Southern California Retreat
By Bruce McLain

Beautiful Dana Point was the setting for the annual retreat for Christian workers in Southern California on Sept. 18-20. The first evening began with a potluck dinner, followed by worship and a challenging and encouraging video. Tuesday was relaxing, with morning fellowship and then lunch together at a local restaurant. After an afternoon of free time, we were blessed by another wonderful time of worship and a second timely video. On Wednesday morning we gathered for sharing and praying together before heading home. This was the first time Margie and I have been able to attend this retreat, and we were blessed by the fellowship with our coworkers in Southern California. We are thankful for the leadership that Robin and Diane Montgomery have given to this ministry for many years.

16th Anniversary of Sovereign Grace Baptist
On Sunday, Aug. 20, 2017, Sovereign Grace Baptist Church in Modesto, Calif., celebrated its 16th anniversary. The day started with a brief history of how the church began on Pastor William Heinrich’s front lawn. Next Pastor Heinrich, who “planted” the church, spoke on “The Hour of God,” pointing out that the church today is where God meets with His people to be worshiped and enjoyed.

At the end of the service, Pastor Johnnie Sloan brought forward all who had signed the church charter in 2001. Then he invited those who had asked to join the church that Sunday to join them, and the church voted unanimously to accept them. The charter members were the first to give the new members the right hand of fellowship.

After the service a potluck was held in the social hall, with every seat filled. God’s decree for Sovereign Grace Baptist Church is providently prospering by His sovereign grace.

Preparing for Death
by Marcie Mendenhall

I’ve been watching my mom, Dee Wilcox, die. She was recently diagnosed with PSP (progressive supranuclear palsy), and daily, steadily she declines. But the truth is, I’ve been watching her die my entire life. In a recent effort to express empathy and create solidarity, I told her everyone suffers from PD (progressive death). Each day that passes inches us closer to the grave.

So I’ve been watching her. I want to learn whatever I can about how it looks for a woman who loves Jesus to face her own death. What might we shift toward as disease and death breathe down our necks? I asked her a series of questions hoping to glean some answers. What surprised me the most was my lack of surprise as she slowly, tearfully responded. Her answers were the same that she would have given if I had asked them 10, 20, or even 30 years ago! I was a little disappointed. Where were the godly keys of life that I had hoped to take from her hand? Where was the fresh insight, the bombshell of realization that she embraced in the middle of her diagnosis?

Then I realized the slightly unromantic truth: there is no earth-shaking shift in her mindset and purpose as she ages and tip toes toward the grave. And do you know why? Because she was already living like she was dying 40 years ago! Let me summarize a few of the questions and responses:

- What do you regret? “I was never able to go to the foreign mission field and share the gospel there.”

- What are you glad you focused on? “Raising my family. Telling them about Jesus. Teaching other children about Jesus, the gospel, and missions.”

- What is hard about your disease? “Not being able to serve at church and teach about Jesus.”

- What is most important in life? “Accepting Christ as your Savior.”

- What do you want people to remember when you’re gone? “That I loved Jesus, that I loved my husband and family.”

See preparing cont.
Preventing Cost

The thematic thread became clear. Her life was wrapped up in desire to spread the gospel and to love others. So, also, is her death. Much of her anger these days is that her limbs and her voice fail her in this pursuit. But her heart still beats for it.

She filled her days with things that had already begun to swallow up her death in victory long before she was diagnosed with this heartbreaking condition. God has been robbing the grave’s curse and removing death’s sting throughout my mom’s life. Her focus on loving God and others weaves a consistent pattern of grace throughout her days. The gospel drives her in life and will be her literal saving grace in death.

May I indeed take heed to all she has taught me. Perhaps it’s earth shaking after all.

Marcie Mendenhall attends First Baptist, Windsor. Dtee Wilson is the daughter of Pastor Maurice Wilson (First Baptist, Windsor). She has actively served at Clear Lake Baptist Church, Lakeport.

Churches Seeking a Pastor:
Western Avenue Baptist, Brawley; First Baptist, Duccor; First Baptist, Petaluma; Community Baptist, Red Bluff; First Baptist, San Dimas; Deaf Baptist, San Jose; First Baptist, Wilmington.

Pastoral Changes:
Gary Barker to Grace Baptist, Paso Robles.
First Baptist Church of Clayton Valley in Concord, Calif., ordained Andrew Sanders, their associate pastor of music and student ministries, on Nov. 4. Pastor Chris Oliveri oversaw a thorough examination process that began in 2016 and included several pastors.

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Stronger Conference

By Jay Underwood

On Oct. 20–21, the northern churches of the CARBC were blessed by the Stronger Churches Conference, a ministry of Regular Baptist Press. Attendees were encouraged to participate in one of three tracks designed to promote stronger churches: Church Discipleship— Maturing Stronger Churches, Church Revitalization—Maximizing Stronger Churches, and Church Planting—Multiplying Stronger Churches. Since everyone was encouraged to stick with one track, multiple leaders from several churches fanned out, and everyone covered a separate track. Materials for all three tracks were made available to take home with the sincere offer from conference leaders that they would be more than willing to help through calls or email.

I chose the Church Revitalization track, which was tailored toward churches that feel like some of the vitality of ministry has been diminished or that may be in a season of complacency. Over four sessions, John and Darrin Greening walked us through how to evaluate our own church and ministry, assess its assets, motivate the team, and create a plan. John Greening pointed to the Epistle writers, who both positively and negatively evaluated the different churches they were writing to. Add to this Jesus’ assessment of the churches in Revelation 2—3, and it makes good sense that we would do the same within the contexts of our own ministries.

I found this conference to be of tremendous value for my ministry at First Baptist in Weaverville. I was very pleased both with the content of the material and with those teaching it, and I learned a lot. I am looking forward to walking my church’s leaders through these materials. My wish would be to invite the Stronger Church folks back for more.