

Report to the 122nd Covenant Annual Meeting By the President Glenn R. Palmberg

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” —Mark 12:29-31

We know this statement as the Great Commandment; we may also know that the first part is the *shema*, a historic Jewish statement of faith. We know the words well and hear them often. “God and neighbor,” we sometimes say—but it is more complex than that.

Our God is One and whole; and God’s love and care for the world is one whole. We are called by God to live and minister as whole persons, servants and children of God. We are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. That calls for everything we are and have, everything we can grow to be. And then we are to love our neighbors with all those strengths and gifts we have.

As a church, we worship and serve that one God. Our life together responds to the same demands as our individual lives: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. All the areas of our Covenant ministry grow from those twin commands. Some concentrate on equipping us as persons for whole lives of love and obedience to the mission. Some express directly our outward-moving work in response to God’s call. Some serve as the necessary supports to make everything else possible.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The reports found in the delegate book under section 6 show a portrait of one church, servants together in one mission. I am grateful for each leader who steers one of these areas of ministry. We are blessed with leaders who are themselves seeking to grow in fully loving our God and our neighbors, and who share generously and creatively in our response to the God-given mission of the Covenant.

Executive Vice President Donn Engebretson shares in strategic leadership for the Covenant as a whole church. He nurtures our strength for mission as he travels the country among our churches, nurturing the bonds we share. Donn and his staff also contribute very significantly to the health and wholeness of our pastors through the Midwinter Conference.

The **Finance Office**, headed by Vice President for Finance **Dean Lundgren**, provides essential support for all that we do. Engaging together in ministry as a whole church requires money, and Dean

and his staff manage our money with skill and integrity. They also provide important support to pastors and other church staff with our pension program and health insurance management.

Christian Formation, under the energetic leadership of **Doreen Olson**, focuses all its efforts on helping Covenanters of all ages to grow and become increasingly formed as whole people of God. Heart, mind, and soul are nourished, stretched, and gently bent towards the likeness of Christ. CHIC for youth, materials for children, and resources for churches help shape our personal lives as servants.

Church Growth and Evangelism, with **Gary Walter's** visionary leadership, expresses and implements our shared work of reaching out to our nearest neighbors in love and invitation. Birthing new churches, adopting existing churches into our fellowship, helping to revitalize older churches, and moving us forward in ethnic diversity are just some of CGE's ministries. The department also provides resources for individuals to grow in prayer and in evangelism.

Covenant Communications, under **Don Meyer's** creative leadership, is another important supportive department. Linking churches by publishing news and ministry models on the website, encouraging Covenanters to engage heart, mind, and soul with writers in the *Covenant Companion*, and presenting the public face of the Covenant Church are some of this department's significant contributions. This year the Companion won eight awards for excellence, and one of the covers was named best in the nation..

The **Ordered Ministry** office, under the wise leadership of **Dave Kersten**, feeds the growth of the whole church through the care and nurture of our pastors. In addition to credentialing, ordaining, and advising on placement, the department, through the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program, challenges ministers to grow in skills, understanding, and spiritual health. The department offers special resources in spiritual formation and personal/vocational care and counseling.

Women Ministries, with **Ruth Hill** as its visionary leader, pursues a mission "to equip women to grow, serve and reach out with the Gospel." With women providing, on average, more than half of the active strength in our churches, this mission is crucial to our growth and health. The Triennial conferences held each three years have had a major impact on thousands of women, and the AVA initiative has brought awareness and skills for dealing with victims of abuse into our whole church.

World Mission, under **Curt Peterson's** skilled and sensitive leadership, is the long arm of our church reaching out to neighbors on five continents. Missionaries and home office staff together serve the call of God to love those neighbors as ourselves. In addition to supporting and sustaining missionaries, the department increasingly works with Covenant churches that want to be directly involved in mission. An area of recent growth is in the different types of missionaries (different bases on which they go out), giving greater flexibility and increasing the numbers of people working in mission.

Covenant Estate Planning Services and **Covenant Trust Company**, headed so ably by **Chuck Walles**, serve individuals in managing their funds both now and for future stewardship. The growth

of those funds through careful investment benefits Covenant ministries to which portions are directed. Millions of dollars each year feed our common mission.

Covenant Ministries of Benevolence, led with skill and vision by **David Dwight**, form another strong arm of outreach. One of the earliest calls of our church, together with mission, is caring for people who cannot care for themselves. In hospitals, retirement communities, enabling residences, and congregation-based ministries, **CMB** serves those who are in greatest need.

National Covenant Properties, led so well by the soon-departing **David Johnson**, makes possible much local ministry by providing loans for land and buildings. The resources that feed the program come from investments by Covenanters, who receive attractive rates of return—along with the satisfaction of knowing they helped to give a church a home. **Steve Dawson** has been chosen as David's successor, and I am confident that he will do an excellent job, as David has.

At **North Park University**, **David Parkyn** has completed his first year as President, and passed with distinction. More than 3,000 students (undergrad, grad, and seminary) were enrolled as of last fall—surely one of our highest counts ever. Young people at North Park are given the resources to grow in all the dimensions included in the commands from Matthew, both inward and outward. The seminary, under **Jay Phelan's** strong leadership, welcomed five new faculty members this year, further enriching the school's resources for educating and forming pastors to serve in our churches.

Next year there will be another report in that cluster: from the new **Department of Compassion, Mercy, and Justice**. At this Annual Meeting we will vote on the nomination of **Debbie Blue** to lead that department. She is a superb choice for this new department doing some of our oldest ministry. Since our founding, the Covenant Church has cared for our neighbors in need of compassion. The Home of Mercy in Chicago grew into Swedish Covenant Hospital and Covenant Home. May the Covenant itself be always known to our neighbors as a home of mercy—and of justice as well.

I am personally thankful for the gifts, commitment, and friendship of all who share in leadership of the Covenant Church, our conferences, and our related ministries. Among those not mentioned above are a few I want to specially acknowledge. **Karl Klockars**, our corporate counsel, advises and represents us with intelligence, resourcefulness, and deep faith in Christ. **Jim Sundholm** serves as the director of both Covenant World Relief and the Paul Carlson Partnership, and he brings great wisdom, vision, and energy to both of these crucially important ministries. As director of strategic giving, **Bill Clark** also spends part of his time and efforts with the PCP and CWR, along with other areas of ministry; and his work is bearing fruit in people touched by the love of God through these programs.

I also want to thank my own staff. **Chrissy Palmerlee** succeeded Joey Ekberg last fall as my assistant, and she quickly took the measure of the job and made it her own. She manages travel arrangements, calendar, meeting details, materials, and many other matters with intelligence, patience, and good cheer. **Sally Johnson** spends half of her time handling communications for my office, including research, drafting, and editing tasks. The other half is now given to the Paul Carlson Partnership, where she brings expertise and deep commitment to the role of communications manager.

These two colleagues and friends make it possible for me to carry out my leadership responsibilities without worrying about the ongoing work of my office, and I am grateful for them.

This year, as every year, we have lost a number of beloved ministers, spouses, and missionaries. Their names are listed in the report from the Department of the Ordered Ministry, and I hope you will take time to turn to it and read them. Some names will probably be familiar to you. All of them remind us of God's great goodness to us in the people he has given us to serve our church over time.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all"

May the one God who is above all and through all and in all equip and bless each of us in our parts in God's own work.