



Be It Resolved

Our Annual Meeting each June is more than a business meeting. We do gather to make important decisions around the mission we share, but we also have inspiring worship services, great preaching, practical seminars, celebrations of what God is doing, affinity groups (including our ministerium), and opportunities to make and strengthen friendships. To capture the breadth of all that activity, our planning committee is changing the name from the Annual Meeting to Gather 2014. Business will be a central but not exclusive component.

One thing we do as we come together is examine issues that impact public discipleship, or how we engage with the issues of the world around us from a biblical perspective. We do that through resolutions that provide biblical perspective on an issue and suggestions for living faithfully in regard to the issue. Resolutions are crafted by the Commission on Christian Action and presented to the Annual Meeting, which may accept, amend, refer for more refinement, or reject a resolution. Adopted resolutions are not binding, but rather are offered to inform individual, congregational, and denominational grappings on issues our society and culture generally wrestle with poorly. A complete list of adopted resolutions can be found at CovChurch.org/resolutions.

I confess I used to dread this agenda item. The prospect of processing a substantial document on a potentially polarizing topic in just thirty to sixty minutes, word-smithed among hundreds of delegates, often with arcane parliamentary procedure with amendments to amendments to amendments, all under the pressure of a thumbs up or thumbs down vote, could be discomfoting.

But then Debbie Blue, executive minister for compassion, mercy, and justice, came up with a much better process. Rather than trying to attend to these matters of importance in a single Annual Meeting, why not do it over the course of two?

The result: greater engagement, stronger consensus, and better final documents. What adding a year has done is take the harried focus off the thumbs up/thumbs down nature of an agenda item needing action, and allow non-anxious room for constructive discussion and additional perspective at that first Annual Meeting. The draft

is then posted online, with feedback encouraged from individuals, churches, and leaders. With the feedback, a new draft is developed and presented to the second Annual Meeting for final action. There is still opportunity for vigorous debate at the second Annual Meeting, but the primary effect of this enhanced process, in my observation, is a coalescing of perspective and ownership.

We are committed to certain values in crafting a resolution. The first and governing principle is to be biblical. Every resolution begins with a scriptural overview of the subject. Our highest intent is to engage the world from the perspective of the wisdom and direction of God's word.

The second is to make sure we are looking at a topic from 360 degrees. It is easy to take a single dimension of a complicated matter and come up with a simplistic solution, but rarely does that encourage progress. Indeed, when countered by a different narrow solution, the result most often becomes intractability. It is the hard work of engaging complexity that leads to a more authentic way forward. For example, a recent resolution on mass incarceration looked at perpetrator *and* victim; the good *and* the bad of the criminal justice system; the impact on individuals *and* communities; systemic issues *and* personal responsibility. As a result, instead of demonizing one position or another, we help create understanding, which can potentially lead to finding new common ground.

A third principle is listening. We present, we listen, we find gaps, and then we enhance. Some might call this "communal discernment." I simply call it the wisdom of the body of Christ. The Christian Action Commission initiates thoughts, but in the end these are documents that are honed and owned by the church.

At this Annual Meeting, er, Gather, we come to year two of a resolution on immigration. We began as an immigrant church, the memory of which influences us as today our churches serve and include immigrants from around the world. I promise you the resolution will be biblical, that it takes a well-rounded view of the complexities, and has been honed by the wisdom of much input. ■

Gary Walter is president of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Follow him on Twitter @ECCprez.

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