



A Lesson in Love: SECC Youth Leaders Convention





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Pathfinder leaders attend convention.

The Southeastern California Conference (SECC) Youth Department hosted its 2021 Youth Leadership Convention at Pine Springs Ranch in September. The goal of the convention, according to Youth Director Aren Rennacker, was to “train, equip, and inspire the youth ministry leaders of this conference to lead thriving youth ministries in churches.” To this end, they held two dozen breakouts that focused on club ministries, children and family ministries, youth and young adult leadership, and community awareness and engagement.

Leaders continued to ask for help in how to respond to family members and loved ones who were coming out. In an effort to be relevant and helpful, the SECC youth department invited Bill Henson to help leaders as they minister to LGBT+ people and their families.

Henson is the founder of Posture Shift and has trained thousands of church leaders on how to become loving caretakers of LGBT+ people. He has also worked with the North American Division Commission on Human Sexuality. Together, they produced the book *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones: Adventist Edition*. This book is available for free at AdventSource. Customers are responsible for shipping.



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Bill Henson gives keynote address.

The purpose of the general sessions was not to debate doctrine but rather to describe good practice. Youth leaders were trained on how to love this group of people and how to show them the compassion of Christ. “Because we have this community of people we know God loves so much, it’s worth it to us as a church to talk about how we can love them as well,” said Rennacker.

“This is our exclusive goal. We want to love the way Jesus wanted us to love,” said Executive Secretary Patty Marruffo. As the former associate youth director, she helped organized the event.

Gabriela Navarro, a youth leader from the Ontario church, was grateful for the training. It was helpful to her to learn “what to say, what not to say, and what to do when someone opens up to you,” said Navarro. “I just wished this education was provided more often.”

Leaders also learned about love in the Faces of Human Trafficking Gallery. This space held over 250 pictures of human trafficking. There were exhibits, activities, and even a virtual reality experience that acquainted participants with the realities of human trafficking in the conference territory.

Benjamin Amoah, youth pastor at La Sierra University church, was impacted by the gallery. He was concerned that it would only display the horrors of human trafficking, but the gallery went a step further. “This was extremely well done and had resources. Instead of just showing trauma, it showed what you can do to help,” said Amoah.

By Andrea King