

MINISTRY REPORT 2022

BEMIDJI COVENANT CHURCH BEMIDJI, MN NORTHWESTCONFERENCE.ORG



For God's glory and neighbor's good

Mission Friends.

As we gather for our 2023 Northwest Conference Annual Meeting Celebration, and as this is my first report as Superintendent, I want to pause and give thanks to God for our shared ministry and to remember God's faithfulness over this past year. It is an honor and a privilege to serve in this role as we work together to steward well this ministry that God has entrusted to us.



I have been so encouraged to serve alongside other faithful leaders in the NWC. Our staff team, in particular, is dedicated and competent, devoted to our shared mission of developing leaders and healthy churches. I am grateful for our Executive Board that works tirelessly behind the scenes, making sure we

are aligned with mission, are fiscally responsible and are committed to moving the mission forward.

We've also navigated a year of incredible transition as I moved from Associate Superintendent to Superintendent. We remember with gratitude the ministry of Mark Stromberg, Superintendent, and Mike Brown, Director of Church Planting, who served the NWC so faithfully for many years.

I would like to thank Jim Volling for his leadership of the NWC Executive Board, as he has led us through a number of challenges and transitions in both the Northwest Conference and Minnehaha Academy during his tenure, as well as Cindy Owen, who is concluding her service as a wise and discerning member of our NWC Executive Board.

Certainly, serving in ministry is not without complications and heartaches. Churches and pastors are still trying to make sense of what we've been through these last few years, and how that impacts ministry going forward.

"The heart and soul of our Conference is the churches, camps and affiliate ministries that are committed to serving faithfully for God's glory and neighbor's good."

Yet, we've seen firsthand how even our limitations bring opportunities. Time and time again, I've been encouraged by your stories of ministries that have creatively adapted to move the mission forward. The heart and soul of our Conference is the churches, camps and affiliate ministries that are committed to serving faithfully for God's glory and neighbor's good.

You can read in the following pages about how our NWC ministry team has, among other things, leaned in to our three mission priorities of ministry with Children, Youth & Families, Church Planting and Congregational Vitality as we developed the Rural Impact Leadership Conference last March, hosted two youth events last summer (UNITE North and MUUUCE), connected with countless pastors for prayer and support, resourced churches in pastoral searches and helped church plants who started before or during the pandemic find their footing.

On behalf of all of us in NWC leadership, we are honored to serve you through Conference ministry.

Looking ahead, I am committed to leading in non-anxious, prayer-filled ways as we continue to navigate uncharted waters, following the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:6-7:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not

NORTHWEST CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

As people who remain rooted in hope, we are not discouraged by what threatens to distract or disorient, submit-

ting everything fully to the Lord. As we gather this year at our Annual Meeting Celebration to remember God's goodness, I pray you will be encouraged by the stories of others on this journey of faith who remain rooted in the hope of Christ.

With joy and gratitude.

Kara Stromberg, Superintendent



Developing leaders. Thriving churches.

The Mission of the Northwest Conference is to engage, empower, and equip healthy missional leaders, as we believe that this is an essential component in growing healthy missional churches.

The **Northwest Conference** is a mission region of the **Evangelical Covenant Church**. It is comprised of roughly **140 churches** in MN, ND, SD, western WI and northern IA. These churches come in all shapes and sizes. They are **urban**, **ethnic**, **town & country** and **suburban**.

Beyond local churches, the ministry of the NWC is also bolstered by **a number** of affiliate ministries including five Bible Camps. Minnehaha Academy—a Pre-K through 12th grade school on two campuses in Minneapolis—is also a direct ministry of the NWC. Its mission is to integrate Christian faith and learning.

MINISTRY PRIORITIES

Congregational Vitality

Church Planting

Children, Youth & Family

MINISTRY SUPPORT

Pastoral Care
& Development
Administration
Communication
Finance

Ministry in a liminal season

Pastor, author and consultant Susan Beaumont identified 2021-22 being best described as a season of ambiguity or disorientation referred to as "liminality."



In unpacking this concept, she also highlights how liminal space requires leaders to manage anxiety, embrace the freedom of unknowing, and to explore new possibilities, while not acting prematurely.

In addition, she suggests that we must learn our way through liminality—not plan

our way through—by engaging in cycles of observation, experimentation, adjustment and trying again.

Which is why leadership resilience and imagination are both critical to navigating this space well.

So, it was these dynamics that we traveled together in this past year. It was a hard journey as we faced disruption, loss, conflict and letting go—while also being given a divine opportunity to reset, learn from old patterns and look afresh at our futures. Why? Because while the core mission of the Church remains the same, the methods in advancing her mission adapt to context regularly.

Our engagement with each other came through cohorts, webinars, online resources, coaching and training—including our first Rural Impact Leadership Conference—and for all this we are grateful.

Looking forward, let's remain hopeful as we continue to pursue Christ and Christ's mission for His Church in this next season (Isaiah 41:10)!

To God be the praise!

Jon Kramka, Director of Congregational Vitality

Supporting and strengthening pastors

Covenant pastor Gabriel J. Catanus writes: "Pastors and ministry leaders nowadays [are] under overwhelming pressure ... expected to lead and preach prophetically, educate



as in-house experts, care for and counsel people towards healing, grow ministries with limited resources, and model Christian maturity in our contexts. It's a lot! Meanwhile, spiritual leaders must also receive care, tending to their own wounds and needs as persons."

Pastors give care and need to receive care. Many have spouses, children and aging parents also needing care. Thank God, who enables us to walk alongside NWC pastors and families in need. Here are two examples.

Assisting Pastors in Crisis: Partnering with the Develop

Leaders ECC Mission Priority and NWC Ministerial Association, we assisted several pastors and their families who experienced challenging health concerns by providing financial assistance for medical expenses, counseling or other resource needs. Thank God for partnerships that enable us to do much more together than separately.

First Time Lead Pastor Cohorts: As in 2021, we gathered pastors in their first call as Lead or Senior Pastors for mutual learning and leadership development, connection and encouragement. Several serve as solo pastors in rural churches, which have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to face challenges specific to their respective communities.

Supporting and strengthening our pastors and their families extends to those they lead and serve.

Joyfully in Jesus, Hollis Kim, Director of Pastoral Care & Development

Maturing into fully-developed churches

Last summer we said goodbye to Mike Brown who served the NWC for more than 15 years in Church Planting. Many of the day-to-day functions for planting were either temporarily paused, handled by other NWC staff or transferred to a team of experienced planters that I had a hand in guiding.

COVID was a challenging season for church plants. After some church closures in 2022, we focused on giving our younger plants training, support and accountability to help them mature into fully-developed churches.

We were, for the first time since before COVID, able to do site visits. These visits were well received and speak to the maturity of our planters in being able to receive coaching and feedback.

Our monthly cohorts continued in 2022. These are important spaces where key training occurs and planters have a chance to pray for and encourage each other.

We are also working to ensure all of our current church planters have a coach they meet with for support, accountability and training.

Looking ahead, as future models of church arise, we recognize different structures for training, evaluation and support will be needed. We have hit pause on initiating new planting projects for a season of evaluation, discernment and strategic planning. The prayer is this pause will



allow us to focus on current plants and their health to give them a greater chance of success and to develop a new team, approach and strategy in the new era we find ourselves in. It's a joy and honor to serve you all.

Jeff Olson, Church Planting Associate

Maximizing impact of Latino churches

Looking back, we have many reasons to celebrate what God has done in the Latino ministries of the Northwest Conference. And now, looking forward, we are entering into a new chapter in our commitment to reach the growing Latino community in our region.

King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:5-6: "I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees."

As you see, it's not enough to plant trees of all kinds. You have to have reservoirs to water them. The same intentionality required to plant the seed is necessary to prepare the watering systems to produce and sustain a healthy and fruitful tree.

Last year, we started shifting our focus into equipping, resourcing and fostering the current Latino congregations. For example, we offered a two-day Finances Retreat in Spanish as part of a holistic approach to bring financial

literacy as a starting point for building financial capability for our Pastors, their leaders and their churches.

We believe that offering coaching and training opportunities in addition to our regular pastor's connection will strengthen the unity of the Latino pastors and maximize the impact of their ministries.

Thank you for your prayers and support as we make the

necessary changes to accomplish our mission together.

Mauricio Dell'Arciprete, Director of Latino Ministry



Helping churches reach teenagers

Teenagers face many challenges that make it difficult to develop their faith and stay engaged with their church community. The NWC strives to come alongside our



churches and help them reach teenagers through resources and events. Here is a sample of how we embodied that in 2022:

Adventures in Leadership is our high school leadership experience at Adventurous Christians. Thirteen high school students developed

their leadership abilities and returned home ready to put their expertise into practice in their church.

Over 750 students and leaders from the northern U.S. and Canada gathered at Bethel University in July for UNITE North. Worship, teaching, discussion and fun filled the four days. Around 200 students responded to the Gospel. Hundreds of students and leaders stood in response to a call to discipleship. In the words of one leader, "None of us came back the same as we left. God was at work in these students' lives and really set a fire in them to want to live more intentionally for Christ."

After a two-year hiatus, MUUUCE happened in August. Four hundred seventeen middle school students and leaders from 23 NWC churches gathered to play, worship and learn about following Jesus. Over 100 middle schoolers said "yes" to Jesus for the first time, and over 200 recommitted their lives.

The NWC sees youth ministry as a vital component of any church that seeks to engage with teenagers. We strive to help our churches build a solid and vibrant church community that will continue to thrive for generations.

Serving with joy, Ginny Olson, Director of Youth Ministry

Pouring into children and family leaders

It has been an honor to serve these past seven months as the Director of Children & Family Ministry for the Northwest Conference. During this time, I have been working to



update our contact list (there was a lot of movement during COVID!) and connect with leaders as needed.

We restarted our monthly lunches last October and have had a steady turnout each month.

I asked different churches to

host our gatherings and offered our January meeting via Zoom. We have three remaining lunches this year.

I had the privilege of being a workshop presenter for the local Recharge Conference in January (at Bethel University) and also for the NextGen Conference (a denomination-

al pre-Midwinter event). These were great opportunities to pour into leaders who need encouragement and resourcing for this new season of ministry.

I have also consulted with leaders regarding ongoing initiatives that support children and family ministry across the denomination.

Another ministry project that has been taking some of my Conference hours is the development of a resource called LunchBox (lunchbox.group), which is an online community for children and family ministry leaders that provides grab and go resources for ministry as well as professional training opportunities.

LunchBox is supported by the Northwest Conference and is available to all leaders across the denomination.

Sara Sosa, Director of Children & Family Ministry

A return to event promotions

In many ways, it felt like my job returned to some sense of "normalcy" in 2022. After several years of mostly digital communication and resourcing, I worked on two new major event projects, in addition to my normal duties that include weekly UPDATE emails, website updates, webinar promotion and Annual Meeting promotional work.

For the inaugural Rural Impact Leadership Conference, which took place in March, I was responsible for developing a new visual identity, applying the identity to a wide variety of print and digital communication tools, building an event website and publicizing event follow-up stories.

I also partnered with the UNITE North leadership team to create a brand for the event, build a new website, create apparel, design social media and event presentation graphics, and coordinate follow-up stories and promotions as well.

Bryan Malley, Director of Communications



God goes before us

It was great to gather in new and big ways in 2022. It was a privilege to be a part of the Rural Impact Leadership Conference and UNITE North. God went before us in so many ways and poured out His blessing on both of these events.

We arrived at the office on Sept. 21, 2022, to find water raining down the walls and through the floors after a small connection failed in our second floor bathroom. Our staff and some superstar volunteers from Minnehaha Academy started the cleanup. Our insurance company and an Emergency Service Specialist (Giertsen Company) walked with us throughout the restoration project.

Twenty Twenty-Two brought some unexpected disruption to my life in the form of a cancer diagnosis. Even more unexpected were the many acts of kindness and support. I am grateful for life and for the power of prayer.

With joy, Cheryl Theilen, Director of Administration



Building best practice resources

I continue to be grateful for the opportunity to serve the churches of the Northwest Conference. Careful management of the financial resources entrusted to further God's mission will always be an important task of leaders in the Church.

The recently-completed budget season was typical of so much of church life these days. It's easy to see that life in church has changed and finances will most certainly be affected—but in what way? And to what extent? As the year unfolds, we can be confident that God is in our midst—even as we practice active budget management.

We will partner with National Covenant Properties and Maple Grove Covenant Church to host a workshop for financial leaders on May 20, 2023, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Register at the Northwest Conference website: northwestconference.org/events.

Faithfully, Sandy Norris, Director of Finance



CATALYST

LOCATION: White Bear Lake, MN **PLANTER:** Cory/Cindy Jones **DATE STARTED:** July 2021 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$45,600**

THE CROSSING

LOCATION: Houlton, WI **PLANTER: Michele Arndt DATE STARTED:** March 2019 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$5,200**

CROSSVIEW ROSA PARKS

LOCATION: Mankato, MN PLANTER: Brian/Sandi Asker **DATE STARTED:** June 2019 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$33,600**

EPIPHANY

July 14-17

LOCATION: Minneapolis, MN **PLANTER:** Kevin Farmer DATE STARTED: April 2018 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$12,000**

EN SU PRESENCIA

LOCATION: Rochester, MN PLANTER: Edgar/Alva Ardon **RESIDENCY:** July 2021 **APPROPRIATIONS:** \$34,200

IGLESIA UNIDAD

LOCATION: Fridley, MN **PLANTER:** Erico Ortega **DATE STARTED:** May 2018 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$6,000**

JESÚS FIEL

LOCATION: Brooklyn Center, MN

PLANTER: Edith Soto

DATE STARTED: January 2020 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$10,000**

LOCAL

LOCATION: Brooklyn Park, MN **PLANTER: Seth Lindberg** DATE STARTED: January 2022 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$40,800**

NORTH CITY

LOCATION: Minneapolis, MN **PLANTER:** JD/ChristianAnn Larson **DATE STARTED:** October 2018 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$7,800**

NUESTRA ESPERANZA

LOCATION: Brooklyn Center, MN **PLANTER:** Hector/Betty Reyes **DATE STARTED:** June 2019 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$7,667**

RISEN LIFE

LOCATION: Minneapolis, MN **PLANTER:** Chris Auer **DATE STARTED:** July 2021 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$45,600**

TURTLE MOUNTAIN

LOCATION: Belcourt, ND **PLANTER: Roger Ross**

DATE STARTED: February 2020 **APPROPRIATIONS: \$10,500**

2022 NORTHWEST CONFERENCE EVENTS & WEBINARS

Disability Ministry Webinar: Tools and Strategies for **January 6** Working with Challenging Behaviors **January 12 NWC Rural Ministry Webinar: Thriving in Ministry** March 3 Disability Ministry Webinar: Practical Steps to Engage Families Impacted by Disability Into Our Churches March 19 Rural Impact Leadership Conference - Alexandria, MN **April 28-30** NWC Annual Meeting - Minnehaha Academy,

Minneapolis, MN

NWC Rural Ministry Webinar: Restoring, Renewing, **May 11**

Rebuilding the Fellowship

June 11-18 Adventures in Leadership - Adventurous Christians, Grand Marais, MN

UNITE North - Bethel University, Arden Hills, MN

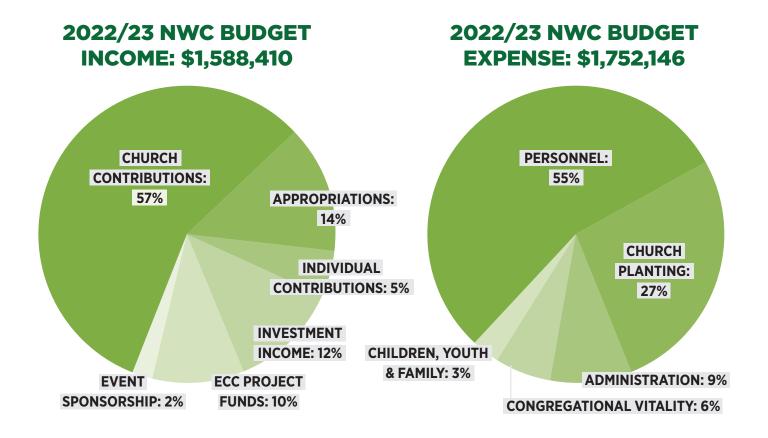
Gather Debrief with Conference Staff and Ministerial Association Leaders (online) **August 3**

August 4-6 MUUUCE - Crossroads Church, Woodbury, MN

NWC Rural Ministry Webinar: Ordering Your Life and Ministry September 28

November 17 NWC Rural Ministry Webinar: Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry





Gap between income + expense (\$163,736) intentional draw on restricted funds

2022/23 INCOME Notes:

Individual Contributions: Includes designated and undesignated contributions to the NWC.

Appropriations: Money the NWC receives from the ECC for Church Planting. The NWC and ECC invest equally in all new church plants.

Draw on Available Funds:

NWC Cash Reserve Balances - 7.1.22:
Children, Youth & Family \$238,129
Congregational Vitality \$237,728
Church Planting \$891,015
Unrestricted/Discretionary \$779,401

TOTAL \$2,146,273

Some of these funds are readily available, while some are in dedicated Trust Accounts with Covenant Trust Company and can only be withdrawn at a rate of 5% per year.

2022/23 EXPENSE Notes:

Personnel: Compensation for all staff included. Staff time used for direct ministry to churches for Congregational Vitality, Church Planting, Children, Youth & Family and Pastoral Care & Development.

Bequests Received in 2022:

Leroy Ekstrom: \$39,805.16

God-inspired goals

"Our hope each day is to inspire students to shine academically, spiritually and creatively so they can live lives of purpose." - Rev. Dr. Donna Harris.

As we live out the initiatives from our Strategic Plan that was prayerfully designed in 2021, we see students flourishing in our Christ-centered community. Our students are growing in wisdom, stature and favor with God and others through transformative learning experiences. We are grateful for our incredible faculty who create programs that shape the soul and character of each student.

Core Formation Experiences

In 2022, faculty laid the groundwork for Core Formation Experiences. Currently in our Lower School Core Class, students are exploring ways to share God's love with each other, the school and the world through activities such as a Kindergarten Shine Line (uplifting phone messages), second grade Kindness Grams, and a fourth grade inclusive theatre project. Middle and Upper Schoolers participate in spiritual retreats at Covenant Pines and academic formation opportunities, among numerous other activities.

Pathways for Learning

Leadership, STEM, and Fine Arts are three primary pathways that we provide for K-12 students to grow in their gifting or explore a new interest. These Pathways are intentionally designed to link classes and co-curriculars so that students can have a continuous educational experience and are the result of long-term curriculum collaboration between our teachers and the Office of Teaching and Learning.

Faith in Learning

MA students are learning to link their faith with learning to bring change to real world issues. Teachers facilitate this by



"My deep hope is that students would be curious and engaged with our complex world and that they would see and experience Jesus as they learn to think and seek truth." - Collin Quinn, Faculty

using four powerful teaching tools that connect students to God's bigger story and their role in it: Deep Hope, Storyline, Throughline, and Formative Learning Experience.

We know that when we connect academic learning with deeper biblical truths, students discover a larger sense of purpose and meaning in their work that ties to God's big story.



MINNEHAHA ACADEMY: A NORTHWEST CONFERENCE SCHOOL

Founded by NWC pastors and lay leaders 109 years ago, Minnehaha Academy remains a vital ministry of the Northwest Conference. Families who are members of NWC churches are eligible to receive 100 percent of demonstrated financial need. For more details or to apply, please call 612-728-7776 or e-mail admission@ MinnehahaAcademy.net.

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COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Stay connected with news, opportunities and stories from around the NWC. Subscribe to the UPDATE e-newsletter, and check our website for event details.



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612.721.4893 or 1.800.756.6692



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IOWA

Grandview. Larchwood

MINNESOTA

Alexandria Covenant, Alexandria Catalyst Covenant, Alexandria Evangelical Covenant, Anoka Restoration Covenant, Apple Valley Evangelical Covenant, Baudette Evangelical Covenant, Bemidji Evangelical Covenant, Big Falls Svea Hill Community Covenant, Big Lake Evangelical Covenant, Biwabik Bloomington Covenant, Bloomington Evangelical Covenant, Braham Blue Oaks Covenant, Brooklyn Center Brookdale Covenant, Brooklyn Center Laotian Covenant, Brooklyn Center Nuestra Esperanza, Brooklyn Center Jesús Fiel Amigo Covenant, Brooklyn Park La Bendicion Covenant, Brooklyn Park Local Covenant, Brooklyn Park Redeemer Covenant, Brooklyn Park Buffalo Covenant, Buffalo Faith Covenant, Burnsville Lakeside Covenant, Chanhassen Big Lake Evangelical Covenant, Cloquet Highland Community Church, Cokato Evangelical Covenant, Cook Harvest Covenant, Crookston Evangelical Covenant, Dassel Lake Jennie Covenant, Dassel Dawson Covenant. Dawson First Covenant, Duluth Lakeview Covenant. Duluth Salem Covenant, Duluth Mercy Commons Covenant, Edina New City Covenant, Edina Calvary Covenant, Evansville Excelsior Covenant, Excelsior Fairmont Evangelical Covenant, Fairmont Maywood Covenant, Foley Crossroads Evangelical Covenant, Forest Lake Fridley Covenant, Fridley Iglesia Unidad, Fridley Riverwood Covenant, Greenfield Harris Covenant, Harris Palmyra Covenant, Hector Gethsemane Covenant, Hermantown Community Covenant, Huntley Oak Heights Covenant, Hutchinson Evangelical Covenant, International Falls

Evangelical Mission Covenant, Kennedy Kensington Covenant, Kensington Community Covenant, Lake Bronson Lancaster Covenant, Lancaster Rice Creek Covenant, Lino Lakes Grace Covenant. Little Falls Lowry Community Covenant, Lowry Mahtowa Covenant, Mahtowa Maple Grove Covenant, Maple Grove Crossview Rosa Parks, Mankato Bethlehem Covenant, Minneapolis City of Lakes Covenant, Minneapolis Community Covenant, Minneapolis Crosstown Covenant, Minneapolis Destino Covenant, Minneapolis Epiphany Covenant, Minneapolis North City Covenant, Minneapolis Risen Life Covenant, Minneapolis Sanctuary Covenant, Minneapolis Verbo en Accion Covenant, Minneapolis Evangelical Covenant, Moose Lake Fairview Covenant, Mound MainStreet Covenant, Mound Salem Covenant, New Brighton Evangelical Covenant, New London Vista Evangelical Covenant, New Richland Crossview Covenant, North Mankato Genesis East Covenant, North St. Paul Calvary Covenant, Northome Lewis Lake Covenant, Ogilvie Christ Community Covenant, Owatonna Salem Covenant, Pennock Plymouth Covenant, Plymouth Karmel Evangelical Covenant, Princeton First Covenant, Red Wing En Su Presencia, Rochester NewDay Covenant, Rochester Rochester Covenant. Rochester Salem Road Covenant, Rochester Nueva Vida Covenant, Rogers Evangelical Covenant, Roseau Roseville Covenant, Roseville Evangelical Covenant, Rush City New Life Covenant, Saginaw Emmanuel Covenant. Shoreview Lake Union Covenant, South Haven Hope Covenant, St. Cloud Awaken Covenant, St. Paul Catalyst Covenant. St. Paul First Covenant, St. Paul Roots Covenant. St. Paul Thomastown Covenant, Staples

Bethany Covenant, Stillwater

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NORTH DAKOTA

Turtle Mountain Epiphany Covenant, Belcourt Teien Covenant, Drayton Grace Covenant, Fargo Hope Covenant, Grand Forks

SOUTH DAKOTA

Komstad Covenant, Beresford Living Springs Covenant, Brandon Swedona Evangelical Covenant, Brandon Evangelical Covenant, Lake Norden Countryside Covenant, Milbank Prairie Hills Covenant, Sioux Falls South Sudan Covenant, Sioux Falls

WISCONSIN

Prairie Lake Covenant, Chetek United Covenant, Clear Lake Renew Covenant, Eau Claire Bethel Covenant, Ellsworth Zion Covenant, Ellsworth Calvary Evangelical Covenant, Grantsburg Midcurrent Covenant, Hudson Cedarbrook, Menomonie Prince of Peace Covenant, Mondovi Prairieview Covenant, New Richmond Mission Covenant, Poplar First Covenant, River Falls Siren Covenant, Siren Calvary Covenant, Stockholm Lund Mission Covenant, Stockholm First Covenant, Superior