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THE COVENANT

# reporter



In 2013, Covenant Kids Congo powered by World Vision will partner with Covenant camps to bring clean water to Congo.

## BE FAITHFUL

How are we impacting the lives of real people in real places?

**T**he Covenant has embarked on a journey that focuses more crisply on what we do in our shared ministry as we seek to be found faithful to God's call.

President Gary Walter frames the larger mission and ministry objective as a question: "What are we trying to accomplish in the lives of real people in real places?" The response has become as familiar as the question: "We join God in God's mission to see more disciples, among more populations, in a more caring and just world."

In pursuit of that objective, five core mission and ministry priorities have been identified that serve as a framework for advancing the Covenant's shared ministry through local church, conference and denominational efforts: start and strengthen churches, make and deepen disciples, develop leaders, love mercy - do justice, and serve globally.

In the pages that follow, you will read representative articles that reflect the way we live out these five priorities together. Opportunities for becoming more involved in Covenant life are also shared.

To learn more about the Covenant's mission and ministry efforts, take advantage of the wide range of informational tools and resources that explore each of these priorities in greater detail: [CovChurch.org](http://CovChurch.org) (the Covenant website), *The Covenant Companion*, Covenant Newswire (the daily email-based news report), [CovBooks.com](http://CovBooks.com) (the online Covenant bookstore), [CovChurch.tv](http://CovChurch.tv) (houses all Covenant-related video), the CovLink and CovEvents mobile applications, the official Covenant Facebook and Twitter pages, and a wide array of blogs from individual mission and ministry areas and affiliated ministries among others.



# BE MERCIFUL

Covenanters create a safe place to overcome addiction.

**MOUNT VERNON, WA**—Kristin’s drinking led to multiple trips to emergency rooms and several stints in rehab centers, but the former upper-level executive of a major firm couldn’t admit that she was an alcoholic. “I was broken and things kept falling apart—literally,” she says. “I was one of those people who would fall down and hurt myself.”

Then she lost everything. Her husband left with their son, and the couple sold their house. She wound up drinking three straight days and nights in a hotel room. “I spent another day in the emergency room and went straight to treatment.”

After treatment, she went straight to Faith House, a home for women in recovery started just a year before by Amy and Alan Muia, members of Bethany Covenant Church.

Amy Muia had worked several years for a nonprofit ministry called Tierra Nueva, which seeks to join “word, spirit, and street.” When she began serving as a chaplain to women at the county jail, she was frustrated that many were caught in a seemingly endless cycle of being jailed, released, jailed, and then released again.

Then she received an invitation to attend the first-ever Covenant Prison Ministry Roundtable sponsored by the Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice. “It was there that they met Joe and Carmin Ottley, two recovering addicts and members of Crossroads Covenant Church in Yelm, Washington. They had started their own homes for recovering addicts and have been recognized by the state for their work.

“My husband and I caught a vision—we would start a women’s clean and sober house,” she says. They started it under a new department of Tierra Nueva and partnered with Bethany and a local Presbyterian congregation.

“I remember Carmin telling me, ‘We couldn’t have done it without Crossroads.’ ”

The ministry found a home to rent, and volunteers from the churches logged more than 2,000 hours preparing it for the women. Up to 15 women can live in the house at one time.

For many of the residents, the house is nicer than any place they’ve lived and is symbolic of what a new life can be. “One of the residents just cried,” says Muia. “She said that



Far left: Bethany Covenant Church members helped to remodel Faith House so residents would feel special.

Left: Amy and Alan Muia oversee a ministry that helps women battling drug addiction transform their lives.

just being in a beautiful place makes her feel human.”

The women learn to manage conflict, develop job and life skills such as paying bills and interviewing. Alan Muia says, “The conflict is hard, but this is the good stuff. This is where people learn to do things differently, to get relationship skills that will help them their whole lives.”

The ministry recommends the women stay for at least a year. “We know they didn’t get to this place overnight,” Amy says. “It is about healing heart issues and not just addiction.”

One of the goals of Faith House is to share the gospel, but the women are not easily swayed. “They don’t just take your word about God’s love,” Muia says. “They want to experience it.”

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Kristin is experiencing that love and now participates in multiple ministries and attends Bethany Covenant. “I can’t believe all the goodness that has come about and how blessed I am, and how God has a plan for my life. Alcohol doesn’t have a place in my life anymore. I look forward to the days ahead.”

To watch a video on CovChurch.tv of women sharing their testimonies, visit [CovChurch.tv/new-earth-recovery](http://CovChurch.tv/new-earth-recovery).

## LOVE MERCY & DO JUSTICE

From a biblically rooted perspective the Covenant since its beginnings has sought to help hurting people (love mercy), and address the causes of that hurt (do justice). We provide tangible ways to extend the love of Jesus in deed as well as word, and advocate for the “least of these.”

# BE GROUNDED

Free curriculum lays foundation for faith around the world.

**CHICAGO, IL**—In 1989, missionary Margie Swenson began a 10-year process of working with others to write *El Pacto Con Dios* (The Covenant with God), a comprehensive children’s Sunday-school program, at the request of seminary students she was teaching in Medellín, Colombia. They had told her that the greatest need in their churches was material originally written in Spanish.

Most of the curriculum being used by Spanish-speaking churches was translated from English, and a comprehensive suite of materials was not available. Teachers had to piece their curriculum together from multiple publishers. “All were antiquated and geared toward North American children,” Swenson says.

So it is no small irony that the material has become the basis for the English-language *Adventures with God*, a recently released comprehensive Bible study curriculum for children. Or that missionaries in Thailand are adapting *Adventures with God* to teach at-risk children in the Southeast Asia country.

*El Pacto Con Dios* is being used by Spanish-speaking churches around the world and receives more than 50,000 page views a month on the Covenant website. “It’s stunning to me that so many churches from other denominations around the world started using the materials,” Swenson said last year. “It’s amazing. We still hear about new churches that have found the material.”

That was before she learned that Heather Askew, a short-term Covenant missionary, had started teaching Bible stories

to her K-2 class at Taw Saeng (To Shine), a ministry to children living in the red-light district of Chiang Mai.

With an awe-filled humility, Swenson says, “Now, to see the curriculum being translated into English and made available to folks in places like Chiang Mai, Thailand, makes me say, once again, ‘To God be the glory.’”

Askew says the students love the curriculum, and it has led to discussions in which children share their biggest dreams and deepest questions. Askew and a co-instructor teach the stories and concepts in Thai and then have the kids read the Bible verses in Thai.

“The structure allows for child participation, so we get to hear how the kids have experienced God when they were scared or far from home,” Askew explains. “The art activities are a form of art therapy as many of our kids come from broken homes, have experienced abuse, or come from Buddhist families that live in fear of evil spirits controlling their lives.”

The materials also give students the opportunity to ask questions at their level about theological issues such as God being “with us.” Askew recalls one student who asked, “He doesn’t come in the bathroom with us right?” before continuing, “Well, I guess it’s OK cause he made our bodies, but he still has to close his eyes, right?”

Others asked, “How can God be in all of our hearts all the time and go with us everywhere and see us everywhere?” and “If God is in our hearts and we are children of God, why can’t





Pictured: Covenant missionary Heather Askew (center) uses *Adventures with God* to teach the Bible to children in Thailand.

## MAKE & DEEPEN DISCIPLES

We are committed to reaching people with the new life in Christ (evangelism) and helping them grow deeper in Christ (formation). We seek to resource congregations in engaging persons of all ages in a lifelong journey of faith.

we walk on water like Jesus?”

The material teaches biblical truths using Bible stories as the base. The material also is illustrated with original artwork.

All lessons follow the same format, but the curriculum is not one-size-fits-all. An accompanying training manual for teachers offers educators advice on how to adapt the material for different learning styles.

Askew adds, “The great thing about the curriculum is that if you have all the aids and a classroom at a church you can really do it to the fullest, but even if you just have a multipurpose room and some cotton balls, you can still teach the core lessons.”

Educators from the Evangelical Covenant Churches of Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and the United States developed

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the material. Hillcrest Covenant Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, paid the bulk of expenses to bring the educators together for multiple sessions.

Swenson says developers also wanted to make sure anyone had access to the curriculum. “The goal was to be complete, inexpensive, biblical, and available,” Swenson says.

*Adventures with God* and *El Pacto con Dios* are available for free download. Local users also can post their own adaptations on the curriculum website.



# BE VITAL

Churches, new or established, can be agents of change.

**NEW YORK CITY, NY**—To see how planting churches makes a difference one need only look at New York City, where three congregations helped lead efforts to assist victims of Hurricane Sandy. In other urban, suburban, and rural areas, the Covenant’s commitment to strengthening churches is helping local congregations address new challenges and engage new opportunities.

It was only hours after Hurricane Sandy ripped through the East Coast and tore apart sections of New York City that ministers of three church plants already were at work helping to plan ways to provide relief supplies.

Working with the National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC), they obtained use of the Kingsbridge Armory within a day of Sandy striking.

Even as the Federal Emergency Management Agency was beginning to mobilize, Michael Carrion of Promised Land Covenant Church, Efrain Alicea of Elements Covenant Church, and Jose Humphreys of Metro Hope Covenant Church were working almost around the clock making sure

donated supplies got to where they needed to be.

Some of the assistance they received came from Covenanters around the United States, especially the East Coast and Great Lakes Conferences (GLC). A team of 30 people from the GLC trucked in more than three tons of food, water, blankets, and other supplies within days. In addition, GLC churches raised more than \$32,000 in special offerings to provide support to ongoing relief efforts.

New Harvest Church, a Covenant congregation in Toledo, Ohio, arrived with a mobile medical unit, nurses, and trained emergency workers.

“We appreciate all the support through the East Coast Conference, Covenant World Relief, and the Evangelical Covenant Church,” Carrion said in the early days after the storm. “We don’t know where we would be without you or what we would do without your support in this moment, in this time.”

The work of the churches also was a witness to the hundreds of volunteers who assisted at the armory. Many of

them had no religious affiliation who got to see the love of Christ being lived out by Christians, Carrion says.

By the time the immediate relief efforts were completed, more than 400 tons of supplies were taken in at the armory and delivered. The broader Covenant has continued to work with the church plants and NaLEC to

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help spearhead ongoing cleanup and restoration work in some neighborhoods. Carrions says the work will take years, and the congregations intend to be part of the work throughout.

The churches are located in some of the poorest areas of the United State's largest city. Many congregations have left, but the Covenant has been intent on expanding ministry in the area, says Howard Burgoyne, East Coast superintendent.

The Covenant has been just as determined to assist existing churches by mapping out a congregational vitality pathway that includes Veritas, Pulse, and EPIC. John Wenrich, director of congregational vitality, is quick to say,

“Vitality is a pathway, not a program.” So each congregation employs the available resources in its own way.

Veritas is a workshop designed for pastors, chairpersons, and other key leaders in the church. PULSE is a congregational assessment tool given after a church participates in Veritas. EPIC is a follow-up workshop to Veritas and focuses on the spirituality, chemistry, and strategy of leading healthy missional change. It also equips leaders with the necessary tools.

At the second-ever Navigate conference last year, 120 pastors and lay leaders whose churches are on the journey partnered their individual congregations with two others that would encourage and strengthen one another over the next twelve to fourteen months.

Bill Nylund, pastor of Milwaukie Covenant Church in Milwaukie, Oregon, said the congregation has benefited immensely from the process.

“I remember John Wenrich saying this will be a four- to seven-year journey, where we will be challenged to face the truth about our church. Looking back upon those five years and the various components of this process, I would say our church has experienced its healthiest point in years.”

Nylund adds, “One primary reason the vitality process worked for us is that we didn't expect these answers to come from outside our own body.” He adds, “We needed to identify the uniqueness of our own church and then work within that framework.”

Pictured: Michael Carrion, pastor of Promised Land Covenant Church in Bronx, New York, directs operations at the Kingsbridge Armory, the staging site for relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Sandy.

## START & STRENGTHEN CHURCHES

We believe the local church is God's basic strategy to carry out mission in the world. We are committed to planting new churches and providing resources to help existing churches be healthy and missional.

# BE MISSIONAL

From Kandahar to Oaxaca, Covenanters join in God's work.

**AROUND THE WORLD**—Whether ministering to U.S. troops around the world or transforming the lives of people in the poorest countries on the planet, the Covenant is sharing the gospel in some of life's most painful circumstances.

A week after redeploying to Afghanistan, U.S. Army Maj. John Grauer led the Dignified Transfer Ceremony held on the tarmac of the Kandahar airbase in Afghanistan, immediately before the caskets bearing the bodies of servicemen are loaded on transport planes. For at least the next five months, he would participate in the DTCs on a weekly basis.

"I try not to think about it too much, or I start to cry," Grauer said months later while fighting back the tears.

Amid stories of tragedy, Grauer is inspired by the heroism of the troops to whom he has ministered. He recalls one soldier who lost both of his legs. The first thing he said after waking in the hospital was, "I need the phone so I can make sure all my guys are OK.' He didn't even think about himself."

Military chaplaincy is an important way in which the

Covenant serves globally, says Navy Cmdr. Jeff Saville, who is the chair of the Covenant Chaplains Association. He has provided services from a tent in Somalia, a library-turned-chapel aboard a ship, a chapel in Spain, and an ancient church in London. He has visited more than 30 countries on duty.

As a denomination, the Covenant provides per capita more military chaplains than any other. It currently "endorses" 32 chaplains who are on active duty, in reserves, or in the National Guard. Seven Covenant ministers are in training. Navy chaplains also serve with the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Coast Guard, since neither of those maritime branches have their own chaplains.

In just Afghanistan, Grauer as well as two other currently stationed chaplains, Navy Lt. Cmdr Frank Riley and Army Maj. Mark Nakazono, oversee ministry to more than 20,000 service personnel and Department of Defense civilians. The chaplains are pastors, preachers, counselors, administrators, advocates, and reconcilers.





They also are ministering to soldiers of other countries and helping troops to interact with Afghani civilians as they work together on humanitarian efforts.

Halfway across the world, the Covenant is also helping people who once believed they were destined to remain impoverished.

Ten years ago, Guillermo Conde Tzompanzti—called Memo by his friends—was a rural pastor in Oaxaca, Mexico, with little formal education. He and his wife, Estella, had accepted that poverty would be their future.

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Then he and other local pastors were invited to join a women's community bank group run by Fuentes Libres (free-flowing fountain), a nonprofit organization that provides micro-loans to women to run their own businesses. Started in 1997 by Covenant missionary Nancy Jo Hoover and some local Oaxacans through funding from Covenant World Relief, Fuentes Libres invited local pastors like Memo to join, hoping that they would encourage the women in their church to get involved.

Memo and Estella received a small loan of about \$100 and used the funds to start a small stand in their yard where they made and served light supper foods like tostadas and quesadillas. They paid off the loan with weekly payments over the next sixteen weeks, which is the normal loan

cycle for the women's community banks.

The restaurant continues, and there have been many improvements. The couple is able to take care of their financial feeds and have even been able to pay for their daughter's college tuition.

Memo later volunteered with Fuentes Libres and is its current CEO. Fuentes Libres is currently involved with thirty-five women's community banks and serves 550 women. Each group elects its own officers—president, secretary, and treasurer—and there is a regular rotation of officers. During their weekly meetings,

the women who have received micro-loans gather to study the Bible, contribute to their savings, make loan repayments, and talk about and encourage each other in their small business.

The loan repayment rate is a remarkable 95 percent. Between individual savings accounts and interest on loans, the women's community banks often become financially independent and sustainable within two years. Fuentes Libres continues to maintain a relationship, providing coaching and encouragement.

Covenant World Relief sponsored forty-five community development programs in twenty-one countries and twenty-two disaster response projects in sixteen countries—a total of sixty-seven projects on five continents in 2012.

Far left: U.S. Army Maj. John Grauer, a Covenant chaplain, ministers to troops serving in Afghanistan.

Left: Fuentes Libres provides micro-loans to women in Oaxaca, Mexico, to run their own businesses.

## SERVE GLOBALLY

We are committed to extending the whole gospel to the whole world. Through relief and development ministries, our Covenant missionary team, and global partnerships, we make and deepen disciples, start and strengthen churches, develop leaders, and love mercy and do justice around the world.



# BE LEADERS

CHET nurtures healthy leaders for tomorrow's church.

**LOS ANGELES, CA**—Sergio Cortes would encourage his then live-in-girlfriend Maria Castillo to attend the Bible study next door led by members of a church being started by a student at Centro Hispano de Estudios Teológicos (CHET), the denomination's training center for Hispanic ministers.

"I wanted to be by myself so I could drink," he explains. "I never imagined that one day they would be meeting in my home." Nor did he imagine that he might marry Maria, and certainly not as part of a ceremony involving three other couples at Iglesia del Pacto Fuente de Vida, an Evangelical Covenant Church plant led by Eloy Castro.

During the wedding, each of the couples shared their stories and asked forgiveness of their new spouses for encouraging and allowing them to live together without being married. Sergio's conversion also has led to reconciliation with Maria's family. "My wife's adult children from a previous relationship who had never ever accepted me have asked me for forgiveness. They know that I truly love their mother. They in fact asked to be our marriage witnesses."

Castro said working with couples to strengthen their relationships and live out their commitments to one another through marriage is a major focus of his ministry. He adds that good marriages have implications beyond the immediate home.

"Strength must begin in the home and I am convinced that if we have healthy marriages that are centered on an intimate healthy growing relationship with God, it will result in healthy churches and in turn healthy communities."

The church is supported in part by CHET and El Encino Covenant Church, a church planted by CHET leaders and students. The school's president, Ed Delgado, helped perform the wedding because Sergio was not yet licensed.

CHET is located in Compton, California, and offers numerous classes at multiple sites, including Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and La Villa, Texas. More than 600 students matriculate through the school.

Last year was one of expansion for CHET. Covenant pastor Manuel Valencia, a former professor, was hired to serve as the new dean and faculty leader. The school also started its

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first-ever summer program and graduated its largest class.

At the ceremony former student Danny Martinez, pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Spring Valley, recalled what the degree he earned through the school meant to him. “CHET provided me with highly practical ministry tools and is the place where my theology has been given shape and a center,” he said, adding that his degree prepared him to go on to earn a doctorate in homiletics.

As important as the classes are, coming alongside the students has been equally important for developing leaders.

Just as Delgado had assisted Castro and led by example during the wedding ceremony, he later ministered to his student and the church during a horrific tragedy. A 25-year-old woman who had been attending the church was murdered along with her two young children.

Delgado and school chaplain Flor Graterol rushed to comfort the pastor and church within hours of the tragedy. “He called us and said he didn’t know what to do and felt that he needed us to minister to him and his church,” Delgado said.

They spent time “just listening and praying and doing whatever else we could,” said Delgado. That included discussing how church members would break the news to their children, who still were in school.

“I am resolute and passionate about preparing men and women to face the challenges and struggles that Christian leaders face today,” says Delgado. “I am convinced that CHET exists to provide training to students like Eloy.”

Castro stated, “that God through life and recent experiences has opened my eyes to needy and hurting families. He has touched my heart. I must fight for justice and God shaped values. God has been equipping me through CHET and through ministry to live a life that reflects him, to know how to grow a church and how to minister to a hurting world. I must pass on what I have learned.”

During his report to the Midwinter Conference in January, President Gary Walter told the gathering, “My number one priority in my second term is the acceleration of Hispanic ministry.”

Samuel Galdamez, MHIPE president and pastor of Iglesia del Pacto Evangélico (La Familia de Dios) in Turlock, California, and Michael Jordan, pastor of La Vina Covenant Church in Kerman, joined Walter onstage.

Jordan translated for Galdamez, who responded to Walter’s comments, “We appreciate your openness to Hispanic leadership, and we want to encourage you that there are many Hispanic men and women who can be of great resource to our denomination.”

## DEVELOP LEADERS

We are committed to developing and strengthening leaders, both clergy and lay, through multiple avenues. Through leader formation processes, persons of all ages are equipped to live into their unique callings.

## BE INSPIRED Covenant kids reach out to children in Congo

**GEMENA, DR CONGO**—Delia’s family had sat down to dinner, but the seven-year-old was having none of it. She wanted something else. That is, until her four-year-old brother, Jason, pointed to the picture of Theophile, the four-year-old Congolese boy the family was sponsoring through Covenant Kids Congo (CKC) powered by World Vision. “I wonder if Theophile has something to eat today,” he said. Delia finished her dinner without further complaint.

Many children, like Jason and Delia, have responded enthusiastically to CKC and are learning that they can play an important role in advancing the kingdom of God.

The historic undertaking by the Evangelical Covenant Church, World Vision U.S., World Vision Congo, and the Congo Covenant Church seeks to invest millions of dollars in Gemena, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Gemena is located in the poorest province of the poorest country in the world. The United Nations also has declared it one of the world’s most failed nations. Funding will enable holistic ministry that includes initiatives focused on clean

water, health and hygiene, food and agriculture, education and literacy, and economic development.

Children and teenagers have been eager to sacrifice for kids in Congo. One teenager in foster care who attends Brookdale Covenant Church in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, took the initiative to rake yards to raise funds. Another girl who had been in and out of difficult living situations also contributed money even though she had little of her own.

The youth group from Hinsdale Covenant Church in Hinsdale, Illinois, decided to raise money for CKC at CHIC 2012 by doing belly flops in return for donations. Ultimately, the 5,000 students and 400 volunteers at the event donated \$127,555 during a special offering. It was the most money ever collected at the triennial youth event.

Other churches and ministries have also joined the effort. The Association of Covenant Camps and Conference Centers has chosen CKC as their mission project for the summer.

So far, Covenanters have sponsored more than 5,000 children, but there is much yet to be done.

## BE INVOLVED Opportunities abound to be found faithful

At the Midwinter Conference for pastors, President Gary Walter encouraged the ministers to ask themselves the question, “Lord, what more is there for us to do?” The question also is one for every layperson, and there are many opportunities for engagement.

“If it’s God calling us to do something more, then it’s a question about obedience,” Walter said. He noted, “There’s a reason it’s called a call and not a preference.”

Women will have a special opportunity to explore that call this year at Triennial XIV, August 15-18, in San Diego, California. The event, sponsored by Women Ministries, draws women from around the world, and features first-class workshops and keynote speakers.

Covenanters are answering the call to “go and make

disciples” through 72, the denomination’s effort to empower non-clergy to proclaim the kingdom of God. “The value is so central to us,” says John Teter, director of evangelism, adding that many Covenanters don’t know how to share the gospel.

The Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice offers a four-day bus journey called *Sankofa*, where participants are paired with someone of another race and travel to historic sites of the civil rights movement. *Sankofa* is a West African word meaning “looking backward to move forward.”

Conferences throughout the Covenant also offer numerous workshops and other training events on a variety of topics that include developing pastoral relations teams, growing a disabilities ministry, participating in world mission. Check your conference website for opportunities.