



## Organizing for Mission

One of the signature events for the Covenant is our Midwinter Conference, where some 1,000 Covenant clergy gather for inspiration, worship, seminars, and friendship. As this incredibly faithful cadre of generous and sacrificial servants of Christ gathers again this month, they will hear that collectively we are entering the Year of Organizing for Mission.

When you enter a home, you do not see the plumbing and wiring hidden behind the walls. However, that which is unseen is the exact source of making that home comfortable, convenient, and efficient. Likewise, the good organization and smooth operation of a church at its best is largely unseen behind more visible aspects such as worship, children's ministries, evangelism, and ministries to the hurting. Good behind-the-scenes organizational and governing processes should not call attention to themselves, but they are indispensable to accomplishing the mission.

That is no less true of this collective movement we call the Evangelical Covenant Church. A basic structure that has served us well for a long time is showing signs of overload. The Covenant Executive Board has authorized a fully orbited review to make sure we are finding the pinch points, gaps, and overlaps as we engage in the incredible opportunities and considerable challenges in bridging to the future. We are calling this the Year of Organizing for Mission.

This is the culmination of a process addressing three questions: 1) What are we trying to accomplish in the lives of real people in real places? 2) What are the core ministries that will accomplish that mission? 3) What is the best alignment of personnel, structures, and resources to accomplish that mission?

In answer to the first question, we use this framing language: we join God in God's mission to see more disciples, among more populations, in a more caring and just world.

In answering the second question, we introduced five priorities at the 125<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting last June: 1) Start and strengthen churches. 2) Make and deepen disciples. 3) Develop leaders. 4) Love mercy, do justice. 5) Serve globally.

Now we turn to the third question. The Ex-

ecutive Board has authorized the convening of a fifteen-member Organizing for Mission Project Team tasked with developing potential answers. Its primary focus is structural. The team will have a strong center core of people with planning experience in complex and layered systems, and will be broadly representative of the diversity of the ECC constituency in terms of generation, gender, geography, ethnicity, and congregational context.

The scope of review will include the denomination, regional conferences, and affiliated institutions/corporations to identify unique strengths and appropriate responsibilities of each, clarify their intersecting relationships, and find ways to further our mission through cooperation and mutual support.

We expect the potential answers to point toward greater missional effectiveness; greater organizational clarity and simplification; cohesion and congruence across the whole of the ECC; ongoing flexibility and responsiveness for adaptation moving forward; and enhanced leadership and financial streams to support the mission.

The aim is to have finalized and presented recommendations by the Executive Board meeting in October.

Several important values will guide the process, among them:

*Mission-driven:* We will maintain "advancing capacity for mission" as a filter for all recommendations.

*Congregationally centered:* We will operate from the core assumption that the structure exists to serve our churches and to unite our churches in service together.

*Communicative:* The process will include a communications strategy for stakeholders and constituents throughout the process.

*Coordinated:* The process will use findings from existing efforts, such as innovation groups, Vision 2020 task force results, the Fivefold Test (which informs multiethnic advances in the church), and other ongoing planning processes.

*Strength/asset-based:* We will build on strengths and assets within the ECC, and not be

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# COMPASS BEARINGS

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dominated by “fixing” problems and deficits.

*Resources:* The structure should encourage flexible distribution of resources (financial, human capital, knowledge, access, etc.).

*Connectional:* The structure should create and support relational connections between the denomination, conferences, and local churches.

*Adaptable:* The structure should be flexible enough to allow for streamlined decision-making and course corrections as necessary.

*Integrated:* The structure should coordinate various tasks, functions, and divisions so that they work together and not at cross-purposes or in isolation. The whole must be greater than the sum of its parts.

*Multifaceted:* The structure should reflect, support, and benefit from the advancing mosaic of the ECC.

Somebody once said that when we answer the call to follow Christ, we are led not out of the world, but into the world. There are moments when it is important to see if we are inadvertently getting in our own way. Now is just such a time. ■