One hundred eighty-seven students from Central California’s six senior academies joined together for the second Chorale Performance Weekend, February 4-6, 2010. Hosted by Mountain View Academy (MVA) and supported by volunteers from several Bay Area churches, the Sabbath afternoon mass choir concert culminated months of planning and practice.

“This is a two fold ministry,” says Ken Bullington, associate superintendent of education. “We wanted to bring our students together in an environment to elevate their talents and to also showcase their talents.”

“Music is an avenue of worship that can involve so many. It is yet another way to bring our students to God,” says Doug Knecht, music teacher at MVA. “Choir also helps them learn to work cooperatively within a group for the benefit of the group. We learn self-discipline in a way that is not evident in many other areas.”

Calvin Knipschild, a music teacher from Loma Linda Academy and music director for Christian Edition, an adult choral group, chose the music which was sent ahead to the academies. Michael Stencer from Pleasant Hill Academy, provided the piano accompaniment.

The ambitious schedule began with the arrival of the choirs at 4:00 p.m. Thursday evening rehearsals were 6:00-8:00 p.m. and 9:00-10:30 p.m. The first of Friday’s four rehearsals began 8:35 a.m. Students and their sponsors slept on the gymnasium floor and ate in the Academy’s cafeteria. A special Friday night vespers was a time for students to share their own ministry experiences while on mission trips and community outreaches. Thirty students came forward during a call for baptism.

By 8:45 Sabbath morning, the six school choirs spread out, each attending a Bay Area church for the worship service.

The concert began at 4:00 p.m. at the Mountain View Central Adventist Church. Each academy choir presented two musical pieces as did the mass choir. Afterward, students expressed awe and surprise at what was accomplished in such a short time.

“Most importantly, I have students who told me they felt closer to God during the presentation on Sabbath afternoon than they had ever felt before,” Knecht says.

“There is no limit to what a dedicated group of Christian students can achieve if we give them the chance to do it.”

“It was very moving and inspirational,” says Kenny Fraser, pastor of the Mountain View Central Church. “With the pieces they sang and the way the young people carried themselves, it was such a great witness of the Adventist church.”

Students perform a concert to a standing-room only crowd at the Mountain View Central Church. The theme “Soli Deo Gloria” in Latin means “Glory to God Alone.”
From Gangs to Sharing Jesus
by Caron Oswald

Antonette Acevedo had finally had enough. Her husband of 10 years had spent a significant time in jail or prison since their marriage. This time Larry was looking at going away for a long time.

As a young teen, Larry had seen life in a gang as his future – just like all of his friends. “My first arrest was at age 14 or 15,” says the Madera, Calif. resident. Drug addiction, stealing and dealing drugs were the usual charges. “I’ve spent half my life in prison,” Larry says.

“Always people had been telling me about Jesus, but I wanted nothing to do with that. My wife told me ‘I am done waiting on you’ and gave me a choice. I was at a crossroads,” Larry explains.

In the County jail, he made his choice to leave his gang. When a gang member “resigns,” there are consequences. When Larry heard that his car had been blown up, he feared for his family's life. Not hearing from Antonette, he didn’t know if she was alive.

For the first time in his life, Larry prayed. “I prayed sorta making a deal.” He didn’t know if he would ever see Antonette or his two children again. Finally, he received a letter from her. She was alive, but hadn’t changed her mind about her husband.

Moved to a prison in Corcoran, Calif. he began reading a Bible. An inmate gave him a Spirit of Prophecy book and he read it. And he began writing home to his wife, telling her all about what he was learning.

Antonette was skeptical about the “changed” Larry. “I don’t know about this,” she wrote.

When Larry was released, he went home to Madera to begin his new life and repair his marriage. On his first Mother’s Day home, he wanted his family to go to church together. Antonette wanted her Sunday church. Larry wanted the Adventist church.

“So, we compromised. One week we would go on Sabbath, the next week we would go on Sunday,” Larry explains.

The Adventist church family welcomed them with open arms. Members hired him until he could get a full-time job, and they helped meet their other needs as well. Finally the Adventist church was their only choice.

“We had to leave the other church,” Antonette says. “Every person here has been so nice, so supportive. We’ve felt so loved.”

After two years of Bible studies, Larry was baptized December 19, 2009. “Pastor Gerhard and Emilie Van Wyk were so patient with me!” Larry shares. Antonette followed the next week.

Larry is now giving two Bible studies and helps in Sabbath school.

“He has changed a lot. It was worth the wait,” Antonette says.

“I used to be a big worrier,” Larry says. “The God I serve is bigger than a gang. As long as I am doing His will, I don’t believe He will let anything happen to me.”

Family, Friends and Church Leaders
Gather for the Nichols’ Ordination Service
by Shenalyn Page

Ezequiel Nichols, pastor of the Selma Bilingual and Fresno Sequoia Hispanic churches, considers himself one of the blessed ones. As a fourth generation Mexican immigrant, he is one of the few who speaks Spanish and is a Seventh-day Adventist.

“Second and third generation Hispanics are trying to fit in,” he explains. “They don’t speak enough Spanish to go to the Hispanic churches, but they don’t fit in at the Anglo churches either. I’m one of them. I love the culture, but I find the language very difficult.”

During his ordination on March 6, 2010, at the Fresno Central Church, Nichols stated, “I have a burning desire in my heart to reach out to second and third generation Hispanics. I want to work with them and sustain them in their faith.”

Nichols grew up in an English-speaking Hispanic Adventist home near Fresno. He learned Spanish at church and from his grandparents. At 16, Nichols became the youth leader at the Sanger Bilingual Church. He saw Jesus working in people’s lives and sensed the call to pastoral ministry. But four years passed before he accepted the call and began studying theology at Pacific Union College.

After his graduation in June 2001, the Conference hired Nichols to work with second and third generation Hispanic youth at the Mountain View Hispanic Church. His first year was challenging. The church’s senior pastor was killed in a car accident shortly after Nichols arrived, thrusting him into a leadership role he felt unprepared to handle, especially with his imperfect Spanish.
After nearly a year, Pastor David Monsalve took the church’s leadership. Nichols learned a lot under his tutelage. Nichols became pastor of the Redwood City Hispanic Church in April 2005. It was here when he realized that “even though my Spanish is not perfect, God could use me to equip the members to carry out His work,” he says.

In May 2007, Nichols and his family moved to Andrews University for his masters of divinity and his wife Angelica’s (Quintero) masters in religious education. Since returning to California last summer, Nichols has been reaching out to second and third generation Hispanics and helping his members use their God-given spiritual gifts. Angelica is a full-time mother for the couple’s two children, Sammy, age 4, and Chloe, age 2.

“Responding to God’s call is the most rewarding decision I ever made in my life,” says Nichols. “I love seeing the changes in people’s lives. I will continue in ministry until the very end.”

For Your Information

Central’s membership has grown to over 35,000 with 1,517 new members joining in 2009. That is the largest single year growth in the past 25 years.

Go to www.campwawona.org and subscribe to the blog. You’ll get news as it happens, like the new chairs just donated and the first outdoor education class the week of March 29.

Check out ccc.adventist.org for all the coming conference-sponsored events, including information, applications and registration details.

Weekly Children’s Offering Takes on a New Look

While running errands, Jesse and Gloria Hernandez decided to eat lunch. “We had heard of a nice place,” Gloria says. But they couldn’t find it. “Let’s go home and have lunch. We can save money that way,” Jesse suggested.

That following Sabbath as the children came through the congregation with offering baskets, Gloria reached in her purse for her usual dollar. Having no cash, she remembered the lunch money they’d saved and got out her check book. “I wrote a check for $25 which was about what I thought lunch would have cost us,” she says.

Baptized four years ago, the Hernandez’ love their Lord, and have learned so many new things and they love their church family. That Sabbath, a new idea was born in Gloria’s mind. “I went home and made decorated envelopes and put them all over the house,” she says. Decorated with crayons, the envelopes have rainbows, happy faces, clouds, stars, and flowers.

“Every time we would save on something, I would put the money in an envelope,” Gloria explains. It wasn’t long before she was thinking of other cost saving ideas, like her regular $5.00 frozen yogurt. “These are things I can do without, things my Lord would be very happy to have for these children in His school.”

Recently Gloria had the privilege to call for the children’s offering and shared her envelope idea. “These envelopes serve as a reminder to prepare every Sabbath to come with money for student aid,” she says. “I get excited about coming to church prepared to give.”

1 Hispanic immigrants rapidly lose Spanish fluency, showing just 17% fluency in the third generation and 5% in the fourth. Massey, Douglass; Rumbaut, Ruben; and Bean, Frank. Population and Development Review. September 2006.

2 A 20-year study of Hispanic Adventism in Southern California found that “not a single third-or fourth-generation Hispanic was baptized, who was not already married to an Adventist or who had some other connection with the church. p. 35. Paulien, Jon (2008). Everlasting Gospel, Ever-Changing World: Introducing Jesus to A Skeptical Generation. Nampa: ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc.
During her commute to work, Tracy Pimentel turned on a Christian radio station and listened to a panel of women sharing their views on specific questions. “It was interesting to listen to them, their interaction,” Pimentel says. What a great idea for a program.

As Women’s Ministries leader for the Orosi church, she was always looking for ideas. “We are a small church and we have a lot of older ladies in our church. Social interaction and support of the ladies is important.” She shared the idea, including a printed transcript of the radio program, with her planning team.

All were in favor. That was Spring 2009.

Now for the guest panel. Pimentel asked women that had impacted her own life: Janet Page, conference president’s wife and conference women’s ministries director; Joyce Mulligan, pastor’s wife, because of her prayer life; Caron Oswald, for her outgoing nature and honest life experiences; Yolanda Leamon, pastor’s wife, for the change in their personal lives in the last year; and Atonte Myers (the youngest), pastor’s wife, how their lives had changed since going into ministry together.

“These women are just like the average woman in the average church. Everyone has struggles,” Pimentel says.

When Janet Page suggested the Spring Tea Luncheon be opened up to other churches, the five-member leadership team agreed. All worked outside the home, yet believed this was where God was leading. “Lord this is really overwhelming and please let it be about You and not me,” Pimentel prayed.

The numbers quickly grew from 40 to more than 125 ladies. The fellowship hall was maxed out, extra tables were rented and a very flexible ministry-minded caterer expanded the menu almost daily.

“Praise God, they [the panel] helped me a lot. I needed to know how to worship God,” says Mercedes Gonzales. Christina Monterroso felt impressed to come. “This was totally worth coming. As a single person I need to know how to find the right person. Learning that we can’t force people to be like us was so helpful.”

Listening while working, the professionally dressed teens and young adults serving as waiters were part of the ministry. “I liked the morning worship ideas about praising God in song,” says Estrella Ramos, age 15. Jackie Villegas, age 13, says “Spending time every day with God in a solitary place” is so very important for a close relationship with Jesus.

“I thought about all the time and effort it took. It was outstanding!” says Velma Mostenbocker, Women’s Ministries leader for the Porterville church. “And I am sure it [the panel] was helpful, especially for some of the younger women.”

“Everyday my niece (the caterer) would say to me ‘I can’t believe what the Lord has done for you guys,’” Pimentel says. The team leaders were having the same experience. “Every day we were talking about how the Lord was working things out. Just to see everything the Lord worked out was an awesome faith building experience!”

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The Orosi Women’s Ministries Team: (l-r) Aracely Lipps, Debbie Purviance, Fran Stoner, Tracey Pimentel, Donna Pimentel, Maralyn Wileman, and Karla Cummings.