love the Los Angeles Lakers. I love cold weather. I really do. But what does it mean when I say I love something? I guess when I say I love ice cream, I am saying that "I am endeared to it. I really like it."

So what does love mean? What about when used in relation to God and His sovereignty? What does it mean to say, "God loves you"? What does it mean to say, "I love God"?

Recently, my father was sick in the hospital for 10 months straight. I had the opportunity to visit him each week, to be by his bedside, and to show him that love is an action. Love is not passive. Over 10 months, my father got to experience the love of God each day of his life. Through the care of doctors, nurses, and the visitation of family and friends, he experienced God's love.

The apostle Paul, the greatest Christian and theological mind that has ever lived, writes: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the

present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39, NIV). Nothing can separate us from the love of God, and yet how often and quickly do we forget about God's unconditional love with no strings attached? We certainly cannot earn or merit God's love. It is given to us as a gift.

Many Bible-believing students are concerned with perfection and holiness in the last days. Some have taken Jesus' words, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, NIV), as a literal command. Some have gotten discouraged with trying to be perfect and sinless, and some give up altogether.

John was a youth at a church I pastored. He called me one day to tell me that the devil had defeated him and caused him to sin and stop being perfect. He asked me to come to his house to pray for his salvation.

When I got to his house, he told me, "Pastor, the devil defeated me today and has taken away my perfect standing before God." I was worried, to say the least. He continued by saying, "I have been eating just fruit and bread and drinking water for the last 30 days to overcome my sinful flesh. However, after 30 days, the devil finally defeated me."

John continued, "As I was walking down the street today, I could no longer overcome the flesh and be perfect. I went inside a Subway restaurant and ordered two footlong turkey sandwiches. They tasted so good. Then I went inside a Burger King and ordered a Double Whopper with cheese. It was so sinful. Finally, I went inside a liquor store and bought a king-size Snickers and ate it all. I feel so unworthy and sinful. Can

THE BEST DEFINITION OF
LOVE IS A CREATOR DYING
ON THE CROSS FOR THE
SINS OF THE WORLD.

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Harrison's ordination service highlighted her powerful testimony

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Andy Villanueva Joins SCC Literature Ministries

BY LAUREN LACSON

In the summer of 2009, Villanueva experienced his first summer as a Youth Rush student. After four summers, wanting to receive deeper Bible work and evangelism training, he felt impressed to attend SOULS West.

After graduation, he joined the Southeastern California Conference as assistant literature ministries director. He later accepted a call to Oregon Conference in 2015 as associate director of outreach ministries.

This summer, Villanueva accepted a call to join the Southern California Conference team as the new literature ministries director. Villanueva and his wife both grew up in Southern California, and with a young daughter, it's a blessing to be near family. "We began praying about it, and we just

starting seeing God open up different things that we were praying for specifically," he said.

Villanueva has experienced the personal, spiritual impact of literature ministries. "I knew the power that literature ministry has for church members and young people involved in doing outreach," he said.

"What I see in the future," he continued, "is our department becoming a resource for schools out in the field as well as for churches."

"Everyone is called to do ministry," he said. "Oftentimes, literature ministry can seem like a scary thought for a lot of people. But in reality, anybody can do literature evangelism. When you put yourself out there—to actually step out of your comfort zone—and



Villanueva with his wife, Areli, and daughter, Adeline.

you leave some room there for the Holy Spirit to work, you're going to be able to see how God uses all of us." ●

Celeste Harrison Is Ordained

BY ARAYA MOSS

Celeste Harrison began her journey in ministry as a Pathfinder director 20 years ago. The first time she heard God's call was during a baptism of three Pathfinders; however, she felt neither ready for nor worthy of this call.

But God pursued her and continued to work on her until she finally stepped forward into her calling.



Harrison (center) receives her new credential from John H. Cress, SCC executive secretary.

"I began to see that all of my life God has been leading me, teaching me, working with me, instilling things in me," Harrison said, "even when I didn't know it."

At her ordination service this summer, this call was affirmed by all in attendance: members from Norwalk and South Bay churches, where Harrison previously served; members from Alhambra church, where she currently serves as pastor; plus family, friends, and colleagues from the Southern California Conference (SCC).

"God has been calling you for a long time," Velino A. Salazar, SCC president, said in his homily. "God is the only one who is in the business of calling people. Our role is to send out

workers into the harvest field."

When Harrison received her new credentials, her excitement for this next step in her ministry was clear. In her response, she shared how she at first saw this ordination as a destination but soon realized that it's just one step in her journey in ministry.

"I'm so incredibly blessed to have gone through all these things and to have learned so much along the way," Harrison said, acknowledging how her life experiences have prepared her for pastoral ministry. "Journeying is how we build relationships. You guys are here with me today because we journeyed together."

Watch at <https://scc.adventist.org/celeste-harrison-ordination>. ●

in transition

NEW EMPLOYEES

Voted July 13 & 27, August 10, 2023

Kristine Butler | Teacher, San Gabriel Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Michael Butler | Teacher, San Gabriel Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Jonny Moor | Teacher (Secondary), Glendale Adventist Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Molly Lynn Moore | Elementary Teacher, Conejo Adventist Elementary, as of July 1, 2023.

Luis Reyna Alvarez | Music Teacher, Glendale Adventist Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Brett Wilson | Teacher (Secondary), Newbury Park Adventist Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Alfredo Breto-Prieto | Pastor, El Shaddai and Glassell Park Spanish churches, as of July 5, 2023.

Orbel Lastima | Teacher (Grades 7-8), San Fernando Valley Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Mary Lemasters-Tahir | Teacher (Grade 6), Conejo Adventist Elementary, as of July 1, 2023.

Gi Woong Kim | Pastor, Glendale Korean church, as of August 1, 2023.

Andrew Wortham | Teacher, Los Angeles Adventist Elementary, as of July 1, 2023.

Ryan Lacson | Associate Pastor, Sylmar church and West Region assignments, as of August 13, 2023.

TRANSFERS WITHIN SCC

Voted July 13 & 27, 2023

Kirsten Born | From Teacher to Teaching Principal, South Bay Christian School, as of July 1, 2023.

Amanda Johnston | From Teacher to Middle School Teaching Principal, South Bay Christian School, as of July 1, 2023.

LEAVING SCC

Voted July 13 & August 10, 2023

Cabel Bumanglag | From Art Teacher (Grades 9-12), San Gabriel Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Iris Escudero | From Marketing Director, San Gabriel Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Iris Ferrando | From Teacher, Glendale Adventist Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Hannah Gallant | From Modern Languages Teacher (Grades 9-12), San Gabriel Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Roger Gallant | From Bible Teacher (Grades 9-12), San Gabriel Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Patricia Garcia | From Elementary Teacher, Los Angeles Adventist Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Xiomara Jimenez | From Teacher, Adventist Union School, as of June 30, 2023.

Kahmya Pridgett | From Elementary Teacher, Los Angeles Adventist Academy, as of June 30, 2023.

Adrienne Rowe-Saulsbury | From Principal, South Bay Christian School, as of June 30, 2023.

Mike Kim | From Associate Pastor, Glendale City church, as of August 12, 2023.

Todd Leonard | From Senior Pastor, Glendale City church, as of September 5, 2023.

Donald Smith | From Associate Pastor, White Memorial church, as of August 6, 2023.

Paulette Park | From Teacher to Teacher/Vice Principal, Newbury Park Adventist Academy, as of July 1, 2023.

Edbert Carceler | From APC to Ministerial Intern, Pasadena church, as of July 1, 2023.

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AN INSIDE LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

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Lauren Lacson

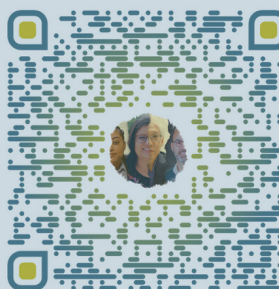
Submit a story

Email us at:
communication@sccsda.org

Have you ever wondered what the Southern California Conference does? Why do we even need a conference in the first place? "We Are SCC," a documentary series, explores the inner workings of the conference and the dedicated employees who work there. Discover the people behind the mission and how their jobs affect local churches and schools within the SCC territory.

Watch the playlist and stay tuned for new releases:

scc.adventist.org/wearescc



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READ MORE SCC STORIES

scc.adventist.org/stories



you pray for me?"

I have to confess, I had never felt so good to pray for someone who thought that what they ate made them sinful and imperfect. I said in my heart, "Thank you, Jesus, that John only ate turkey, a beef burger, and a giant chocolate bar."

Somewhere in John's journey, he became confused regarding the love of God. We can never earn God's love. It is a gift.

So what is love? The best definition of love is a Creator dying on the cross for the sins of the world. That is an amazing love. When I was a student at PUC and worked in the dorms doing maintenance, I saw a picture inside Andre Hall that said, "So I asked Jesus, 'How much do you love me?' Then He stretched out His hands and said, 'This much.' Then He died for you and me."

In our spiritual journey, we may often come before Jesus and weep because of our shortcomings. "The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 64). However, keep your eyes on Jesus. Martin Luther once said, "When I look at myself, I don't see how I can be saved. When I look at Christ, I don't see how I can be lost."

So, yes, I love spaghetti. I love ice cream. I love the Los Angeles Lakers. I love cold weather. But there's something greater that I love: God's relentless pursuit of people like you and me. ●