



JUNE 21-23 / MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

# Delegate Summary

## Introduction

Gather '18 brought the Covenant family together to celebrate God's goodness and reflect on how he's calling us to join him in service to the world. The Annual Meeting portion of the week allowed us to participate in the important business of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC).

As a delegate, you have the privilege of sharing this information with your congregation. This delegate summary provides an overview of the meeting. Related news stories covering events at Gather '18 are also

available at [covenantcompanion.com/news](http://covenantcompanion.com/news). You can find the video archives of the event at [gather.covchurch.org](http://gather.covchurch.org).

You can use these highlights to deliver an official report to your congregation's board, council, or leadership team. Some Covenant churches publish this information as part of their congregational newsletter. We invite you to use this summary in whatever way it will best serve you and your congregation.

## Key Facts

### *Membership in the Mission*

1. There were 856 credentialed delegates representing 369 churches. Total registered conference attendance, including general conferees, was 1,159, representing 386 churches.
2. 16 churches were received into membership, representing combined approximate attendance of 2,839.
3. 14 churches were removed from the membership roster.

### *State of the Mission*

4. The report of the President and video archives of all Gather '18 proceedings will be located at [gather.covchurch.org](http://gather.covchurch.org).

5. Newswire stories covering the Annual Meeting are posted at [CovenantCompanion.com/news](http://CovenantCompanion.com/news).
6. Highlights of Annual Meeting and Gather '18 will appear in the September/October issue of the *Covenant Companion*.
7. The 2017-18 Annual Report can be downloaded at [AnnualReport2018.covchurch.org](http://AnnualReport2018.covchurch.org). Print copies will also be mailed to ECC congregations.
8. The ECC ended the 2017 fiscal year with an operating budget surplus of approximately \$53,000. Expenses were held to roughly \$770,000 or 4.6% under budget. Covenant churches gave a total of \$10.7 million to ECC mission and ministry for a 0.5% increase in local church giving. Individual gifts provided more than \$6.6 million to base mission activity as well as an array of designated ministries to mark a 3.5% increase in direct donor support.

### **Growth Statistics**

- Average weekend worship attendance on any given Sunday was estimated at 223,000.
  - About 33% of all ECC congregations are now among populations of color or intentionally multiethnic, making the ECC one of the most diverse denominations.
9. Thirty-two new church planters were commissioned.
  10. The Covenant Pension Plan, which provides retirement benefits to approximately 2,200 active and retired pastors, missionaries, and their surviving spouses, continues to reflect strong investment performance. The plan remains well funded at 105% of the projected actuarial liability of \$241.5 million. Bethany Benefit Service provides medical, dental, prescription drug, vision, life, and long-term disability benefits to pastors, missionaries, office staff, surviving spouses, and families. A 3.5% rate increase was announced for 2017, which remains low in a healthcare environment characterized by 10 percent increases.
  11. Bethany Benefit Service provides medical, dental, prescription drug, vision, life, and long-term disability benefits to pastors, missionaries, office staff, surviving spouses, and families. Bethany Benefit Service held 2018 medical rate increases to 3%, much lower than rate increases in the broader healthcare environment.
  12. *The Covenant Companion* received a total of twenty awards for its work in 2017 at the Evangelical Press Association and Associated Church Press conferences, including the Associated Church Press's "best in class" for denominational magazine.

### **Servant Leadership in the Mission**

13. On Thursday evening, four missionaries were commissioned for service.
14. Delegates elected John Wenrich to serve as president of the ECC. He was installed during the Friday evening worship service.

15. Delegates elected Lance Davis to serve as executive minister of Develop Leaders / Ordered Ministry. He was installed during the Friday evening worship service.
16. Delegates approved the call of Mary Surridge to serve as president of North Park University. She was installed during the Friday evening worship service.
17. Also during the Friday evening service, Catherine Gilliard was installed as the new superintendent of the Southeast Conference and Glenn Peterson was installed as the new superintendent of the Canada Conference.
18. Twenty-three individuals were elected to denominational boards.
19. In anticipation of the ordination service on Saturday night, delegates voted to ordain 57 individuals to Word and Sacrament; ordain eight individuals to Word and Service; finalize the transfer of ordination for five individuals; and commission two.

### **Honoring Faithful Service in the Mission**

20. The Irving C. Lambert Award recognizing outstanding urban and ethnic ministry was presented to Karen Brewer of Atonement Covenant Church in Chicago.
21. The T. W. Anderson Award recognizing outstanding laypeople was presented to Dave and Kathy DeVries, who are currently members of Anchor Covenant Church in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.
22. Forty-five individuals received Clergy Lifetime Service recognitions.
23. Retiring leaders Harold Spooner (former president of Covenant Initiatives for Care, vice-president of community impact for Covenant Retirement Communities, and staff member-at-large for Love Mercy Do Justice) and Robert Owens (Southeast Conference superintendent) were honored.
24. Three departing members of the Covenant Executive Board were recognized: Rachel Burke, David Danielson, and Juana Nesta.

25. Retiring missionaries Keith and Florence Gustafson (34 years, the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Christy Taylor (11 years, East Asia) were recognized upon the conclusion of their service.
26. A Resolution of Sympathy was adopted praising God for the lives and ministries of dedicated Covenanters who have gone to be with the Lord, including 21 pastors, 4 missionaries, and 16 pastors' spouses.
27. President Walter and the Annual Meeting honored Richard Lucco for his faithful and effective service as executive director for ministry development and interim executive minister of Develop Leaders/ Ordered Ministry. President Walter also honored Chris Hagberg, his administrative partner of nearly 18 years.

#### *Funding the Mission*

28. The Covenant Annual Meeting approved a 2019 Mission and Ministry budget of \$25.8 million. Paul Hawkinson, executive director of finance, noted that 100% of all ECC mission support is funded by external revenue, which means 100% of church giving goes directly to the mission priorities.
29. Hawkinson explained that there will be ongoing evaluation of the future form of the Covenant Pension Plan with a commitment to make future retirement programs more accessible and equitable for lower-income church settings. He estimated that the current plan would likely be closed to new participants on Dec. 31, 2019. He indicated that participants after that date would be part of a new plan, and reiterated that we will always have a mandatory plan.
30. During 2017, National Covenant Properties disbursed about \$35 million to fund projects at local Covenant churches.
31. Covenant Trust Company (CTC) managed more than 3,000 accounts representing \$1 billion. In addition, CTC distributed in excess of \$7.2 million to ECC ministries from the estate plans of its clients.

#### *Living Faithfully in the Mission*

32. During his final annual report, retiring President Gary Walter spoke about the challenges of Covenant cohesion, multiethnic inclusion, and navigating issues of human sexuality. He also announced that the Executive Board had commissioned a resource paper that will focus on Covenant freedom and responsibility. He noted that resource papers are meant to help guide discussion and are not binding.
33. North Park University interim president Carl Balsam and North Park Theological Seminary dean David Kersten provided updates on positive developments concerning both institutions, including the election of Mary Surridge as the next president of NPU, new programs, and various initiatives underway at the seminary.
34. Gary Walter and North Park University board chair Kristine Strand honored interim president Carl Balsam for his service to North Park and the ECC.
35. Cov Talks were presented on the theme of Love Mercy Do Justice by Covenant pastors Mauricio Dell' Arciprete (Nuevo Pacto, Minneapolis, MN), Lavern Holdeman (financial consultant who attends Community Covenant Church, Omaha, NE), and Stephanie Williams O'Brien (Mill City Church, Minneapolis, MN). The talks were hosted by Adam Gustine, director of ministry initiatives for the Love Mercy Do Justice mission priority.

#### *The Next Annual Meeting*

The 134th Annual Meeting will take place June 20–22, 2019, in a location to be announced. Covenant churches also are encouraged to engage in the CHIC youth conference on July 15–20, 2018, in Knoxville, Tennessee. Please visit [covchurch.org](http://covchurch.org) and [chicconference.org](http://chicconference.org) for more details.