



Gather 2023

137TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

DELEGATE SUMMARY

Gather 2023 was held in a hybrid format with delegates attending online and in-person in Garden Grove, California. A total of 848 delegates were registered and certified, with 499 attending in person and 349 virtually. This summary provides an overview for delegates to share with their congregations. Related news releases are also available at covchurch.org/gather.

STATE OF THE MISSION

Tammy Swanson-Draheim presented her first report as president, which focused on three themes. First, she called the assembly to be immersed in prayer, reminding those gathered that God promises to be in the boat with us, even in seasons of storms, guiding us through challenges and bringing us to the other side (Mark 4).

Second, she addressed the recommendation from the 2022 Annual Meeting to report on how best to “address the divide within our body around the topic of human sexuality.” President Swanson-Draheim began by acknowledging that every person she has spoken to engages this topic out of a deep sense of conviction according to the Scriptures, and every person believes their perspective is being true to Covenant ethos and history. As a result, she said, “We need divine wisdom. I can assure you that we can be friends with people who think differently than we do.” She continued, “We didn’t get to this place overnight, and this issue won’t be resolved overnight. Sometimes God brings

us miraculously out of a storm, and sometimes, like Moses leading the Israelites, it takes 40 years to lead the people into the promised land. My hope is to bring people along in the journey.”

Third, she presented the proposed Covenant Organizational Design, along with Deb Mitchell, interim executive director of Operations. The reorganization seeks to align the mission God has given the Covenant Church with the resources God has provided in this season, to set the denomination up for a fruitful and thriving future. After discussion, 87% of delegates voted to approve the proposed Covenant Bylaw amendments to support Phase I of the Organizational Design.

The full president’s report can be viewed [here](#).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP FOR THE MISSION

- Michelle Dodson was called to serve as Milton B. Engebretson Chair of Evangelism and Justice at North Park Theological Seminary.
- Steve Klimkowski was introduced as the new president of Covenant Trust.
- Twenty-six individuals were elected to denominational boards.
- Brian Johnson was officially installed as superintendent of the Midwest Conference.
- Samantha and Seth Jordan and Rebecca Hodson were commissioned as new global personnel.
- Delegates voted to ordain 39 individuals to Word and Sacrament and nine to Word and Service, commission one, and finalize the transfer of ordination for two ministers. The service of ordination, commissioning, and consecration of new Covenant ministers was the culmination of Gather 2023.



HONORING FAITHFUL SERVICE IN MISSION

- The 2023 Irving C. Lambert Award, recognizing outstanding urban and ethnic ministry, was presented to [Harold Spooner](#) for his life of commitment to racial righteousness, community development, and consistent pursuit of shalom for all of God's people.
- The 2023 T.W. Anderson Award, recognizing an outstanding layperson, was presented to [Janet Woods](#) of Rochester (Minnesota) Covenant Church.
- Outgoing leaders Angela Yee, Steve Klimkowski, Michelle Sanchez, and Jacqueline Sugihara were honored for their service to the Covenant.
- The Covenant awarded 50 individuals with Clergy Vocational Service recognition.
- Eight global personnel were recognized for their service: Gary and Pauline Carlson, Andy and Cari Larsen, Celia and David Stockamp, and Carolyn and Jeff Stoker.
- 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 20 pastors, three global personnel, and 18 pastors' spouses.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE MISSION

- The Covenant received ten new churches across four conferences into membership.
- Delegates honored and prayed for seven new church planters.
- Twenty-two churches were voluntarily removed from the membership roster: 11 closed, ten withdrew, and one merged. One church was involuntarily removed.

DIMENSIONS OF THE MISSION

- Howard Burgoyne, superintendent of the East Coast Conference, presented a report on the Covenant resource paper "The Evangelical Covenant Church and Freedom, Unity, and Responsibility" to be spread across the minutes for vote at the 2024 Annual Meeting.

FUNDING THE MISSION

- Delegates approved a Fiscal Year 2023 budget of \$17,551,054, as presented by Steve Dawson, interim chief financial officer and treasurer.
- Gayle Gilreath, executive director of Mission Advancement, reported on 3StrandStrong partnerships, outlining our belief that the local church is God's basic strategy for reaching the world and that the conference and denomination exist to serve and support the local church. To learn more about how your church can partner in mission, go to giving@covchurch.org.
- National Covenant Properties reported that 4,000 mission-minded investors funded 260 loans to Covenant churches, camps, retirement facilities, and affiliated organizations totaling \$275 million in commitments. They provided \$30 million in new loans, with 41 real estate projects totaling \$38 million.
- Covenant Trust reported that in 2022, assets under management grew to \$1,102,400,000, and assets under custody are \$949 million, with a total of assets under care of \$2.091 billion. Total giving to Covenant ministries through Covenant Trust, including legacy and current gifts, was \$8 million.

THE NEXT ANNUAL MEETING

The 138th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church will take place June 26-29, 2024, in Covington, Kentucky, at the [Cincinnati Marriott at RiverCenter](#).

For more details on any of these items or to watch video of the 137th Annual Meeting, visit gather.covchurch.org.