

Our Commitment to Our Kids

Nancy and I have been blessed with three awesome daughters, Amy, Alissa, and Lauren. Given their age spread, we faced the daunting prospect of having a teenage girl in the home for seventeen consecutive years. Lauren, the youngest, just turned twenty. Nancy and I toasted each other with a celebratory root beer at A&W.

There is not too much celebration, however, because they are now spread coast to coast with their various pursuits. We miss them for sure. Recently we were in a park and nostalgically watched a young family with three daughters enjoying each other. I discreetly pulled the dad aside to give him a little money so he could get some ice cream for the girls at the snack bar, so wishing I could do the same with my three. He thanked me, but said it wasn't necessary because they had just finished their own cones. We exchanged a knowing dad smile.

I wonder what awaits him. And all young dads. And all young moms. We know parenting comes with no guarantees, except that at some point your heart will be broken by your burden for the kids you love so deeply. It's tougher than ever to be a parent these days, especially in a culture that so abbreviates childhood and adolescence that it risks overexposing and underdeveloping an entire generation.

That's why the partnership between home and church is so critical. The discipleship of a child is best when it is neither outsourced to a church nor the sole responsibility of the family, but when the community of faith—family and congregation together—invests deeply in the generations to come.

The Covenant's commitment to the next generations is both prominent and crucial. We partner with churches to help them partner with the family.

One signature element is CHIC, our denominational youth convention held every three years. This summer some 5,000 students gathered from all over the Covenant. Nancy and I were there from start to finish. In my estimation, and that of everyone I talked to, it was the best CHIC ever. There was a palpable spiritual earnestness the entire week. Every student I talked to spoke of the profound impact in their lives through exceptional speakers, heartfelt worship, challenging seminars, friendships, and tons of activities. As one indication of what God was up to, the students gave \$127,555 to the CHIC offering, the largest ever. Funds will go to Covenant Kids, in support of ministry to children and youth in difficult

settings in South Sudan, India, Colombia, and DR Congo. But CHIC is only one dimension.

Some 20,000 children and youth attended our twenty-one camps and conference centers this summer, making deeply meaningful spiritual decisions. Another 1,000 young adults serving on staff gained valuable leadership lessons that will make them even more effective in service to Christ whatever their future vocation. Family camps provide intergenerational opportunities to grow side by side.

North Park University states its mission this way: to prepare students for lives of significance and service. With a robust enrollment, it is tapping into a stream of students hungry to live with God and for God.

ACTS 29 is an intensive three-month young adult discipleship experience under development in conjunction with international Covenant partners like Sweden and Ecuador. The design is to bring together an international mix of participants in an international context for spiritual growth, service, and community. Watch for details later this year.

Frontline Youth Ministry Coaching provides consulting to congregations of all sizes and contexts from experienced youth ministry leaders.

Youth Workers Connection is an annual training and fellowship gathering for both volunteer and church staff working in youth ministry.

Additionally, there are coaching and training resources for children's ministry, confirmation resources, and on it goes. Visit the Department of Christian Formation on CovChurch.org for more information on all of these areas.

Why is church and family partnership so important? Doing life together in raising families is an incredibly powerful and positive tool. As a parent I am deeply grateful for all of the other adults in the churches where we have been who have taken an interest in and invested in the lives of our girls.

Kids matter to God. Your kids. Your grandkids. The kids of your church. The children down the street, around the corner, around the world. The school year is starting up. Let's all find a way to jump in and bless the children around us, and, in so doing, bless their parents as well. ■

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