



# Finding Place in This Church

PART TWO

In recognition of the 125th anniversary of the Evangelical Covenant Church, we asked our readers to share their reflections on Covenant identity through-out the year. This month readers continue to tell us why they are Covenanters and what the church means to them.

## Janet Lundberg

In 1918 my mother immigrated with her family to the United States under sponsorship of the Mormon Church. After arriving in Utah from Sweden, she met my immigrant father who was also sponsored by the Mormons.

Mother's father became suspicious of Mormon doctrine and left the church. This created an attempt to break up the growing romance between my parents, and my father was sent back to Sweden on a Mormon mission. While there, he also became concerned about practices in the Mormon Church. He returned to the United States and married my mom.

Fast forward to the 1930s when my parents' Swedish Mormon friends invited them to attend an authentic Julotta service they had found at First Covenant Church in Los Angeles. My parents heard a Christ-centered Christmas message that morning, while I clutched my new teddy bear and fell asleep. I was five years old. After listening to the church's Swedish radio broadcast, my mom began to search the Bible and the Book of Mormon for truth. First Covenant had a



branch Sunday school that my brother and I began to attend, and the First Covenant parish worker followed up with visits. On Easter Sunday in 1941, my parents made a public declaration of their faith in the finished work of Jesus alone.

Because of its great youth group, First Covenant became my home. I met many friends there who remain close to this day. And who could have predicted that I would meet and marry my wonderful husband, Bill, there? He was youth pastor at the time, returned later as senior pastor, and again as interim pastor. Many missionaries, including Paul Carlson, pastors, and pastors' spouses grew up in First Covenant, Los Angeles. I am so grateful for my mother's search for truth and for the love and care of the church, which led me to Christ in my formative years.

---

**Janet Lundberg** is a member of New Hope Covenant Church in Peoria, Arizona.

## Dave Olson

**M**y family and I joined the Covenant in 1993 when I became the director of church planting for the Pacific Southwest Conference. We have found in the Covenant a family of churches that fit each of us very well.

First, I greatly value the strength of the Covenant's commitment to Scripture. We take the whole Bible seriously as our only guide for faith and practice. The Covenant adds to that an underlying hermeneutic for understanding Scripture that has always allowed us to live out a powerful, holistic gospel. That rootedness in Scripture is foundational to how Covenanters understand and live out our life in Christ.

The perfect complement to that high view of Scripture is our quest

for a deep and intimate walk with Jesus. While adherence to the historic affirmations of the faith is critical, by itself it can create a dry and artificial expression of Christianity unless there is a matching daily engagement of an ever-deepening relationship with Christ.

Third, I love that Covenanters believe that Christianity is not an individualistic religion but rather a communal faith. I cannot walk with Jesus apart from being an integral part of a local church. For me that means cultivating deep and honest friendships with other Christians. That life together creates the fertile soil for growing into the image of Christ.

Of course, what seals the deal for me is that the Covenant is missional. We believe it is not enough to love God and love each other—we also need to love our world. In many ways, the Covenant is reliving the incredible vitality of the evangelical movement that emerged in the United States in the late 1800s—with a focus on the Spirit leading the church in evangelism, church planting, compassion, mercy, and justice, a return to urban ministry, and a global mission for the whole world.

One final thought: I also love the people of the Covenant.

---

**Dave Olson** is the executive minister of church growth and evangelism. He attends Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis.

## Jerry and Vicky Love

**E**ach of us received a clear call to missions at the age of seventeen, and we prepared for ministry in our denomination's college and seminary, anticipating that we would serve with that body. At one point during our pastoral ministry, however, we separated from that denomination over what we considered an issue of freedom. We found that freedom in

a small community church where we served until God opened the door to enter our calling with Operation Mobilization (OM) as short-term missionaries serving in Europe. In that interdenominational mission dedicated to evangelizing the world, we enjoyed that same spirit of freedom we needed, and we thought we could never join another denomination.

But to our surprise, while serving our second year with OM, having moved to Mexico City, we met the Evangelical Covenant Church, a "non-denominational denomination," as the Covenant missionaries described it. We felt that God had prepared us and led us to our place of service, the "treasure hid in a field," so to speak. Returning to the United States to finish the required master's of divinity program at North Park Theological Seminary, we applied for Covenant missions.

In his mercy God allowed us to return to serve with wonderful mentors in the persons of Jerry and Nancy Reed and Marlan and Fern Enns. During our thirty-one years as Covenant missionaries, planting "Pacto" churches in Mexico, we have constantly praised and glorified God for his provision of the Covenant, the answer to our prayers. Now in retirement, Jerry is privileged to fulfill a new call as pastor to a 120-year-old church starting a second childhood, Powell Valley Covenant Church of Gresham, Oregon.

---

**Jerry and Vicky Love** are retired Covenant missionaries living in Gresham, Oregon.

## Doug Wootten

**A**s a new Christian I was drafted in 1972 into the Army, where I became a chaplain's assistant. During those three years I realized God was calling me to be a

chaplain, and I promised him my life would be dedicated to him through the military chaplaincy.

The emphasis on new life in Jesus Christ; the ecumenical flavor; reaching out to the whole world; and embracing every ethnic and economic background—all of it still excites me about what God is doing through our church. The Covenant Church’s non-legalistic understanding of Scriptures has allowed me the freedom to serve thousands of soldiers and their families and to share with them the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ for thirty years.

The Evangelical Covenant Church has given me the freedom to serve in ways other chaplains could not. In military chapels the communion tray contains both wine and grape juice, and communion is served in the pew and at the rail for Christians of all traditions. On one occasion, I found myself stationed with four other chaplains, but I was the only one who could serve communion to every believer among us. One chaplain could only give communion to his own denomination, one couldn’t pray over wine, one couldn’t pray over grape juice, another could only give communion at the rail. What a joy to know it isn’t legalistic mechanics but the act of remembering and believing Christ’s sacrifice that is central to our faith.

We are people covenanting together to invite others to become Christians and to grow as disciples. I have been blessed to serve God as a Covenant pastor, chaplain, and growing disciple (Philippians 1:6).

---

**Doug Wooten** is deputy garrison chaplain for Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and a member of Redeemer Evangelical Covenant Church in Carrollton, Texas.

## Sue Radosti

I discovered the Covenant about fourteen years ago when I was particularly fed up with having to choose between “Bible believing churches” that promoted fear-based cultural perspectives, and churches that were committed to social justice but were theologically at sea. Finding the Covenant was a V-8 moment: Wow, I could have been a part of *this* all my life?

I love the diversity (it’s not your grandma’s Swedish church anymore!), the dialogue, and the willingness to stand firm on biblical authority and social justice. In the Covenant I can take seriously the biblical mandate to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly—without feeling out of step with my own denomination.

---

**Sue Radosti** is a member of Evangelical Covenant Church in Sloan, Iowa.

## Christine Koller

My grandma was part of Missions-vännern in Sweden before she came to the United States in 1897, where she found a Covenant congregation in Iowa. My mom was part of Tabernacle Covenant on Chicago’s South Side in the 1930s when Karl Olsson was a youth pastor there. Later it was Covenant Harbor Bible Camp and then North Park for me.

Then I took an almost thirty-year hiatus. After a reawakening of my relationship with Christ, I was drawn back to the Covenant by the old history, the Swedish hymnody, and my long-standing family relationship with the Covenant and its people. It was a perfect environment in which to foster my relationship with the Savior. I appreciate the fact that the Covenant recognizes the Holy Scripture as the only perfect rule for faith and

doctrine. I also appreciate the new diversity of the Covenant, which is essential to our growth.

---

**Christine Koller** is a member of Bethlehem Covenant Church in Stephenson, Michigan.

## Marjorie C. Carlson

You might say I am in the Covenant because I was born into it. That’s only partly true. I am told I began attending the Evangelical Covenant Church in Belvidere, Illinois, two weeks after I was born in a nearby farmhouse.

The church was the center of my world. My family and friends were there. My social life took place in the church. After high school I attended North Park College. What a great experience to meet Covenanters from other parts of the country. I felt so at home. Then I began working for para-church organizations. My horizon was greatly expanded as I began to know like-minded denominations and personnel.

Later my professional moves took me further away from home. At Fuller Seminary, I was thrust into working relationships with other Christians, some who were from what I had considered liberal mainline churches. I discovered much to my joy, these friends and churches abounded in love and service to “my” God!

When the Covenant church I attended closed its doors, I considered becoming part of another denomination. A new focus would bring fresh enthusiasm. But I couldn’t get the Covenant out of my mind. Reflecting on our founding verse, “I am a companion to all those who fear me” (Psalm 119:63), I realized this was where I wanted to be. And so I chose the Evangelical Covenant Church. It allows me to minister in my own church and also to embrace all who

claim Christ as Lord.

So yes, I am a Covenanter by birth. But more importantly, I am a Covenanter by choice!

---

**Marjorie C. Carlson** lives in Rockford and is a member of the Evangelical Covenant Church in Belvidere, Illinois.

### Esther Nelson Hallock

**M**y husband and I served together as missionaries to Congo for the Covenant until we retired. He died three years ago. Together we attended First Covenant Church in Portland, Oregon, where I still attend.

When I was thirteen, Covenanters from Duluth First Covenant came out to the country and opened up a church building that had been locked up for many years. I started going to Sunday school then, and I have been a Covenanter ever since. I took the job of custodian at fifteen years of age. My mother suggested that the church be named “Gethsemane.” It is now a thriving church and has been for many years. I am now ninety-four years of age, and have had perfect attendance since I recovered from a broken neck in 2004. My fulfilling ministry is attending church.

---

**Esther Nelson Hallock** is a member of First Covenant Church in Portland, Oregon.

### Randy Klassen

**I**t happened in 1956. I was at home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, having returned from two years at Fuller Theological Seminary, when I received an unexpected telephone call. A man named Rueben Tungeth was calling to see if I could fill the pulpit for a coming Sunday at the Teien Covenant Church, a hundred miles away in Drayton, North Dakota.

I had grown up in a German-

speaking Mennonite church and through the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship had come to know several denominations, but I had never heard of the Covenant. I accepted the call anyway, and by way of the Greyhound bus made it to Drayton on the specified Sunday. After the services (both morning and evening), which went well, I received the second surprise. Would I consider an interim ministry? I replied, “I don’t think so. I haven’t finished seminary. I’m not married. I’m not a U.S. citizen, and I don’t know what the Covenant is all about.” So it ended, I thought.

About three weeks later came another surprise. The pulpit committee told me that they had prayed about it and wanted to come to Winnipeg to discuss it with me. They came—three Swedish farmers. I asked them, “I know what the Mennonites believe, and the Presbyterians, but what should I know about the Covenant?” I’ll never forget the answer. “You preach Christ,” Adolph Anderson said, “and ve vill pray for you.” “Is that it?” I gasped.

“Is there more?” he replied.

I think I joined the Covenant that moment. I served the Teien Covenant Church for the next eighteen months and then went on to North Park Seminary. Forty years of an exciting journey in the Covenant followed. There were failures and successes, joys and tears, and many wonderful people along the way, starting with those in the Teien church. Through it all, the grace of God has grown more precious to me. Now in retirement, I still “preach Christ” in churches of many denominations, but I am always introduced as an ordained minister of the Evangelical Covenant Church, and so it will be, until heaven.

---

**Randy Klassen** is a retired Covenant minister living in Walla Walla, Washington.

### Warren W. Lindstrom

**W**hen I think of the Evangelical Covenant Church in which I grew up, I think of people and hymns that dominated my early nurturing in faith. A close-knit group of young followers of Jesus grew out of the ministry of Robert Sturdy. From the small Mission Covenant Church (now Grace) of Stambaugh (now Iron River) in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, God called a half-dozen or more to professional ministry. Music, especially heritage hymns, strongly influenced us and became an integral source and expression of our faith walk. The strength of our youth ministry was in the choir, at times led by one of the Ericksons—first Fritz, then Irving, and later Eldred.

Another enriching and bonding experience came after the Sunday evening service at which the choir sang. The youth frequently were invited to a church member’s home for fellowship, singing, games, and refreshments. Spontaneous fun mingled with a deepening of life.

The influence of that ministry followed me into the Navy during World War II. Often as I stood a night watch over the darkened waters of both the Atlantic and Mediterranean, hymns would drift back in memory to lighten the boredom. Years later I preached sermons on a number of hymns and the use of the hymnal.

So the song and faith live on generation after generation to the praise of God.

---

**Warren W. Lindstrom** is a retired Covenant minister and a member of Bethany Covenant Church in Bedford, New Hampshire.

