



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

MAY 2016

From the Superintendent: ALL PENTECOST



Pentecost is a time when Christians celebrate the giving of God's gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. It can be a time for us to remember the diversity and multi-faceted nature of the Holy Spirit.

We are told in the second chapter of Acts of the first Pentecost. But I believe that the Bible records at least one more Pentecost event, in Acts 10:44-48. This passage is sometimes referred to as "the Gentile Pentecost." On the day the Spirit fell upon the Jewish believers, the church was born. When the Spirit fell upon the Gentile believer at Caesarea, the church of Christ grew up. It became more mature in several ways. Maturity is the mission of the Holy Spirit. Maturity depends on moving to new insights and greater value concerning redemption.

The church learned to accept and acknowledge the unpredictability of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles had not anticipated that the Holy Spirit would fall upon the uncircumcised in the same measure and manner as he had fallen upon the circumcised. But they had to acknowledge and accept that he did. When Peter witnessed this event, it must have dawned on him that God had been preparing him and the early church. It was God's purpose to have the church spread the Gospel to the ends of the Earth and overcome cultural comfort zones.

Peter already knew that God does not show favoritism but accepts people from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. The Church was called to a new level of insight that overlooked skin, accents, and customs to let Christ and the Church be for the nations.

The church was moved out of its comfort zone and habits and into new adventures. A mature church is willing to accept new people into the church. New life comes to old churches through new believers, yet so many refuse to accept new people into fellowship. If Christ accepts outsiders as insiders, so must we or we are not in Christ. People are to be accepted on the basis of similarity of confession and not culture. We must assimilate any whose confession is accompanied by a worshipful attitude and spirit. To do otherwise is to backslide from the call to Christian maturity and mission. As you attend services on Pentecost Sunday ask God to allow the Holy Spirit to fall fresh on you.

By: Rev. Jerome Nelson



130th Annual Meeting of the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church

Make & Deepen Disciples Annual Meeting's Summary Report

- ◆ **Breakout Sessions** focused on "Raising your Church's Evangelism Temperature" by Beth Severson, "Advocacy for Victims of Abuse Overview and Orientation" by Meagan Gillan and Rev. Karen Brewer, and "The Gospel of John, Told & Retained" by Rev. Tom Lach.
- ◆ The following **representatives** gave reports: **Rebecca Gonzalez** from the Evangelical Covenant Church, **Anne Jorgenson** gave the report for North Park Theological Seminary/North Park University, **Cheryl Borgeson** from Evangelical Covenant Church Nomination Committees, **Pete Heintzelman** from Covenant Trust Company, **Beth Severson** from Make and Deepen Disciples, **Scott Bolinder** from Community Bible Experience, and **Solid Rock's Youth Team**.

The 2016 **Compassion Mercy and Justice** award was presented to **Karla Menucci** from Grace Covenant Church, Iron River, MI. **Pastor James Swanson** received a plaque to keep until next year.



- ◆ On Friday evening worship service, **Rev. Jerome Nelson** preached on "Soldiers of Christ Jesus!" 2 Timothy 2:1-7 and encouraged us to be faithful laborers in the work of Jesus Christ. First Covenant Church Praise Team lead praise and worship.

A brief **Litany of Affirmation and Prayer** was given for the following candidates for Ordination from the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church: **Ordination to Word and Sacrament:**



Willie G. Comer Jr. (Berean Covenant Church, Champaign IL), Lance L. Davis - Transfer (New Zion Covenant Church, Dolton, IL), Jennifer Gillan (Chicago, IL), Sarah Henry (Faith Covenant Church, Wheaton, IL), Chris McKnight (Zion Covenant Church, Sheboygan, WI), David Swanson (New Community Covenant Church, Chicago, IL), Mark Tao (Immanuel Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, IL), and Allison Wible (St. Louis, MO).

The offering collected during Friday's worship was designated for Church Revitalization.

- ◆ **103 attendees** which includes **70 delegates** from the conference churches, spanning five states.
- ◆ Elected to the **Executive Board**: Mike DeLong (Evangelical Covenant Church, Milwaukee, WI): Officer Secretary, Keith Perkins (Redeemer Evan-

gelical Covenant Church, Beloit, WI): Officer: Treasurer, Sally Pierce (Holmstad, Batavia, IL) Officer: Nominating Commission, and Ken Oliver (Sojourner Covenant Church, Elgin, IL) Member. Elected to the **Harbor Point Ministries**: David Anderson, Kurt Kovacic, and Kirstine Brandel.

- ◆ The **treasurer, Keith Perkins**, presented the 2016 revised and the projected 2017 Budget were approved.
- ◆ **Welcomed newly adopted Peacemakers Korean Covenant Church**, Buffalo Grove, IL.



- ◆ **Welcomed formerly a fellowship group, now a church plant, New Life Covenant Church of Palatine, Palatine, IL** is being received into membership.



- ◆ **Closed** Agape Community Covenant Church, Chicago, IL, Evergreen Evangelical Covenant Church, Rockford, IL, Evangelical Covenant Church, Villa Park, IL, Christian Vision Korean Covenant Church, Northbrook, IL, Antioch Korean Covenant Church, Desplaines, IL, Hallelujah Korean Covenant Church, Northbrook, IL, Korean Ark Covenant Church, Morton Grove, IL, Emmaus Covenant Church, Arlington Heights, IL, and Damascus Korean Covenant Church, Mt. Prospect, IL.

- ◆ **Rebecca Nakamura** and **Rev. Peter Sjoblom** were elected to be **delegates** from the Central Conference to the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Churches.

- ◆ **Superintendent and staff highlights** for Future Ministry Initiatives: Debbie Griffith Samuels will be responsible for distribution of Covenant Children's Ministry grants, Church Plants are required to tithe to the Central Conference prior to receiving appropriation. Encouraged established congregations to partner with church plants.

- ◆ **Carl Helfrich** and **David Green** were recognized for having completed their terms on the Executive Board.

- ◆ **Evangelical Covenant Church, Lafayette, IN** will host the **131th Annual Meeting of the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church** on April 27-29, 2017.



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2016 Compassion Mercy and Justice Award



2016 Compassion Mercy and Justice Award was awarded to Karla Menucci from Grace Covenant Church in Iron River Michigan. Over 24 members and friends came to support Karla Menucci as she received her award.



Karla came up with the idea of Three Threads in 2010, a ministry of quilting, sewing, crocheting, friendship and prayer among the women of Grace Covenant Church (GCC) and Mission Bible Training Center (MBTC) a residential Bible and faith based facility in Gaastra, MI (about five miles from GCC) dedicated to the restoration of people who struggle with addictions. Three Threads has blossomed and become a regular part of the schedule at GCC as well as for the female residents at MBTC. Those involved are hoping in the near future to create a quilt that can be sold with the profits to be divided between MBTC and Three Threads.

New this year is a traveling Compassion Mercy and Justice Award that displays the names of each of the awardees since 1996. The award is housed at the home church of the awardee for the year then travels the following year to the church of the CMJ Award recipient for that year. Once all 24 plates on the plaque is filled the Award will be permanently hung at the Central Conference office, then a new CMJ Award will circulate.

By: Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels

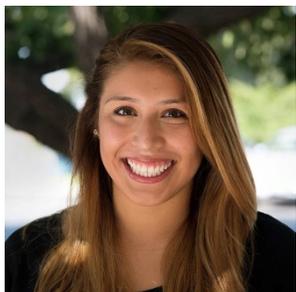


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Part 6: We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ.

Meztli Gonzalez attends Vida Plena Covenant Church and currently is in her 1st year at North Park Theological Seminary.



Growing up in the Hispanic congregation, it is tradition to go to Covenant Harbor Bible Camp up in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin for our annual Baptismal Sunday. If I go through photo albums, I see many joyful expressions on people's faces. I can recall the exact songs of worship one would sing from the gazebo and on the pier. I imagine that this is how Israel left Egypt when God took them out of slavery. They had joyful expressions, they were clapping, and they were singing songs of praise and worship. However, as we continue to read in the book of Exodus, we soon find out that during hard times the people of Israel would cry out to God asking him to take them back into Egypt, even though their status would go back to being one of slavery.

When we read scripture, we see that Egypt is a place where the people of Israel are treated as second class citizens. Egypt represents a place of captivity. In this case, that captivity took over the lives of the Israelites and there was a clear distinction between social classes. I think many of us would agree that being captive is no way of living: someone telling you what to do, what to eat, causes emotional distress. When one comes to know Christ, that emotional distress and emptiness is broken. Why? Because there is power in the name of Jesus to break every chain in our lives that is keeping us captive.

The problem is that many times we are just like Israel we cry out to God and wish to go back to our old way of living. Why? A possible answer is that our old way of living is going back to our comfort zone. Of course humanity has the tendency to find great comfort in engaging in a pattern of what feels natural and familiar. Comfort zones exist in every area in our lives. The key is to be aware of them and examine which comfort zones may not be beneficial to the Kingdom of God. Which comfort zones are preventing you from change? Which comfort zone keeps you from experiencing freedom in Christ?

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”(Galatians 5:13)

It is no secret that outside the walls of the church (and even inside the church) there is a clear distinction between socio economic levels, race, ethnicity, and appearance. This is of course uncomfortable to acknowledge, because we begin to talk about what breaks God's heart. God sent his one and beloved son to break all these chains among us, so that we can experience true love and freedom through him. We affirm the reality of freedom in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1) This freedom is a gift of God in Christ, so that we can serve the community and the world. For Paul, this freedom means that we are set free from the power of those things that tend to divide. United in Christ we offer freedom to one another to differ on issues of belief or practice where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. We in the Covenant Church seek to focus on what unites us as followers of Christ, rather than on what divides us.

Change of Status

For eleven years, a man named Merhan Karimi Nasserri was stateless. During that time, he lived in an airport in Paris. He had no passport, he did not have citizenship, and he had no documents that would allow him to exit the airport or fly to another nation. He had been expelled from Iran, his country of origin. Then, he was kicked out of Paris, France for lack of proper documentation. He had manifested that they had stolen his refugee documents issued by Belgium. He flew to England, but was refused entry and sent back to Paris. When he returned to Paris in 1988, the airport authorities allowed him to live in terminal 1. He remained there for eleven years, writing in a journal, living off the gifts that the employees of terminal 1 would give him, showering in the bathrooms in the airport.

In September of 1999, his situation changed. French authorities gave Nasserri an international travel card and a permit of French residency. All of a sudden, he was free to go wherever he'd like. When the airport authorities gave him permission to go, to everyone's shock he simply smiled and put the documents in his binder and continued to write in his journal. They discovered that he was afraid to leave the station that had become his home for eleven years. As days went by and Nasserri refused to leave, the authorities decided that they were not going to kick him out of the airport, but that they would patiently and kindly try to convince him to look for a new place.

Can you imagine a more unnatural home than an airport? There is so much movement, it may be interesting place, but it is not a place to call home. When we come to Christ, we need to take a step that may be terrifying, such as the moving out of the airport like Nasserri should have done. We have been invited to leave the unnatural home (the ways of this fallen world) into our new home: the freedom of the kingdom of God. Do not stop!

The Dominion of Sin and Death

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Pain and suffering are part of human experience as consequences of their bad decisions. But as humans, we want to conquer the perceived obstacles in front of us. A few examples:

- In the 16th Century, great European empires such as Spain, England, and Portugal went after the conquering and expansion of their empires. This conquest is what we now refer to the New World (the Americas).
- In the United States, we had the conquest of the West.
- In the decade of the 60's and 70's, space programs were implemented at great costs with the end of conquering outer space.
- Death has also formed part of the list of things that humanity has tried conquering. In many cultures, there are records of reincarnation, a prime example is this ritual in Egyptian culture. Pyramids were great tombs where they would deposit the body of Pharaoh all "dolled up" for the afterlife. Another civilization that did believe in the afterlife are the Aztecs, the Hindu culture, etc.

However successful we have been at our various conquests, the experience of sin and death has been a losing battle.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Romans 5:15)

Freedom from the dominion of sin and death is only possible by the grace of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Questions:

1. What have you conquered in your life?
2. Has there been a circumstance where someone has offered freedom through another mean that is not by the grace of God?
3. How has freedom in Christ a transformed your story?

Your Freedom, Christ's Mission

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus Christ has called us to a ministry of deliverance, healing, and salvation. The call of Jesus Christ to a ministry marked by presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit anointed Jesus Christ and gave him power for His mission. The call of Jesus Christ to a ministry marked by the proclamation of the Good News:

- proclaim freedom from the dominion of sin and dead
- proclaim freedom from the dominion of Satan
- proclaim freedom from the dominion of fear, guilt, and shame

We need to seek this physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom. Freedom. We live in a broken world and we are going to experience brokenness in one area or another at one point or another in our world, but Jesus Christ has overcome this world and called us to experience and proclaim his freedom.

Questions:

1. In what areas of your life do you need healing or freedom from?
2. What does it mean to you, to be anointed by the Holy Spirit?
3. Does the anointing of the Holy Spirit make a difference in the proclamation of deliverance, healing, and salvation?



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Covenant Children's Ministry



The Covenant Children's Ministry Board, formerly the Covenant Children's Home and Family Services, is receiving applications from post high school college or trade school students who qualify. Guideline and application forms can be

downloaded from the Covenant Children's Ministry website... www.ccmprinceton.org.

Deadline for receipt of applications in our Princeton, IL office is June 10th.

By: Paul Bengtson