



JUNE 27-29, 2019 / OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Delegate Summary

Introduction

Gather 2019 brought a record number of delegates to Omaha to decide weighty matters, ordain ministers and install leaders. This delegate summary provides an overview of Gather 2019. As a delegate, you have the privilege of sharing this information with your congregation. Related news releases covering events at Gather 2019 are also available at covchurch.org/news, and you can find the video archives of the event at gather.covchurch.org.

You can use these highlights to deliver an official report to your congregation's board, council or leadership team. Some Covenant churches publish this information as part of their congregational newsletters. We invite you to use this summary in whatever way it will best serve you and your congregation. Please also stay updated on all things Covenant all year long by subscribing to the new CovChurch app at covchurch.org/mobileapp, through signing up for Covenant Newswire at covchurch.org/stay-connected and through reading feature stories at covenantcompanion.com.

Key Facts

Membership in the Mission

1. There were 1,051 credentialed voting delegates representing 430 churches. This represents the largest number of voting delegates at an Annual Meeting. The breakdown of voting delegates by conference is as follows: Alaska, 16; Canada, 5; Central, 139; East Coast, 61; Great Lakes, 69; Midsouth, 12; Midwest, 127; Northwest, 261; Pacific Northwest, 98; Pacific Southwest, 149; Southeast, 16. (In addition to the 953 voting delegates from local churches, there were 98 general voting delegates.) Total registered conference attendance, including general conferees, was 1,228 people, representing 443 churches.
2. The ECC received 12 churches into membership, representing combined approximate attendance of 1,159.
3. Seven churches were voluntarily removed from the membership roster: six had closed and one withdrew its membership.
4. After much debate, one church, First Covenant Church of Minneapolis, was involuntarily dismissed from the roster of Covenant churches by a vote in executive session that surpassed the required two-thirds majority needed. Delegates debated the matter in two, 30-minute sessions after presentations by both First Covenant Church of Minneapolis and the Covenant Executive Board, which brought the recommendation for removal before the Annual Meeting, having found the church to be out of harmony with the ECC on human sexuality and pastoral credentialing.
5. After the vote, the Annual Meeting delegates responded with a prayer of lament, which can be found at gather.covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Gather19-Prayer-of-Lament.pdf
6. Delegates also voted to remove the credentials of Steven Armfield and Daniel Collison after extended debate in executive session.

State of the Mission

7. The report of the president and video archives of all Gather '19 proceedings will be located at gather.covchurch.org.
8. News releases and stories covering the Annual Meeting are posted at covchurch.org/news and at covenantcompanion.com.
9. The 2018-19 Mission and Ministry Report to the Annual Meeting can be downloaded gather.covchurch.org/2019agenda under agenda item 28, the "Mission and Ministry Leadership Report."
10. The ECC ended the 2018 fiscal year with an operating budget surplus of approximately \$13,000. Expenses were roughly \$444,000 or 2.65 percent over budget due to the increase in church planting activity. Covenant churches gave a total of \$8.4 million to ECC mission and ministry for a 1.3 percent increase in local church giving. However, individual donor support was down by 1.3 percent. Overall total income was 4 percent ahead of budget, offsetting a 3.9 percent increase in total expenses over budget.
11. Delegates honored and prayed for 20 new church planters.
12. Five churches signed agreements of intention to plant in the ECC in partnership with their local conferences.
13. The Covenant Pension Plan, which provides retirement benefits to approximately 2,400 active and retired pastors, missionaries and their surviving spouses, remains well funded at 99 percent of the projected actuarial liability of \$244.3 million. After a number of years of diligent review and consideration by the Board of Pensions, Director of Pensions Paul Hawkinson brought an amended pension plan, which the delegates overwhelmingly approved. The major changes are as follows: the plan will be closed to new participants after 12/31/2019; a new mandatory 403(b)(9) will be required for new credentials after 2019. Enrolled participants will have a future option to switch to the 403(b)(9). Participants over the age of 65 (but still enrolled) will direct all future funding to the 403(b)(9). Both plans preserve future use of the housing allowance designation for participants. The Board of Pensions will launch a match fund to augment the 403(b)(9) contributions in under-resourced settings.
14. Bethany Benefit Service provides medical, dental, prescription drug, vision, life and long-term disability benefits to pastors, missionaries, office staff, surviving spouses and families. Bethany Benefit Service held 2019 medical rate increases to 3 percent, much lower than rate increases in the broader healthcare environment.
15. The Covenant Companion received a total of 20 awards for its work in 2018 at the Evangelical Press Association and Associated Church Press conferences, including five first place honors.

Servant Leadership in the Mission

16. On Saturday morning, eight missionaries were commissioned for service.
17. Delegates elected Paul Robinson to serve as executive minister of Love Mercy and Do Justice and Paul Lessard to serve as executive minister of Start and Strengthen Churches. They were installed during the Saturday morning service, along with the following ECC leaders who were previously appointed: Angela Yee, executive director of ministry initiatives; Erin Chan Ding, executive director of communications; Steve Klimkowski, executive director of finance; and Peter Hedstrom, president of National Covenant Properties.
18. Michelle Sanchez, executive minister of Make and Deepen Disciples, and Al Tizon, executive minister of Serve Globally, were re-elected to serve in Covenant leadership. Dennis Edwards also was called to the faculty of North Park Theological Seminary.
19. Twenty individuals were elected to denominational boards.
20. In anticipation of the ordination service on Saturday night, delegates voted to ordain 41 individuals to Word and Sacrament; to ordain five individuals to Word and Service; to commission one; and to finalize the transfer of ordination for four individuals.

Honoring Faithful Service in the Mission

21. The Irving C. Lambert Award, recognizing outstanding urban and ethnic ministry, was presented to Lynda Delgado and Edward Delgado.
22. The T. W. Anderson Award, recognizing outstanding laypeople, was presented posthumously to Keith Turnquist of First Covenant Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. The award was accepted on his behalf by his wife, Marcy Turnquist.
23. The ECC awarded 54 individuals with Clergy Lifetime Service recognitions.
24. Retiring administrators Stephen Dawson, president of National Covenant Properties, and Edward Delgado, president of Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos, were honored.
25. Covenant leaders Paul Hawkinson, executive director of finance, Covenant treasurer and director of pensions, and Cecilia Williams, executive minister of Love Mercy Do Justice, were also recognized at the conclusion of their service.
26. Six departing members of the Covenant Executive Board were recognized: Roy Applequist, Alice Lee, Jeffrey Houston, Becky Barnett, Joshua Kang, and Michael Wilson.
27. Retiring missionaries James and Joan Gustafson, the first Covenant missionaries to Thailand in 1971, were recognized upon their retirement.
28. A Resolution of Sympathy was adopted praising God for the lives and ministries of dedicated Covenanters who have gone to be with the Lord, including 21 pastors, 4 missionaries and 16 pastors' spouses.

Funding the Mission

29. The Covenant Annual Meeting approved a 2020 Mission and Ministry budget of \$28.25 million. Steve Klimkowski, executive director of finance, noted that \$18.87 million of that is in base mission investment and \$9.37 million is in project ministry activity.
30. National Covenant Properties reported that 4,600

mission-minded investors were able to fund 314 loans to Covenant churches, camps, retirement facilities and affiliated organizations totaling \$300 million in commitments.

31. Covenant Trust Company (CTC) managed about 3,400 accounts representing \$1 billion. In addition, CTC distributed in excess of \$9 million to ECC ministries from the estate plans of its clients.

Living Faithfully in the Mission

32. North Park University President Mary Surridge, North Park Theological Seminary Dean David Kersten, Paul Carlson Partnership Executive Director Renée Hale, Covenant Ministries of Benevolence President and CEO Roger Oxendale, National Covenant Properties President Peter Hedstrom, Covenant Trust Company President Ann Wiesbrock and Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos President Ed Delgado provided updates on developments concerning their institutions, including new programs and initiatives.

Of particular note is a new partnership between Swedish Covenant Health (SCH) and NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore.) After 133 years of being a ministry of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Swedish Covenant Health will begin a new chapter by joining NorthShore at the end of 2019, pending regulatory approvals. The hospital will remain a full-service acute care community hospital. The ongoing clinical nursing experiences and practices for students at North Park University and SCH will continue, as will the chaplaincy training program between North Park Theological Seminary and the hospital. The partnership enhances SCH's financial stability and will help the organization grow and continue to serve the community for years to come.

The Next Annual Meeting

33. The 135th Annual Meeting will take place June 25-27, 2020, in Phoenix, Arizona. Please visit covchurch.org for more details.