

Report to the Presbytery of San Diego from the Ad-Hoc Linda Vista Committee Ebenezer Church Update November 2023

In September 2022 San Diego Presbytery voted to prioritize the ministry of Ebenezer Church, a New Worshipping Community in the PCUSA, in the building of the Linda Vista Presbyterian Church upon its closure. Among the details were financial support of Ebenezer using rental income generated on site (Verizon and Vine Preschool), the ongoing partnership and oversight of La Jolla Presbyterian Church in matters of institutional practice, the continuing worship of Young Nak Presbyterian Church and Palabra de Vida on site, and an annual report to the presbytery. At the September 2023 meeting of Presbytery, Noel Musicha and Jere Lester were received as Commissioned Ruling Elders with authority to lead pastoral ministry at Ebenezer.

Overview of the ministry and mission of Ebenezer Church

Sundays: the faith community gathers from 10:30-1:30, typically hosting 40-50 people, and a consistent handful of visitors. Worship gatherings are similar to many traditional church services - times of prayer, singing, and preaching/ teaching. There is a vibrant kids ministry, as the children's director makes the rounds to pick up a growing group of neighborhood kids. Their time together always ends with a meal, as eating together fosters the kind of community the Lord has called Ebenezer to form.

Wednesdays: Ebenezer offers Bible study and discipleship fundamentals. Originally the mid-week gathering began with an eye for houseless friends (or those previously houseless) and those who were previously incarcerated. About 10-15 typically attend, with time split between Bible Study and practical next steps (goal setting, financial literacy, mental health resources, etc), also ending with a lunch/meal together.

Saturdays: the first Saturday of the month, every other month, is set aside for a community serve day. Ebenezer tells their people that these Saturdays are their collective sermon to their neighbors- that painting over gang signs, picking up trash, doing projects for the local schools, making meals for the houseless, planting gardens, etc. is one of the most effective ways to communicate hope to others. People gather at the church for a quick devotional before dividing up into different groups with our different partners (SDPD, other churches, city council, etc), and regather after a few hours for a meal together.

As a New Worshipping Community, Ebenezer cannot have a session, but they do have a church council. Jere and Noel, together with the council and other church staff, have smoothly developed the necessary practices for institutional maintenance with the help of La Jolla Pres.

Ebenezer celebrated its 7th anniversary last September. From the start, Jere and Noel understood a calling to the neighborhood and particularly to children and youth, initially spending Friday mornings at the middle school, which fed into local sports programs. Now Jere is on the football staff at Kearny High School, where Noel just became head soccer coach, among other school partnerships. They are in at least one and often all of the local elementary schools, middle school, and high school daily. The fruits of these personal efforts are growing.

The nearby University of San Diego has been a partner to Ebenezer in local mission, and in the spring Noel will be an adjunct professor at USD, furthering that connection. Ebenezer continues to work on community efforts in housing, gangs, and youth.

Ebenezer and other congregations worshiping on site

The Linda Vista Administrative Commission determined a preliminary Sunday worship schedule to take begin in April 2023, six months into the new arrangement among the three churches now sharing the former Linda Vista Presbyterian Church. That schedule was not ideal. Before that schedule took effect, Jere and Noel had established good relationships with Young Nak Presbyterian Church and Palabra de Vida, creating a cooperative spirit among all and devising a new schedule that was enthusiastically accepted. A healthy relationship has also been established between Ebenezer and the Vine Preschool (daycare) on site. Our committee credits Noel and Jere with excellent work in this regard.

Property Update

The fellowship hall has been remodeled attractively to appeal to the community, and now serves as the “front door” of Ebenezer to the community. Palabra de Vida contributed to the renovation of the room. The building is a vital part of Ebenezer’s outreach.

The church building is regularly used for AA and town council meetings. Ebenezer’s willingness to make the fellowship hall available for neighborhood events at no or reasonable cost (such as for a quinceanera or a funeral) is an effective outreach to the community.

The condition of the roof will be reviewed as rainy season approaches.

Financial Report

July 2022 – June 2023 Operating Budget: Income \$250,408 Expense \$245,499
Ebenezer has a lean budget, as funding sources in urban ministry can be challenging.

The \$90,000 maintenance fund set aside for property issues or renovations has not been used. Ebenezer has applied for a \$15,000 grant from the Synod Matthew 25 fund, and a Walton grant from the PCUSA.

Oversight of La Jolla Presbyterian Church

LJPC states that it has been a privilege to journey with Ebenezer for the past seven years, and for this past year in a more “official” capacity based on the recommendations of SD Presbytery. LJPC has been asked to provide oversight in several areas and this has all been working well.

“Though our congregations are located in two very different communities, the commitment to offering the hope of Jesus unites us. In recent months LJPC has joined Ebenezer in some of their work days and Jere and Noel have preached at LJPC. There is a great partnership between our two congregations that continues to develop. Pastor Paul meets with Jere and Noel every couple of months and other people at LJPC participate in various ways at Ebenezer. It has been a gift to be on this journey with Ebenezer and LJPC looks forward to continuing to be part of the good work that is happening in Linda Vista.” *Paul Cunningham, pastor LJPC*

Celebration

While our committee has no authority to make recommendations to the Presbytery, we hope that a date will be set for a Sunday morning in early 2024 for the Presbytery and congregation to celebrate the calling of Noel and Jere as Commissioned Ruling Elders, and the ongoing partnership between Ebenezer and the Presbytery of San Diego.

Respectfully submitted by the Ad Hoc Linda Vista Committee:

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in consultation with Jere Lester, Noel Musicha, and Paul Cunningham (LJPC)