



Preparing the Church for Tomorrow

Throughout the history of the Covenant Church there have been defining moments that have carried this movement to new levels of faithfulness and fruitfulness. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses whose legacy of vision, sacrifice, and priority over the course of 126 years has moved us forward at critical junctures.

Now it is our turn.

When I became president I identified the core assignment for this season this way: to advance the mission while bridging to the future. This is fundamentally a season of positioning the Covenant for a strong time to come, even while attending to the mission that is currently ours.

With the endorsement of the Covenant Executive Board, we have been undertaking a deep review process called Organizing for Mission. Its purpose has been to understand our mission, to clarify our priorities, and to propose ways of expanding our capacity to serve.

A twenty-member Organizing for Mission project team, representative of the Covenant's structural and demographic mosaic, was convened in January. Evelyn Johnson, former superintendent of the Pacific Southwest Conference, was appointed project manager. The group worked diligently over the next eight months to assess the current state of what we are doing and to propose ways forward. Their work was informed by an extensive array of background materials, surveys, and interviews. Twenty-seven recommendations emerged, which were also reviewed and refined by both the Council of Administrators and the Council of Superintendents. At its October meeting, the Covenant Executive Board received the project team's sixty-one-page report, and unanimously approved each of the twenty-seven recommendations it contained. You will find the report in its entirety at CovChurch.org/ofmreport. The following highlights key aspects.

Understanding Our Mission

Foundational to the process was a three-question sequence.

The first question addresses *purpose*: What are we trying to accomplish in the lives of real people in real places?

Committed to the full dimensionality of God's work in the world, we use this understanding of our collective task: We join God in God's mission to see more disciples, among more populations, in a more caring and just world.

More disciples is the spectrum of both evangelism and discipleship. We are committed to individuals experiencing both new life in Christ and an ever-deepening walk with Christ. In other words, knowing God's love, growing in God's love, and extending that love to the world.

Among more populations is the entire spectrum of the great commission, both the multiethnic mosaic around us in our communities and extending to the whole world.

In a more caring and just world is the spectrum of attending to both hurts and the causes of hurt, joining God in making things right in the world.

Focusing Our Priorities

The second question, then, addresses strategy: What are the key priorities that will help us accomplish that mission?

We have identified five key priorities. Sometimes referred to as "five smooth stones," recalling David going into battle with Goliath, these are:

- Start and strengthen churches
- Make and deepen disciples
- Develop leaders
- Love mercy—do justice
- Serve globally

As we talk about our mission going forward, our reference will not be so much to the various parts of Covenant organization, but to these priorities. We want people to identify with what we do, not how we are structured.

The third question, then, is given this mission with these priorities, what is the best alignment of personnel, structures, and resources?

A Compelling Call

Key to the organizational design work implied in the third question is envisioning the potential scope and scale of the ministry of the Covenant

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Gary Walter is president of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

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over the next decade. What might we look like in ten years? As we give ourselves faithfully to the stated priorities, we believe that could carry us to:

- 1,000 congregations
- Greater than 30 percent of congregations among populations of color or intentionally multiethnic
- 250,000 aggregate attendance on any given Sunday (implied constituency of 400,000 regular attenders)
- 2,500 credentialed clergy
- 1,000,000 lives impacted globally through international partnerships and initiatives

While these figures will call out our very best efforts, their deeper importance is pointing to the required resolve necessary to achieve the result.

For example, to achieve 1,000 congregations means church planting must remain a central priority to our mission here in the United States and Canada across all conferences. This in turn means we will need to resource all conferences for church planting, including those with limited finances and staffing. It likewise implies a sustained commitment to congregational vitality, taking a proactive approach to congregational health, ensuring that more of our congregations have strong traction into the future.

To achieve greater than 30 percent diversity of congregations will require that one-half of all church plants be among populations of color or intentionally multiethnic. This in turn requires a fresh look at long-term and sustainable strategies for ethnic and multiethnic ministries, particularly for immigrant and urban contexts. It will mean living with even greater intentionality around becoming a more authentic multiethnic movement and all that it implies.

To see 250,000 in average attendance means we will need to be resolutely engaged in evangelism, with people further finding meaningful pathways to deepen faith and obedience in their walk with God.

To see a global impact of one

million lives will require not only the continued sending of missionaries and partnerships that strengthen national churches, but also additional initiatives and coming alongside congregationally generated projects.

All of this requires capable leadership from clergy and laity alike. To see 2,500 clergy implies a deeper commitment to raising up the vocational option for women and men, as well as contextualized and life-long training. For laity, it implies a major step forward in the development and delivery of relevant resourcing.

Yes, the anticipated Covenant footprint helps us address capacity considerations. But garnering the required resolve around the underlying implications will be the decisive factor for God finding us faithful.

Design Characteristics

Throughout the recommendations there is a desire to bring resourcing around the five ministry priorities closer to congregations, particularly through resourcing regional conferences.

Certain aspects related to scale, identity, resourcing, coordination, and research and development continue to be well-served from a center point.

The five ministry priorities serve as the organizing framework. To approach these, the existing departmental structure was used as the baseline. It is important to first live into the priorities, and then let any lessons learned inform future departmental reorganization, if any.

The existing conference structure is likewise used as a baseline. Long-established loyalties, uneven interior regions of strength within conferences themselves, organizational complexities tied to conference institutions (such as camps), and added administrative costs mitigated against redrawing boundaries. The availability of staff to smaller conferences and the scalability of staff in larger conferences is a key challenge in resourcing mission and ministry across the Covenant Church.

In recognizing expertise already resident among our ministerium, laity, and congregations, there is an elevated strategy around the use of expert practitioners and best practice centers that model and share effective ministry across the breadth of the Covenant.

A new mechanism, called collaboration tables, will be used for each area. These will bring representatives together across departments, conferences, and institutions to advance the cohesive development of each of the five ministry priorities.

All institutions and corporations are identified within one of the five key priorities. For example, North Park University is in “develop leaders” and National Covenant Properties is in “start and strengthen churches.”

The focus of this assignment was the five key priorities. There are other important undergirding operational areas that provide integral support to the whole of our mission such as communication, information technology, business functions, loans and financial services, and insurance and pension benefits. With direction in the five areas now clarified we will be able to address opportunities and approaches in these areas as well.

Why This Is Important

A photographer involved in a unique expedition with National Geographic was asked what it was like when he realized his project had come to fruition in an astonishing way. He said, “When the vision in your head becomes the lump in your throat, you know you have been a part of something special.”

Organizing for Mission is not about the vision in our head. It is about the lump in the throat yet to come. Yet to come when we meet those who will experience new life in Christ because of these efforts. When we worship in churches not

yet started in communities not yet known. When people with names like Anderson and Johnson gather at the Lord’s Table with names like Rodriguez and Hong and Woodson. When adolescent girls are set free from human trafficking. When a hand goes up around the campfire answering the call to serve God. When the prisoner has a friend on the inside, and support waiting on the outside. When someone cautiously takes a volunteer

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position only to flourish in newfound giftedness. When a young person makes a tough choice, but the right choice, because they know their Scriptures well and trust in the wisdom of God. When our brothers and sisters around the world overcoming grinding hardship inspire us to

greater commitment and sacrifice.

I guarantee you that a mother I met cradling her baby stricken with malaria in Congo does not care how the Covenant is organized. She just wants to know her child is going to get better.

Roda does not care how the Covenant is structured. As a teenager in South Sudan, she is grateful she can attend school, a rarity for girls, but something we felt strongly about when we helped start New Hope Academy.

A girl came to camp this past summer grieving her parent’s recent divorce. The fact that we have an association of twenty-one camps and conference centers is lost on her. What is not is that the God of all comfort loves her.

Hector has no idea we have eleven regional conferences. He just knows that his new life in Christ is better than his old life in a gang.

We have invested the time and effort in Organizing for Mission because we do not want to miss what God has for us to do and to be. We want to be part of something special that God accomplishes in and through us. We want the lump in the throat—

which comes when countless faithful acts are carried out by countless faithful people who are supported, encouraged, and developed through this movement we call the Evangelical Covenant Church.

And so, this marks a turning. We now move from organizing for mission to mobilizing for mission, summoning the resolve necessary to take this movement to its next level.

A cloud of witnesses watches. Now it is our turn. ■

Lucco Named to New Position at Covenant Offices



Richard Lucco, currently serving as superintendent of the Great Lakes Conference, has been appointed to a new position, executive director for ministry development. The position comes as one of twenty-seven Organizing for Mission (OFM) recommendations.

“OFM sets a number of things in motion,” says president Gary Walter. “This position will focus on cohesively developing and accomplishing ministry priorities. It will collaborate among departments, conferences, institutions, and congregations, as well as serve as a point of personal and professional support for conference superintendents.”

“To serve effectively in this position, the person needs to be recognized as someone who is committed to all areas of our ministry, and who values every part of our fellowship. Dick is a respected leader because both of those dimensions are true of him,” Walter adds.

Before becoming superintendent in 2002, Lucco served churches in pastoral ministry for twenty-two years. He and his wife, Valerie, have four adult sons and two grandchildren.

“I am excited and energized by the opportunity to further God’s mission in the world and advance the kingdom through my service to the Evangelical Covenant Church,” Lucco says.

The position begins February 1, 2012. The Great Lakes Conference has started a search process to nominate a new superintendent for its annual meeting in April. ■