

JUNE 22-24 / DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Delegate Summary

Introduction

Gather '17 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).

For those who were unable to be present in Detroit, this delegate summary provides an overview of the meeting. As a delegate, you have the privilege of sharing

this information with your congregation. Links in the document will direct you to related online news stories.

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 official newsletter. You're invited to use this summary in whatever way it will best serve you and your congregation.

Key Facts

Membership in the Mission

1. There were 333 credentialed delegates representing 171 churches. Total registered conference attendance, including general conferees, was 547, representing 220 churches.
2. Nine churches were received into membership, representing combined approximate attendance of 827.
3. Twenty-six churches were removed from the membership roster.

State of the Mission

4. The Report of the President and the video recording of the presentation will be found at CovChurch.org. All Annual Meeting videos will be found at CovChurch.org/gather.

5. Newswire stories covering the Annual Meeting are posted at CovenantCompanion.com/news.
6. An article covering the Annual Meeting and Gather '17 highlights will appear in the September/October issue of the *Covenant Companion*.
7. The 2016 -17 Annual Report be found inside the July/August issue of the *Covenant Companion* magazine or in downloadable form at CovChurch.org/gather.
8. The ECC finished the 2016 fiscal year with an operating budget surplus of approximately \$11,575. Expenses were held to \$852,300 or 5.2% below budget. Covenant churches gave a total of \$10.77 million to ECC mission and ministry. A 1.4% decline in local church giving was partially offset by a 24.2% increase in direct donor support.



9. Growth statistics:
 - Average weekend worship attendance on any given Sunday was estimated at 235,000.
 - About 30% of all ECC congregations are now among populations of color or intentionally multiethnic, making the ECC one of the most diverse denominations..
10. Twenty-five church planters were commissioned.
11. 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 more than 95% funded with total assets of approximately \$223 million against approximately \$230 million in actuarial liability.
12. 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.
13. The Covenant Companion received a total of sixteen awards for its work in 2016 at the Evangelical Press Association and Associated Church Press conferences, including first place for denominational magazine (EPA) for the second year in a row.

Servant Leadership in the Mission

14. On Thursday evening, 19 missionaries were commissioned and endorsed for service.
15. Delegates approved the call of Roger Oxendale to serve as president of Covenant Ministries of Benevolence. He was installed during the Friday-evening worship service.

16. Also during the Friday-evening service, Danny Martinez was installed as the new superintendent of the Central Conference.
17. Delegates also approved the calls of North Park Theological Seminary leaders, including Dwight Perry (dean of faculty and professor of homiletics and leadership), Hauna Ondrey (assistant professor of church history), and Elizabeth Pierre (assistant professor of pastoral care and counseling).
18. Twenty-two individuals were presented by the Board of Nominations and later elected to denominational boards.
19. In anticipation of the ordination service on Saturday night, 55 individuals were set to be ordained to word and sacrament; five individuals were set to be ordained to word and service; four individuals transferred their ordinations; one was consecrated to missionary service; one was commissioned.

Honoring Faithful Service in the Mission

20. The Irving C. Lambert Award recognizing outstanding urban and ethnic ministry was presented to William and Marva Watts of Gospel Way Covenant Church in Chicago.
21. The T. W. Anderson Award recognizing outstanding laypeople was presented to Douglas Lunde, a member of Thornapple Covenant Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
22. Twenty-one individuals were present to receive the Clergy Lifetime Service recognition.
23. Retiring or transitioning leaders David Dwight (president of Covenant Ministries of Benevolence), Jerome Nelson (Central Conference superintendent), Jeff Anderson (Canada Conference superintendent), and David Parkyn (president of North Park University) were recognized for their service.
24. Dennis Weidler, retiring general manager of Covenant-affiliated ministry KICY radio in Nome, Alaska, was recognized for his years of service.



25. Four departing members of the Covenant Executive Board were recognized, including Mary Cunningham, William Davidson, Stacey Heimkes, and Carolyn Poterek.
26. Retiring missionaries Baxter and Margie Swenson (32 years, Colombia and Ecuador; 10 years at Covenant Offices), Thomas and Janice Kelly (35 years in Mexico), and Cynthia Hoover (16 years, Mexico) were recognized for their faithful service.
27. 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 twenty-two pastors, three missionaries, and thirteen spouses.

Funding the Mission

28. The Covenant Annual Meeting approved a 2018 Mission and Ministry budget of \$25.5 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. Hawkinson encouraged delegates and their representative churches to engage the new 3StrandStrong initiative of 6.5% giving to the Covenant and 3.5% to respective regional conference.
29. Various finance resources and initiatives for the church were noted, including the Lilly Grant-sponsored Financial Leadership program for clergy, the online giving system provided by the ECC, and the Covenant Scholars program. More information is available in the Delegate Notebook.
30. Hawkinson and Covenant Pension and Benefits Board chair Hugh Magill shared that the ECC pension plan is currently strong, but that national trends point to challenges ahead; they explained a need to proactively evaluate the plan to discern whether significant adjustments would be necessary in the future; a review of potential plan revisions is scheduled for October 2017; the floor was open for questions and comments.
31. During 2016, National Covenant Properties disbursed nearly \$24 million to fund projects at local Covenant churches.
32. Covenant Trust Company (CTC) managed over 3,000 accounts representing \$928 million. In addition, CTC distributed in excess of \$7.4 million to ECC ministries, and more than 30% of all future gifts have been designated for churches and local ministries.

Living Faithfully in the Mission

33. During his annual report, President Walter shared "high-level highlights," important initiatives from the mission priorities, an update on human sexuality discussions, and a word of challenge and hope.
34. Mark Novak, executive minister of Develop Leaders, announced that he would resign effective August 31, 2017, due to family health challenges.
35. Cecilia Williams, executive minister of Love Mercy Do Justice, announced the launch of a new Bezalel community development project in Detroit.
36. An agenda item regarding an amendment to the constitution of North Park University (NPU) was introduced for approval at the 2018 Annual Meeting; the information is found in the Delegate Notebook.
37. Kristine Strand, chair of the board of trustees of North Park University, highlighted celebrations of NPU's 125th anniversary; the naming of Scott Stenmark as vice president of finance and administration and Carl Balsam as interim president; an overview of the search for the next president of the university. Strand and Balsam affirmed the goal of building stronger ties with Covenant churches.
38. Owen Youngman, chair of the NPU presidential search committee, led an interactive roundtable on the search process; Youngman noted that ECC bylaws require the Annual Meeting to approve the call of the NPU president.



39. North Park Theological Seminary dean David Kersten provided an update on new programs and the various initiatives underway at the seminary. Kersten noted an additional Lilly Endowment planning grant that was awarded to the seminary and recognized the service of Jay Phelan, former dean and president of the seminary and retiring New Testament professor.

The Next Annual Meeting

40. The 133rd Annual Meeting will take place June 21–23, 2018, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Covenant churches also are encouraged to engage in the CHIC youth conference on July 15-20, 2018, in Knoxville, Tennessee. Check CovChurch.org and chicconference.org for more details.

Produced by the Department of Communication.

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