

- ¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
- ¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
- ¹⁴ In old age they still produce fruit;
they are always green and full of sap,
- ¹⁵ showing that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. *Psalm 92:12-15*

Searching for Connection

Reflecting on the Hispanic/Latino Pastors Sabbath Retreat

Rev. Amy Mendez

The pandemic changed my desire to connect with others for fear of getting sick and to protect my sister, who has survived lymphoma cancer. After my retirement, I also needed to rest from 25 years of full-time ministry. When I was invited to attend the pastoral retreat at Zephyr Point, I believed I was the first to send the registration. I missed connecting with people in the church because that's what I've done all my life. There is something special about going away, being with others, searching for connection and rest, and allowing God to use that time to draw me closer.

Thanks to the scholarships provided by San Gabriel Presbytery, we rented a car, and four pastors from our Presbytery drove to Zephyr Point Presbyterian Camp. I was not looking forward to a bunk bed, but to my surprise, I had a nice bed and a room facing the lake. Four weeks before the retreat, the main speaker had canceled due to a family emergency. The organizing team asked me if I could help, and with a bit of hesitation, I said yes.

At our retreat, we had fantastic worship services in the morning and evening and plenty of time to rest. We were encouraged to spend sacred space alone and in community. Rev. Frank and Lizzie Giraldo led us during worship time; Rudy Carrasco and I teamed up to unfold the joys and challenges of finding time to relax, rejuvenate, and flourish as leaders in the church. We had workshops, conversations, and reflections on discovering how to rejuvenate and thrive in our own busy personal lives and ministry. I especially appreciated a workshop called "Caring for Self While Flourishing" led by Los Ranchos Presbytery Executive Tom Carmer. We also participated with TruCenter in the most dynamic online Narrative-Based Assessment learning and found our weaknesses and strengths as leaders, led by Tim Yee.

One of our pastors said this retreat was the best experience because he had time to rest, laugh, and enjoy connecting with God and brothers and sisters in Christ, celebrating our diversity. Rev. Yee reminded us that God sees us for who we are. The challenge is that God sees us; we, the Latino community, must make ourselves visible and let our voices be heard because our presence counts and our ministries also count.

The Psalm 92:12-15

The psalmist reminds us that when we are planted in God's house, like the palms and cedars of Lebanon, rooted in solid righteousness and God's grace, we are still standing, flourishing, bearing fruit, and being productive. Thank you, God, for colleagues, friends, and family and for the opportunity to serve and flourish in your praise.