



Report of the President

Mission Friends, we are a people of hope. As we recuperate from Covid and recalibrate to a new normal, our victory is always and only in Jesus. We rest assured, humbly confident that God's purposes will prevail. May we be joyful in hope as we discern how the Kingdom of God is advancing in these days. The challenges are great, but our God is a sovereign God.

GRATEFUL

I am grateful for our partnership in the gospel. We are better together as we join our hearts and hands for mission. Together we share and tell more of God's story. The love of Christ compels us to stay focused on mission.

As I near the end of my term, this is my final report as president. I want to start by saying how grateful and honored I am for the opportunity to have served in this role. The Covenant Church has nurtured me as a disciple of Jesus and impressed upon me our spiritual and relational heritage as mission friends.

From our humble beginnings in 1885 as a life renewal movement, we earnestly sought to go deeper in Christ and further in mission. I am mindful of the great cloud of witnesses who lived lives of sacrifice and service. They modeled an enduring light and passed on a living faith which still shines today.

The story was not over then, and it is not over now. Through the years we have grown to become a multi-generational, multiethnic union of 903 churches in North America. We are blessed with global personnel and partnerships in over 50 countries. Together we proclaim and demonstrate the whole gospel. It is both/and.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to join God in God's mission to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. We carry out this mission through five strategic priorities: Make and Deepen Disciples, Start and Strengthen Churches, Develop Leaders, Love Mercy and Do Justice, and Serve Globally. These mission priorities work in conjunction with Finance, Marketing and Communications, Operations, and Advancement. I am always amazed by how God has blessed our movement with faithful and gifted individuals who serve our denomination and its constituencies sacrificially. I'm grateful for the denominational team, comprised of godly and gifted women and men who come together to make a difference.

We join together with our affiliates who specialize in a variety of ministries: North Park University (including North Park Theological Seminary), Covenant Ministries of Benevolence, National Covenant Properties, Covenant Trust Company, and Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos.

I appreciate each of you and your role in the continuing mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church. We are at our best when we are grounded in the Scriptures, unified in mission, and calling out the best in each other. Thank you for contributing to our shared mission. Your financial gifts support our shared mission of meeting real needs for real people in real places. Your love and faith abound as you give the gifts of God for the work of God. Together we trust in a generous God.

The church was built for times such as this. When the world was struggling with a pandemic, churches moving to online services, racism, anxiety, and school closings, the Evangelical Covenant Church stepped up to follow Jesus's instructions to serve others and bring a message of hope to the world.

In this year's Mission & Ministry Annual Report, you will read of gospel impact both domestically and around the world. It is our deepest desire for people to meet, know, and follow Jesus.

I pray that the things we have accomplished together in Jesus's name will continue to bear fruit for God's glory and neighbor's good.

I would love to share a few examples of our recent collective work:

A RENEWED EMPHASIS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of our Covenant Affirmations is a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. We cannot do the work of God without the power of the Holy Spirit who is the blazing center of our mission, and more pastors are preaching on the Holy Spirit.

FOSTERING THE FLOURISHING OF WOMEN

Based on how we read the Scriptures, we believe that women are called and gifted for every ministry role. There are now more women serving in executive leadership roles than ever before since our founding in 1885. Some would say this is remarkable, but I hope it becomes normal and natural. This is particularly meaningful to me because one of the reasons I originally joined the Covenant was because of our biblical understanding of women as called and gifted.

THE SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

This discipleship tool for multiethnic ministry invites us to lean into the kingdom vision of Revelation 7:9 where people from every nation, tribe, people, and language stand before the throne. The Six-Fold Test for multiethnic ministry identifies six critical elements of living into this kingdom vision: population, participation, power, pace-setting, purposeful narrative, and practicing solidarity. It was the addition of “Practicing Solidarity” that made the Six-Fold Test for multiethnic ministry more accessible for local congregations. This tool provides a clear framework to advance the mission with the dual lens of ethnic diversity and antiracist progress.

THE GROWING MOSAIC

Together we advance the mission through the multiethnic mosaic of churches of which we are all a part. The ethos of mission friends is our past; the mosaic of mission friends is our future. Over 60% of our church plants are led by pastors of color in the full mosaic. I’m especially grateful for the Mosaic Commission, for their diligence and friendship over these past few years.

DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING LEADERS

The Covenant is blessed with younger leaders who are already serving in roles of influence. The leadership cohort “30 for 30” brought younger leaders together for peer mentoring, training, and community-building. For almost two years we walked together and built many lasting relationships.

DIGITAL FIRST

Just as our local churches did, the denominational team made adjustments to our communication strategies during Covid. CovChurchNow is our weekly email communication that provides inspiring stories, updates, and opportunities to connect with how God is working through the Covenant Church. If you are not already, I hope you will subscribe to this email to stay connected in our shared work and mission in a collective manner. The *Love the Cov* podcast seeks to unpack our Covenant history and heritage. The new covchurch.org website, which launched in March, is more user friendly and provides better functionality. My hope is that all three of these improved digital communications help you stay connected and resourced to do your own mission work in your own communities.

JOURNEYS AND ADVENTURES

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, “Some journeys take us far from home. Some adventures lead us to our destiny.” Over the last 16 years I have served in three roles at Covenant Offices: director, executive minister, president. Some of these journeys have taken me far from home. Some of these adventures have led me to places, people, and ministry I never dreamed of. I remain curious about what God will do next, all the while treasuring the many relationships that were formed on the journey.

One thing has not changed. I remain a servant of Jesus. I was a servant before being elected, a servant while in the role, and I will continue to be a servant after my presidential term.

As I enter into a time of prayer and discernment to wait for God’s next calling, my prayer is this for the Evangelical Covenant Church: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Church, continue to work together to share and tell more of God’s story.

Pandemic or no pandemic, Jesus is still the firm foundation of our faith. Jesus will build his church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

In Christ’s love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

John