

# Discerning the **WILL OF GOD** for the Church

BOB SMIETANA

**A**t the beginning of “Heart of Darkness,” a five-part series on the Congo that aired in January 2002 on ABC’s *Nightline*, host Ted Koppel apologizes for ignoring the needs of the African nation of Congo and for acting as if no one cared for the plight of people there.

“These are events you should have heard about on *Nightline* years ago,” Koppel says on the program, which details the devastation caused by Congo’s civil war. During the opening business session of the 118th Covenant Annual Meeting, held June 25-28, President Glenn Palmberg described his reaction to hearing Koppel’s remarks.

“I wanted to call him and say that we care,” Palmberg told delegates gathered at the Holiday Inn in Rosemont, Illinois.

Earlier in that morning session, Palmberg welcomed Gbuda Luyada, president of the Congo Covenant Church (CEUM), as an honored guest of the Annual Meeting, and told him, “You are not and will not be forgotten.”

A renewed emphasis on the needs of Covenanters in Congo was one of the major themes of the 2003 Annual Meeting. President Luyada, who had been visiting the United States this spring, expressed his appreciation for the support of prayers he has felt from North American Covenanters.

“We know of your love for us,” he told the delegates.

“Please continue to pray for us . . . right now the Congo Church is praying for you.”

Jerome Nelson, director of church and society for the Central Conference, presented President Luyada with a check to be used for school supplies for Congolese children. The funds came from a cooperative effort of the Departments of World Mission and Christian Formation, Covenant World Relief, and the African-American Ministers Association. It was prompted by a visit to Congo by a group of African-American pastors, including Nelson.

Since 2004 marks the fortieth anniversary of the martyrdom of Covenant medical missionary Paul Carlson, Palmberg announced plans to raise the equivalent of \$10 per Covenanter in Carlson’s name to aid Covenant clinics and hospitals in Congo. He also spoke about plans to send medical mission teams to work at those clinics and hospitals.

“I know there are needs in other parts of the world,” said Palmberg, “but these are our hospitals, and our brothers and sisters, and our church, and we must stand by them.”

A continued focus on the importance of both the great commandment (to love our neighbors as ourselves) and the great commission (to make disciples of all nations) highlighted the rest of Palmberg’s report. The Covenant



Following a welcome by President Glenn Palmberg (left), President Gbuda Luyada of the Covenant Church in Congo brings greetings and news from his church.

Bob Smetana is features editor of the *Companion*. Staff writer Craig Pinley and managing editor Jane Swanson-Nystrom contributed to this report.



Church's balance in those two areas—along with the church's heritage and tradition—are the keys to its health, said Palmberg. That health can be seen in the continued growth and financial stability of the Covenant in a time where many denominations are facing difficulties.

Some groups neglect the work of compassion and choose to focus only on evangelism, said Palmberg. "They will make Christians," he said, "but they will not make disciples."

In closing his presentation, Palmberg asked delegates to look to the future of the church—saying, "We can change the world"—and asking them to remember the words of a familiar hymn: "Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do, if with his love he befriends you" ("Praise to the Lord, the Almighty").

The first session also featured an update on the Keystone Challenge, an initiative launched at the 2002 Annual Meeting (in Keystone, Colorado) to increase funding for world mission by \$500,000. The program was a response to concerns over the financial condi-

tion of the Department of World Mission, which dominated the 2002 meeting, and was proposed by Ted Smith, pastor of First Covenant Church in Sacramento, California. Executive Vice-president Donn Engebretson reported that \$569,000 has been pledged as a result of the Keystone Challenge; \$312,000 of which has already been collected. Although some of the funds were one-time gifts, more than \$200,000 came from churches that have made the Keystone Challenge part of their annual budgets, Engebretson reported.

### Church Action

A total of 567 voting delegates attended the Annual Meeting, including 481 delegates representing 256 churches.

One of the first agenda items for the opening session was approving twenty-two new Covenant churches. Representatives from each church stood as their church name was announced by moderator Kristine Strand and approved by delegates. (New church profiles begin on page 18.) The new churches have a combined member-

ship of 2,023 and a combined attendance of 2,955.

Delegates also approved two church mergers, with Iglesia del Pacto Evangelico and Emmanuel Christian Church, both of Oakland, California, becoming Bethel Evangelical Covenant Church; and New Community Covenant Church of Stone Mountain, Georgia, and the Christian Evangelical Fellowship Covenant Church of Decatur, Georgia, becoming New Fellowship Covenant Church.

Eight Covenant churches were removed from the roster because they closed. They were the Evangelical Covenant Church of Kinistino, Saskatchewan (founded in 1954); Bethel Covenant Church, Flossmoor, Illinois (1898); Central Covenant Church, Oklahoma City (2000); Cedar Heights Covenant Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma (1994); Trinity Covenant Church, Minneapolis (1890); Lifesource Community Church, Phoenix, Arizona (1942); Mercy Covenant Church, Mission Viejo, California (2002); and Bethesda Covenant Church, Miami, Florida (1996).

## Treasurer's Report

The treasurer's report was given by Elliott Johnson, director of finance and controller for the denomination, in place of Dean Lundgren, treasurer and vice-president for finance, who was recovering from illness. Johnson reported that giving to the denomination from local Covenant churches in 2002 totaled \$8,183,547, an increase of 3.5 percent from 2001.

Giving to local congregations grew by 6.5 percent to \$208.8 million, an average of \$1,485 per attender. Johnson noted that Covenanters ranked third in per-attender giving, according to a recent report on forty-one Protestant denominations. Giving to Covenant World Relief totaled \$1,063,840, down significantly from the approximately \$1.6 million collected in both 2001 and 2000. (Note: the 2001 total of \$1.6 million included funds from a post-September 11 appeal, and the \$1,644,983 figure in 2000 included a special appeal for Sudan. There was no special appeal in 2002.)

Johnson reported increases in local church membership—up 2.3 percent to 107,379 from 104,142—and worship attendance—up 4.6 percent to 140,607 from 134,345.

In contrast to the extensive and emotional debate over the budget at the 2002 Annual Meeting, there was little discussion of the proposed 2004 coordinated budget. There was only one question raised after the budget was officially proposed, when one delegate

asked whether the amount budgeted for the Department of World Mission (\$4,707,634) would cover its need. Johnson said the budget was "sufficient to allow them to operate without bringing back missionaries or cutting programs."

Delegates approved the proposed \$12,623,213 budget, to which local Covenant churches will be asked to contribute \$8.9 million. Departmental budgets break out as follows:

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| World Mission                              | \$4,707,634 |
| Church Growth and Evangelism               | \$2,912,869 |
| Christian Formation                        | \$853,584   |
| Ordered Ministry                           | \$538,151   |
| Communication                              | \$523,386   |
| General Administration                     | \$2,023,589 |
| North Park University (including seminary) | \$1,064,000 |

## Elections

Following the approval of the budget, delegates considered three candidates for administrative offices. Curt Peterson, pastor of Montecito Covenant Church in Santa Barbara, California, and chairperson of the Executive Board, was nominated as executive minister of world mission, filling the office vacated by Jim Gustafson, who resigned prior to the 2002 Annual Meeting. (John Notehelfer, former Pacific Southwest Conference superintendent, has served as interim executive minister.) Gary Walter, executive minister of church growth and evangelism,



Standing with his family, Curt Peterson (center) is installed as executive minister of world mission.

and Ruth Hill, executive minister of Covenant Women Ministries, were both nominated for second, four-year terms in office.

Catherine Gilliard of the Executive Board spoke on behalf of Peterson's nomination, lauding his work as a pastor and his vision in mobilizing support of missions. "He will listen, he will learn, he will love, and he will lead," she said, noting that the World Mission Committee supported him unanimously. Peterson said he would continue the faithful work of both Gustafson and Notehelfer, and would be especially attentive to the missionaries. (For more on Peterson, see page 31.)

All three candidates were elected by delegates. Delegates also elected members to denominational boards and officers of the 2004 Annual Meeting. (For results, see page 22.)

## Ordinands

During the Friday morning business session, delegates voted on the candidates for ordination and commissioning. The large number of candidates reflected changes to ordination policy adopted by the 2002 Annual Meeting.

There were thirty-eight candidates for ordination to word and sacrament; twenty-eight candidates for ordination to specialized ministry; and nine candidates for commissioning. The candidates were greeted with a standing ovation after their approval by delegates. In addition, there were several reported changes in ordination and licensing standing, including one outgoing transfer of ordination; ten incoming transfers of ordination; three names withdrawn from the transfer of ordi-



Surrounded by short-term missionaries, Jo Ellen Reaves, project missionary to Mexico, tells about her call.



As her father looks on, Lindsay Armfield Small is vested with a stole as she is ordained to word and sacrament.

nation process; and one ordination standing revoked.

In other business, delegates also called D. Brent Laytham, professor of theology, and Phillis I. Shepherd, assistant professor of pastoral care, as faculty members at North Park Theological Seminary. (Both have served in those positions for the past two years.)

Jane Hutchins-Peterson of the Commission on Music and Worship, presented the new *Covenant Book of Worship* to President Glenn Palmberg, thanking her commission colleagues and the Department of Communication for their efforts in producing this new resource.

David Stockamp of the Department of World Mission, then introduced Mossai Sanguma, who recently completed his doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is the first pastor from the Congo Covenant Church to receive a theological doctorate. A North Park Seminary graduate, Dr. Sanguma works in theological training of pastors. He expressed his thanks for the support of Covenanters in his long educational journey, comparing it to the difficult task of hunting an elephant.

### An Abundance of Amendments

On Saturday morning, delegates approved a leadership team model con-

stitution and bylaws for local church governance. The model, which sets up a leadership team of five to nine members including the senior pastor (serving *ex officio*), gives local churches a third alternative—along with the board and council models—to choose from in organizing their local congregation.

Much of the last day's work by delegates involved twenty-two proposed amendments to the new Covenant Constitution and Bylaws. The most discussed proposal was an amendment that proposed restricting the executive minister of the ordered ministry from both presenting evidence in a case of clerical misconduct and then participating in the deliberations of the board on that case.

John Hunt, former secretary of the Covenant and a delegate from Evangelical Covenant Church of Evanston, Illinois, who proposed the amendment, argued that the amendment would strengthen the role of executive minister by removing any appearance of a conflict of interest. Currently, Hunt said, the executive minister functions both as prosecutor and judge. Several delegates, most notably Ray Dahlberg, a former conference superintendent and former executive director of world mission, said that it is difficult to be both "disciplinarian and caregiver."



Mossai Sanguma

The amendment was rejected after both Brad Boydston, president of the Covenant Ministerium, and Dave Kersten, executive minister of the ordered ministry, spoke against it. Kersten said that analogies such as prosecutor and judge do not accurately describe the work of the board, which is "first and foremost one of pastoral care."

Other amendments approved by delegates included changing the name of the Covenant Benefit Board to the Board of Pensions and Benefits; allowing representatives of the conference superintendents to be appointed to the

## News and Notes

**Paul Erickson** was honored by delegates for his eight years of service as superintendent of the Northwest Conference.



Paul Erickson

**Jim Fretheim** was installed as superintendent of the Northwest Conference.



Jim Fretheim

**Rodney Sawyer** was installed as regional director of Alaska.

There are now **694** member Covenant churches in the U.S. and Canada: Average membership: 157  
Average attendance: 205



Rodney Sawyer

**8,686** people joined Covenant churches in 2002, with a net increase in membership of 2,446.

The number of names in the *Bringing My World to Christ* program is **101,700**, with **11,612 commitments** to Christ recorded in 2002.

Close to **35,000** people attend Covenant churches started since 1992, representing 25 percent of total attendance.

There are 94 career, 30 short-term and 7 project Covenant missionaries in 17 countries.

There are **176,914 members** in 1,823 Covenant churches outside the U.S. and Canada

More than **35 percent** of all Covenant churches have loans with National Covenant Properties, which manages more than **\$200 million** in assets. Loans this year are expected to total \$30 million.

North Park University attendance, including the seminary and graduate programs, was **2,810**, with 850 students from Covenant churches.

Covenant Ministries of Benevolence, which includes two hospitals, fifteen retirement communities, a children's home, and three enabling residences, provided **\$33.8 million** in charity and unreimbursed care in 2002.

Covenant World Relief spent **\$1,435,665** on projects in 2002. □

## IRVING C. LAMBERT AWARD RECIPIENTS

Arnold "Arnie" and Marilyn Bolin of Community Church of Boulder Junction, Wisconsin, received the 2003 Irving C. Lambert Award, which is given by the Covenant's Urban Commission and honors longtime contributions made in urban and ethnic ministries.

"There are two things that are true about each and every one of us," said Arnie in accepting the award at the Saturday morning business session of the Annual Meeting. "We are all created in the image of God and we are all sinners for whom Christ died and nothing else matters. And as we meet and live, oftentimes in opulence that is a little embarrassing, we need to remember those brothers and sisters, those in need, those who are hurting."

President Glenn Palmberg presented the award, which stated, "Your deep faith and quiet confidence in God's caring love have carried you into places of need where you have lived as servants of the kingdom of Christ."



Glenn Palmberg presents Marilyn and Arnie Bolin with the Irving C. Lambert Award.

Arnie Bolin graduated from North Park Theological Seminary in 1959 and was ordained in 1960. He and Marilyn served congregations in Nauganee and Harbert, Michigan, before organizing Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis, a pioneer in inner-city ministries. He was executive director of Berrien County Council of Churches in Michigan for thirteen years, helping many inner-city programs. He concluded his full-time work as chaplain and public relations coordinator for Hope Rescue Mission in South Bend, Indiana. In retirement, he has served eight interim pastorates.

Marilyn Bolin, a native of New Sweden, Maine, attended North Park Junior College and later Massachusetts Memorial Hospital School of Medical Technology in Boston. As she and Arnie raised four children, Marilyn's ministry included serving hundreds of meals to the homeless and hungry while assisting in many urban ministry projects. □

Boards of the Ordered Ministry, North Park University, Ministries of Benevolence, and Pension and Benefits; allowing several boards, including Pensions and Benefits, Covenant Women Ministries, and Ordered Ministry, to submit names to the Executive Board's nominating committee; and changing the deadline for submitting constitutional amendments to ninety days prior to the Annual Meeting from the previous deadline of 120 days. (A complete list of amendments can be found at [www.covchurch.org](http://www.covchurch.org).)

An amendment to add two lay representatives to the Board of the Ordered Ministry was initially referred by

delegates to that board for further review. That decision was rescinded after delegate Marilee Roberg, legal consultant for the Covenant Constitution and Bylaws Commission, Dave Kersten, and Paul Bramer, professor of Christian formation at North Park Theological Seminary, crafted a revised amendment, which was then approved.

### Covenant World Relief

The Saturday afternoon session began with a report on the Covenant's work in international relief and development through Covenant World Relief (CWR) from director Jim Sundholm. Sundholm reported that CWR funds

were used in the past year for emergency relief in the Philippines, Ecuador, Congo, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Colombia, with \$18,000 being designated for work in Iraq. CWR also supported medical work in Congo, Ethiopia, Tajikistan, and Kenya; economic programs in Thailand, Laos, Colombia, and Central African Republic; and AIDS/HIV ministry in Malawi, Mozambique, Haiti, and Thailand. About 70 percent of relief grants were done in partnership with Covenant World Mission projects.

Sundholm noted that after a fire left 3,500 people displaced in Medellin, Colombia, CWR funds were used to renovate three Colombian Covenant churches—adding showers and kitchens so those churches could be used to feed and house people. In South Sudan, after the government announced that all the country's schools would become Islamic, Sudanese Covenanters started an alternative school, serving 2,500 students. When the government threatened to close the Covenant school because students didn't have uniforms, CWR sent foot-powered sewing machines and cloth so that Sudanese Covenanters could provide uniforms.



Bill Hybels, founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, speaks at the Thursday evening service.



Frank Thomas of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis preached at the opening service Wednesday evening.

## Heated Debate over Resolutions

After approving a five-year extension for the Covenant World Relief Commission, delegates took up two resolutions from the Christian Action Commission. The first, entitled “Our Relationship to the Poor,” urged local churches to become involved in ministry to the poor in their local communities. That resolution was overwhelmingly approved by delegates. A second proposed resolution on bio-ethics was accepted by delegates for discussion at the 2004 Annual Meeting.

But it was the final two resolutions—one from a church and one from the floor—that met with animated and sometimes emotional responses from delegates. The first, entitled “Resolution on Covenant Freedom and Women in Ministry,” came from Graham (Washington) Evangelical Church. The resolution had been a topic of debate outside of the business session, and had been discussed at length during the Wednesday morning meeting of the Covenant Ministerium.

Former Graham pastor Alan Eagle introduced the resolution, which stated that “conformity to a particular view of women in ministry” not be used as “grounds for exclusion of any church, new or existing, from association with



Jane Hutchins-Peterson of the Commission on Music and Worship presented the new Covenant Book of Worship to President Glenn Palmberg.

the Evangelical Covenant Church or exclusion of any qualified applicant for ministerial license, ordination, or commissioning.”

Eagle said that the church wants “to see the Covenant continue to be a fellowship that welcomes people with opposing views.” While the Graham congregation supports the right of local churches to call women as pastor under an egalitarian model, Eagle said a number of Covenant congregations hold an equally valid “complementarian” view in which “some restriction to ministries of authority in the church are based on gender.” In recent years, the Covenant Church has become “egalitarian in its common agenda,” he said. “We are close to making this vision [of women in ministry] a litmus test.” That, Eagle argued, violates the Covenant’s ideal of freedom in Christ.

Brad Boydston opposed the resolution, arguing that the Covenant’s constitution requires pastors and congregations to support the denomination’s policies. Ordaining women without restriction “is a policy of the Evangelical Covenant Church,” he said, noting that “the Ministerium voted overwhelmingly to oppose this resolution.”

David Kersten also opposed the resolution, saying that the Covenant has a “broad and deep biblical theology” for ordaining women. “We are equal in creation—we are equal in the fall,” he said. “We are equal in redemption—both men and women are fully saved—and we are equal in the kingdom.”

Delegate Marilyn Moore of Lexington, Massachusetts, said that one of the things she appreciates most about the Covenant Church is “its validation of women in ministry.” To move away from that would take away freedom “from all the women in this meeting,” she said.

Speaking in opposition, President Glenn Palmberg said support for women in ministry “is not a litmus test.” He added that some of this year’s ordinands held differing views on women, and that did not disqualify them.

But at least one delegate “respect-

## T.W. Anderson Award Recipient

Melton “Mel” Nygren of Rolling Hills Covenant Church in Rolling Hills Estates, California, was awarded the 2003 T.W. Anderson Layperson Award at the 2003 Annual Meeting, for outstanding service in a local Covenant church.

Nygren was joined at the presentation by Mary, his wife of forty-seven years, and several family members. “I am deeply humbled and honored to receive this award, but it’s my joy that I’ve had so many opportunities to serve at Rolling Hills Covenant Church,” Nygren said upon accepting the award from President Glenn Palmberg.

A charter member of his church, Nygren has served in several leadership positions, led and participated in a number of mission projects throughout the world, and helped with building projects at the church. A resident of Torrance, California, Nygren spent his career as a teacher, coach, and guidance counselor.

Rolling Hills senior pastor Byron MacDonald, in nominating Nygren, called him “a model servant of our Lord and church,” noting his skill and passion to helping the congregation develop a far-reaching mission presence. Associate pastor Vergil Best added, “Mel is a friendly man who meets and greets people with a warm pleasant smile that sets people at ease. He is often found at hospitals early in the morning, praying and encouraging people before [their] surgeries.” □



Mary and Mel Nygren

fully disagreed” with Palmberg, saying he was troubled by a growing “political correctness culture” in the Covenant, “where only one view is accepted” on women in ministry. “I have been on the [Great Lakes] conference board of ministry,” he said. “I think we really did see this as a litmus test—I think there may be too much pressure on this issue.”

After reaching the thirty-minute limit of debate outlined in the standing rules of the Annual Meeting, the proposed resolution was defeated.

Delegate Jeremy Males of the Evanston Covenant Church then rose with an unexpected floor resolution on “sexual morality,” saying that he was con-

cerned that the Covenant Church does not have a binding policy on sexual morality and specifically homosexuality. He proposed that three documents—a 1996 Annual Meeting resolution on human sexuality, North Park Theological Seminary professor Linda Belleville’s paper entitled “A Biblical Perspective on Sexuality,” and a “Questions and Answers” paper on sexuality—be adopted as the official policies of the Covenant Church.



Parliamentarian Duane Aschenbrenner, Moderator Kristine Strand, and Vice-moderator John Martz model North Park University hats given to them by NPU President David Horner.

cerned that the Covenant Church does not have a binding policy on sexual morality and specifically homosexuality. He proposed that three documents—a 1996 Annual Meeting resolution on human sexuality, North Park Theological Seminary professor Linda Belleville’s paper entitled “A Biblical Perspective on Sexuality,” and a “Questions and Answers” paper on sexuality—be adopted as the official policies of the Covenant Church.

“Some day [the issue of homosexuality] is going to come our way, whether we like it or not,” he said, “and to [adopt a policy] later would make it more difficult.” After some discussion, Males proposed that his resolution be referred to the Board of the Ordered Ministry, for a report to the 2004 Annual Meeting.

Donn Engebretson, former execu-

tive director of the ministry, spoke against the motion to refer, noting that the Board of the Ordered Ministry had already completed a two-year study of the issue. That study concluded that the Covenant has a clear biblical teaching in place on this issue in the 1996 resolution, the Rules of the Ordered Ministry, the application for licensing, and the ethical guidelines for Covenant pastors. (The 1996 Resolution on Human Sexuality, the Rules of the Ordered Ministry, and the ethical guidelines for Covenant ministers are available under “Resources” in the Department of the Ordered Ministry section of [www.covchurch.org](http://www.covchurch.org).)

Delegate Don Ostrom spoke in

favor of the motion to refer. “I think we have been dancing around this issue and have been unwilling to talk about it,” he said. After further discussion, delegates approved the motion to refer.

### Closing Business

At the close of business, delegates recognized the efforts of Annual Meeting officers Kristine Strand (moderator), John Martz (vice-moderator), Mary Jane Graham (secretary), Daniel Ferguson (vice-secretary), and parliamentarian Duane Aschenbrenner.

Annual Meeting coordinator Eric Palmquist announced that the 119th Annual Meeting will be held June 20-22, 2004, at the Hyatt Regency in Minneapolis. He encouraged delegates to make plans to attend the meeting, noting “it is an honor to come together in community as an act of faith to discern

the will of God for the Church.”

The Annual Meeting closed with Mary Miller, vice-president for administration, reading the names of Covenant pastors, missionaries, and pastors’ spouses who died during the previous year, and offered a statement of gratitude for their lives of service. “Peace to their memory,” said Miller, “and joy to their eternal life.” □

## In Remembrance

The following Covenant pastors, missionaries, and pastors’ spouses died in the past year and were honored at the Memorial Communion Service on June 28 at the Annual Meeting.

### PASTORS

Donald L. Allis  
Alfred J. Ulner  
Clarence H. Peterson  
Ray A. Bishop  
John Wiens  
L. Arden Almquist  
Donald E. Wold  
Wesley W. Nelson  
William L. Peterson Jr.  
C. Calvin Herriott  
Gordon W. Holmen  
Warren M. Jones  
J. Eldon Johnson  
Harold D. Yarrington

### MISSIONARIES

G. Ben Haglund  
Harriet Amundsen  
Ann E. Berg

### SPOUSES

Melva Wickman  
Pearl Gustafson  
Beatrice Rosengren  
Evelyn Pinkham  
Veda Sheriff  
Evelyn Jacobson  
Bernice Johnson  
Elsie Tampte  
Margaret Taylor  
Nellie Bennett  
Esther Liljegren  
Irene E. Anderson-Sturdy  
Anna Kronberg