

Evergreen Notes

Redefining Belonging



By Rev. Doug Avilesbernal

The first church I pastored was a very homogeneous community surrounded by a remarkably diverse neighborhood. The church was made up of English and German descendants in their 60's and older who had no connections or relationships to the diversity just outside the church's doors. I got to work trying to engage with our diversity as soon as I arrived, fresh out of seminary. Still, my first 5 years of ministry felt like all my efforts were for naught. However, the deliberate and gradual process we were carrying out was planting and nurturing a new reality neither I nor our church community could see or even imagine. At that time none of us knew that rather than adjusting our current culture and structure we were in fact building a new reality.

After years of arduous work, the seeds we had been planting sprouted all at once in a beautiful mosaic of diversity announcing a radically new reality. The pivotal moment where we noticed this sprouting was the Christmas Eve service 4 years into my ministry at the church. I wanted to have something new for our worship service that year so several months earlier we put a diverse group together to help us think through what a new service could look like. The result of those hours of work was a highly creative way to incorporate our diversity into a worship service in such a way that it would flow as one worship experience instead of several "samples" of each of our cultures present. We decided that the entirety of the service would guide us all to a pivotal moment, the arrival of baby Jesus. We built a life size nativity scene in the front of the worship space with a spotlight on the empty manger full of hay. There was no sermon and the entire

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EVERGREEN ASSOCIATION
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Pray for Churches seeking Pastoral Leadership

Filipino-American Christian Fellowship,
Lynnwood, WA

Grace Baptist Church,
San Jose, CA

First Baptist Church of Denver, Denver, CO

Mt. Zion Baptist Church,
Seattle, WA

Shell Ridge Community Church,
Walnut Creek, CA

WellBEing Cohorts 2026



By Rev. Morgan Fletcher

In a world that often says being well is a luxury or only available with the latest trends, the WellBEing cohorts seek to debunk that myth and create space for church leaders to identify

what would allow them to thrive. These cohorts are grounded in the beliefs that being well is part of justice work and that it is our divine right as Beloveds.

In 2026, there will be two cohorts: Personal and Systems. The Personal wellBEing cohort is in its second year and the Systems cohort is in its first. Learn about both and register for one or both as this season invites you. Both cohorts will have a chance to connect in person at this year's annual gathering.

Systems Cohort

The wellBEing Systems cohort is open to senior pastors and one or two lay leaders for each congregation registered. The four sessions are focused on:

- 1) identifying when your community is at its best,
- 2) what system impedes your freedom to live into your best,
- 3) how to encourage or practice what is best about your community, and
- 4) what resistance within your system can you identify.

WellBEing Systems is free of charge for four sessions led by Rev. Sam Kim & Rev. Morgan C. Fletcher.

While Sam and Morgan will be the guides for this cohort it will be grounded in collaborative learning from the cohort members. Following session four, cohort members can work directly with Sam and Morgan for a consultation to cocreate an implementation plan to engage the system that impedes your

community's best selves. The consultation will cost \$200 and if you wish to work with one of the Pneuma Consultants or fellow congregations, there may be additional costs based on specific partners' fees. Sessions will begin in June and end in September, meeting once a month based on registrants' availability.

Personal Cohort

The WellBEing Personal cohorts will consist of up to six pastors who will receive the following support:

- one 45-minute intake session,
- four 60-minute sessions to coach and assess steps to support your personal well-being,
- one 45-minute exit session to brainstorm action steps to move forward with identified practices,
- three 90-minute group sessions focused on topics/resources chosen by cohort members.

Cohorts will begin in March and run through August, with each member scheduling their sessions with the cohort guide and through one poll to schedule the group sessions.

The cost for the Personal cohort is \$600/person and if a congregation can't cover this in full the Evergreen Association can subsidize up to 50% of the fee. Gatherings and sessions will be virtual, so wherever you live you are able to attend. Evergreen Association values exploring ways to be well – in service of those values, Evergreen will provide \$500/each to go to whatever item the cohort member identifies as going to their wellbeing.

Registration

Registration for both cohorts will open at the February Leadership Retreat and can be accessed [here](#).

To all who explore the 2026 WellBEing cohorts, thank you for taking this journey with us to find meaningful ways to invest in our pastors. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to [Rev. Sam](#) or [Pastor Morgan](#).



Reconnecting with Old Friends: Beyond Facebook



By Rev. Shavon Walker

Facebook users may still remember the first time they signed up and how excited they felt. Believe it or not,

that was 20 years ago. (time flies fast, doesn't it?) But Facebook now is not the same as Facebook back then. Endless ads, a confusing algorithm and missing posts have made it a less than pleasant place to be. Fortunately, there are other places to go for online social connection.

Let's look a little deeper into why people are leaving Facebook. The algorithm will show you posts and videos it thinks you want to see, but it might also skip showing you other things you'd want to see. That post from your local weather station telling you about a storm might be just fine, but it may be at the expense of finding out about your best friend's pregnancy surprise. The algorithm doesn't just show you posts; it will show you ads, sponsored content, and suggested posts too. Add in privacy concerns and data breaches, and many people feel as though it's time to move on.

It's human nature to want to connect with other human beings. And we humans want meaningful connections. To do that, we need platforms that can meet that need. Here are two to try out.

For online community, you can try stitch.net. Stitch allows you to make new social connections through events and activities. It's built by members for members, for whatever reason: friendship, companionship, romance, etc. All profiles are verified for safety; Stitch members often meet at real life locations throughout the year. Stitch does have free memberships, which include access to public activities, groups and discussions, along with limited messaging capability. Paid memberships start at \$20/month up to \$60/ month, with increasing perks. And Stitch is active in most major cities.

Sometimes you want to meet people in your neighborhood. Nextdoor is a useful app that helps connect you with people in your immediate area. You can even search old neighborhoods as well as your current one. On Nextdoor, you can find practical information as well as social connections (my favorite is the Free category, where you can look for items that others are getting rid of).

Nextdoor is completely free to use, but the social aspect can become more complaint focused than community focused.

That's it for this month. Next month, I'll introduce you to three more social platforms. If you have any questions, you can find me at Shavon@ea-abc.org. And don't forget to check us out at <https://ea-abc.org/>, our Facebook page and Twitter!

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worship space was darkened except for a spotlight on the manger to highlight the empty space even more. The baby Jesus was selected by our Mexican expats as the Catholic faithful there have a tradition of having a life size baby Jesus in their home altars. Near the end of our worship service, we came to the birth Scriptures (Luke 2:1-20) and as the reading was happening, we had one of our young Latino men bring baby Jesus and place him in the manger. This young man was raised Roman Catholic. So, for him bringing baby Jesus up to the manger at church on Christmas Eve was an honor difficult to describe in words. Understandably, he treated baby Jesus with upmost care, gently placing him on the manger, covering him up and staying until he was sure baby Jesus was safe and comfortable. He then walked back to his seat with his face glowing full of emotions.

On that day a disparate, diverse group, complete with all their prejudices against the other became a church where belonging escaped the constraints their cultures had placed on it and took root in the Gospel foundation of love and reconciliation with God's children as they are, not despite their differences. A Euro-American 65-year-old who was constantly told *Hispanics* were ruining his country saw a young Latino man care for HIS Jesus in ways he wished young *Americans* would. A Euro-American grandma finally got to see a young man not only be at HER church after years but be there full of emotion and appreciation. A young Latino man, used to discrimination, got to be at THEIR

(Euro-American People) church fully welcomed and given a prominent place during the most important part of what he would call mass. Baptist and Roman Catholics, who were young and old, US Citizens and expats who would probably would not talk to each other out in public, Euro, African American and Latino were all together discovering that once belonging escapes our inherited limitations far from being diluted, it grows into embracing all fully as they are without having to be assimilated. None of us at the church knew at that time that we were walking toward liberating belonging from the very rigid constraints we had inherited.

An Alternative Retreat

Can't make it to the in-person Evergreen Leadership Retreat on February 5-7? Still want to hear and participate in some of the great program that will be going on? Good News! You can sign up for the **Online Evergreen Leadership Retreat on Saturday, February 21st**. This retreat will go from 9am to Noon, and will be lead by Evergreen Staff. The schedule in brief is as follows:

9:00 – 10:00 How can we listen and respond to the Spirit?

10:00-10:15 What's on your spirit? "Blessings and Needs"

10:15-10:45 Breakout

10:45-11:00 Break

11:00-11:30 Report Back

11:30-12:00 Next Steps

To register for the Online Leadership retreat, fill out the online registration form here: <https://forms.office.com/r/WvuXYaAzuH>

Make sure you select the Clergy and Laity Online track!

Last Call for Cascade Meadows Snow Weekend



The recent heavy rain in the Cascades caused some damage to White Pine Road, the access to Cascade Meadows, but the damage has been repaired and no difficulties are expected for the EBA weekend event.

If you are interested in attending, please respond as indicated below.

Evergreen Baptist Association (EBA) is sponsoring a snow weekend at Cascade Meadows Camp February 20th-23rd.

An enjoyable weekend of snow shoeing, snow play, fellowship, relaxation in front of the fireplace, crafts and some spiritual growth opportunities. Indoor games, ping-pong and foosball are also available in the lodge. Activities will begin the evening of February 20th. You can choose either a two night or three night stay.

Cascade Meadows is an American Baptist Camp operated under the auspices of the Washington Baptist Convention, which all EBA churches are members of. Accommodations are camp style with attendees participating in food preparation and clean-up. Additional details about Cascade Meadows can be found on its web site: [Cascade Meadows Camp](http://CascadeMeadowsCamp.com).

Cost for the weekend is \$105 for two nights and \$150 for three nights. This includes a Friday night snack and meals through lunch on Monday. Campers provide their own sleeping bag or blankets and pillow.

If you would like to attend or have any questions please contact Mark Pittenger at mandmpittenger@comcast.net. Payment can be made at the following link: <https://square.link/u/N3i5cdOH>, via check mailed to the Evergreen office, or by scanning this QR code:



A Preview of the 2026 Evergreen Leadership Retreat

Still undecided about attending the upcoming **2026 Evergreen Leadership Retreat, happening Thursday, February 5th to Saturday February 7th, at Camp Burton on Vashon Island**? The lovely landscapes of Camp Burton not enough alluring enough on their own? The always tasty food this camp staff puts together, sensitive to dietary restrictions not enough to lure you to join us? Connecting with your fellow Evergreen folks from all across our region and across the nation not quiet sufficient to tempt you out to the island? Feel a strong need to know how we're going to be spending our time together before you feel you can commit to giving 27 to 51 hours of your one wild and precious life?

We get it. So here's a look at what you can expect. As always we're dividing this retreat into two portions, the Clergy retreat, and the shared Clergy and Laity Retreat.

The Clergy Retreat check in starts at 11am Thursday and our first real activity will be lunch together at 12:30pm. After lunch we'll have our first session, spending a couple hours working on some important listening to ourselves, our communities and each other. We'll get some free time at 3:30pm to explore the camp, read a book by the fire in the beautiful lodge, take a nap in your room in the retreat center, or however you want to use the two hours here, by yourself or with

others. One of the things Evergreen believes is that a retreat ought to truly be a retreat. That means making sure both the clergy and laity get time to and for themselves. 5:30pm brings the dinner bell, and after dinner a session with Pastor Morgan Fletcher of Present Nomads on individual and collective WellBEING (*See the article on page 2 for a bit more on how Evergreen and Present Nomads are working together to support our pastors and churches in 2026 and 2027*). Then we've got some more free time before lights out.

Thursday brings breakfast at 8:30am for our Clergy folks, and then breakouts and sharing time about the things that have blessed our churches and ourselves in the last year. We'll be reporting back on our insights and our work about the previous year.

11am is when check in begins for the Laity folks. Again, the first real event will be joining the Clergy for Lunch at 12:30pm. After lunch, Clergy and Laity will be given a chance to be introduced to two of our special guests, Amber Naylor of the ABC Creation Justice Network, and Jonathan Malone of Wilderness Journeys. Amber already works with a few Evergreen churches and pastors who have become "Creation Justice Churches." Jonathan Malone is the founder of Wilderness Journeys which leads spiritually aware backpacking trips and other outdoor adventures, including three for Evergreen just in the last couple of years, and others that a number of Evergreen folks have attended. They will be with us for the whole retreat, but this will be a chance for them to say a bit about themselves. Then we'll go into breakouts looking

towards what our churches' greatest needs in 2026 were, and reporting back together. This information alongside the churches' blessings are going to be evaluated by Evergreen Staff and Leadership to help shape our final steps at this retreat.

Then there's a few hours of free time for the whole group. Maybe you want to go find one of the trolls living on Vashon Island with Jonathan Malone? Maybe you need to rest in some other way. Again, we truly encourage you to do so. We'll gather again at 5:30pm for dinner, and after ask the important questions of "How does Evergreen live this current moment? And how is God moving?" Then we'll have a bit of free time again before turning in for the night.

Breakfast on Saturday at 8:30am will bring us together again. After we'll start looking at where are our gifts and needs coming together, and what are the things we want to explore. We will work together to identify the emerging themes and that will help shape the cohorts which will form afterwards. We'll have a special time for the caucuses to gather before lunch where there's no business on the table, but just a chance to connect and explore with one another, hear the celebrations and hurts our communities and we ourselves face. That time can (and probably will) spill over into the meal. After lunch Evergreen Staff and Leadership will sum up some of what we've worked on together, talking about next steps, including cohort sign ups and other things to follow up on. Finally Rev. Shavon Walker will lead us in a reflection tailored to our experience of the weekend.

We hope you'll join us for this great event. See the flyer for registration information!



EVERGREEN ASSOCIATION
—OF AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA—
TRANSLATING OUR UNITY TO THE WORLD

2026 Annual Leadership Retreat

February 5-7 at Camp Burton

9326 SW Bayview Dr, Vashon, WA 98070

February 21, Online on Zoom

Will run 9am to Noon

“Listening Together”

This year we’re going to be collaborating and learning together, and our focus will be hearing God and one another well. The Evergreen Staff, and Rev. Morgan Fletcher, our consultant for Well-Being for pastors and congregations, will be leading this time of listening for what God has placed before us, as churches and as the Evergreen Association.

In Person (2/5-7) Schedule

Thursday—Clergy Session

11am—Arrival & Registration

12:30pm—Lunch

1:30pm—First Session: Listening Well

3:30pm—Break/Free Time

5:30pm—Dinner

6:30pm—Second Session: Well-Being Personally and Congregationally

7:30pm—Free Time

Friday—Combine @ Lunch

8:30am—Breakfast

9:30am—Breakout Sessions

10:30am—Sharing Together

11am—Laity Arrival & Registration

12:30pm—Lunch—Laity join Clergy

1:30pm—Breakout: What are your churches

most concerned about?

2:30pm—Break/Free Time

5:30pm—Dinner

6:30pm—Evergreen Open Session—How does Evergreen Live This Moment?

7:30pm—Free time

Saturday—Combined Session

8:30am—Breakfast

9:30am—Clergy & Laity: What would you like to explore?

10:30am—Identifying Emerging Themes

11:30am—Caucus Connection

12:30pm—Lunch

1:30pm—Next Steps

2:30pm—Closing Reflection

3:00pm—Departure

Online (2/21) Schedule

9am—How can we be open to the Spirit?

10:45am—Break

10am—What’s on your spirit?

11:00am—Report Back

10:15am—Breakouts

11:45am—Next Steps and Closing

Register Now!

<https://forms.office.com/r/WvuXYaAzuH>





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Evergreen Notes, the newsletter for member churches, ecumenical partners, national affiliates, and friends of the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches is published monthly. Please submit articles by the 20th of the month prior to expected publication. You are encouraged to copy and/or reprint information and articles for your congregation and community.

Building Bridges, Resourcing Churches & Translating Our Unity

Mission Statement

Being a culturally diverse people who are one in Christ and who value the liberties of our American Baptist Heritage, the Evergreen Baptist Association will **Build bridges** between communities; **Provide resources** to equip member churches to share Christ and teach God's word; and **Translate our unity** to the world.

May this edge of winter close out the coldness of fear and bring in warm hope!

Save these Dates!

We've got some great events coming up. Please mark your calendars so you can participate in these fantastic events!

Evergreen Annual Leadership Retreat
February 5-7, 2026 at Camp Burton. See inside for more details!

Online Leadership Retreat

Saturday, February 21st from 9am to Noon. Will cover in brief some of what we're doing in person earlier in the month.

Mountain Area Gathering
Saturday, March 7th at Calvary Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado. A time of learning and fellowship, all are welcome to attend.

February Calendar

All of February is Black History Month!

Feb. 2—Groundhog's Day	Feb. 20—Nat'l Day of Solidarity with Muslim, Arab and South Asian Immigrants—Let's in particular remember our siblings of the Burma Diaspora!
Feb. 7—National Ballet Day	
Feb. 8—Super Bowl Sunday! GO HAWKS!	
Feb. 9—Nat'l Pizza Day.	
Feb. 12—Abraham Lincoln's Birthday	Feb. 21—Online Leadership Retreat—9am to Noon—See above and inside!
Feb. 14—Valentine's Day	Feb. 21—International Mother Language Day
Feb. 18—Ash Wednesday—Lent Begins	Feb. 25—National Clam Chowder Day