

# Covenant Women Embody Mission through the Arts: 1958-1978 as a Case Study

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Since their inception in 1916, Covenant Women (CW) have focused on equipping and empowering lay women to participate in the life and work of the church. These ministry efforts were based on a mission to support what were then Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant institutions, and began around a coffee table. In 1915, a social gathering of women in the home of David and Louisa Nyvall led to what would become Covenant Women. Louisa Nyvall<sup>1</sup> asked the women present from various Covenant churches if their church sewing societies could band together to help support North Park College. The young school had many needs, in particular a dormitory. Mrs. Nyvall thought that more help could be provided “by a united effort” than by any one church or sewing group.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, this led to over one hundred women from Chicago churches gathering at North Mission Covenant Church on January 21, 1916, where they formally organized the Covenant Women’s Auxiliary (CWA), the original name of Covenant Women. They were established with the following mission: “To further the kingdom of God by uniting women of our Covenant Church in promoting greater interest for all mission-

<sup>1</sup> When possible, women in this article are identified by their given first name. However, some historical sources only list a particular woman as “Mrs. [husband’s first name, husband’s last name].” At times, the attempt to further identify a given name was unsuccessful. In these cases, the identification of any woman by her husband’s first name, instead of her own given name, is not intended to deprive her of her own identity or honor.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Johnson, “CWA President Looks Back with Thanksgiving, Ahead with Faith,” *Covenant Companion*, January 20, 1961, 8.

ary endeavors, such as home and foreign missions, benevolences, and educational work carried out by the Evangelical Covenant Church of America.”<sup>3</sup>

Ninety-three women signed the charter that day and the women of the Auxiliary began their service by providing “bedding, curtains, rugs, dishes, tableware,” and more to North Park College and Covenant Home.<sup>4</sup> Women in other Covenant churches around the country learned about the newly formed CWA in Chicago and desired to engage in similar ministry efforts. A national organization was formed in 1933 and, eventually, the CWA expanded its mission efforts overseas as well as on the home front.

Between the years 1925 and 1929, the CWA undertook its first major project, fundraising the \$56,000 needed to build Caroline Hall, a much-needed girl’s dormitory, on North Park’s campus.<sup>5</sup> The 2021 equivalent of this figure is \$851,662.<sup>6</sup> To raise the funds, the CWA held bazaars, concerts, lectures, rummage sales (still a favorite of many churches today), and luncheons; they also gave out savings banks, and took up free will offerings.<sup>7</sup> They even used drama to help with their efforts. A skit was written depicting two roommates bemoaning their lack of storage space and trying to stuff all of their belongings into one wardrobe. The skit concluded with the housemother exclaiming, “There, there, girls, someday the Covenant Women’s Auxiliary will build us closets.”<sup>8</sup> Caroline Hall still stands today on North Park’s campus as a testament to the strength, determination, heart, and creativity of our denomination’s women.

As an arm of the Covenant, CW has not merely participated in ministry efforts, it has often led the way by drawing the church’s attention to important issues of the day. Throughout its history, CW has found many avenues to communicate its mission and fundraise for its projects. The Covenant noted that each year CW raised funds for a national project. One early study of the ministry reveals that “some local groups hold a

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>5</sup> Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago: Covenant, 1962), 636–37.

<sup>6</sup> This and all subsequent calculations were made by comparing the buying power for December of a given historical fundraising year with the buying power for January, 2021, via the CPI Inflation Calculator. Figures have been rounded to the nearest dollar (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm); accessed February 26, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, “CWA President Looks Back,” 9.

<sup>8</sup> “Pantomime of Caroline Hall Closets,” 1953–1960, 1. Record Series 2/2, Box 14, Folder 3, Covenant Archives and Historical Library (hereafter cited as CAHL).

fund-raising tea, while others present a Sunday evening church service and receive an offering. The results of these yearly extra efforts are impressive.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps one of the most impressive efforts was the ministry’s ability to fundraise using the arts during a span of two decades. Indeed, from about 1958 to 1978, CW were particularly creative in their fundraising, connecting a drama or skit, a poem or story, to their special project for the year, in an effort to educate churches on the need to mobilize around the fundraising projects. Although CW used skits prior to this time, and afterward as well, the period of 1958 to 1978 represents a particular time of interest in using the arts to mobilize for mission. As such, the women of what is now the Evangelical Covenant Church have a history of leading the way in creatively engaging the church for mission both at home and abroad. As I currently observe Covenant women carrying on this heritage, my goal in this essay is to demonstrate that by better connecting with our past, we might be encouraged to engage and embody mission in imaginative and innovative ways in our current contexts. Indeed, the the women of the Covenant have shown us how God can move powerfully through our creativity, by allowing people to connect to mission in a more embodied fashion. In what follows, I look at three main periods of ministry between 1958 and 1978, before concluding with some observations for Covenant women today.

### **1958–1961: Dramatic Skits Further Mission**

In 1958, the president of CWA was June Anderson, overseeing a membership of approximately 14,000. CWA was supporting seven missionaries, three abroad and four at home, as well as giving \$1,000 annually to North Park College and Seminary and to the Covenant Pension Fund for widows of ministers.<sup>10</sup> At this point, CWA had also begun fundraising for an annual National Project. The leadership of CWA would propose a recipient for their National Project for a given year, which would then be voted on and approved at the CWA Annual Meeting.<sup>11</sup> Their National Project for 1958 was raising \$10,000 for Covenant Youth Work, which was to be divided equally between a Christian Academy in Japan and Covenant Youth Work, including raising \$2,500 for a Volkswagen for the latter organization. They met their goal and raised \$10,970.25

<sup>9</sup> *Covenant Women: 50 Years, 1916–1966* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church, 1966), 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1959*, (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 138.

<sup>11</sup> Covenant Women Stewardship Committee, “Letter #6–July 1966,” 1966. Record Series 2/2, Box 2, Folder 4, CAHL.

(2021: \$99,295).<sup>12</sup> That year, they wrote a dramatic service to be used in churches around the country on Sunday morning. It was entitled “We Belong to a Great Company.” The purpose of the service was described as follows: “For inspiration, for challenge to our missionary task, for getting the feel of belonging to a great company who are believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in the world.”<sup>13</sup> The service was set up as a liturgy of prayers, Bible passages, readings, and songs, reminding believers that they are a part of a much larger body and mission.

In 1959, CWA elected a new president: Ruth Johnson. The ministry still supported seven missionaries along with North Park College, the Widows’ Pension Fund, and the Covenant Church Extension Fund. For their 1959 National Project, they sought to raise \$20,000 to pay for the transmitter of radio station KICY in Nome, Alaska.<sup>14</sup> CWA had the director of the radio station, Arthur Zylstra, write a forty-minute radio skit to be sent to all CWA groups, which has a “sampling of the type of programs to be aired over this station and uses this year’s CWA theme song ... as the background.”<sup>15</sup> The skit contained mock-ups of programs such as: a history of a chosen hymn, a bush pilot’s report, a woman’s program entitled “Designs in Living,” a book review program, and Sunshine Club for children. The material concluded with a special announcement detailing the CWA project and thanking the women for their support.<sup>16</sup> Through this skit, churches could experience what their fundraising efforts might provide for Alaskans. In the end, CWA raised \$21,330.52 for the project (2021: \$198,785).

The 1960 National Project for CWA was to raise money for Christian literature for Covenant missionaries. The program was referred to as “Filling the Bookshelves,” and the goal was to raise \$15,000. In recognition of CWA’s forty-fifth anniversary, January 22, 1961, was designated as “CWA Sunday.” CWA President Ruth Johnson noted that on that Sunday, many churches “presented a program to emphasize our current special project to gather funds for Christian literature for our home

<sup>12</sup> “National Projects of Covenant Women,” n.d. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL.

<sup>13</sup> “We Belong to a Great Company,” 1959, 1. Record Series 2/2, Box 53, Folder 8, CAHL (emphasis original)

<sup>14</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1960* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 189–90.

<sup>15</sup> “Radio Skit to Assist Women in Current Special Project,” *Covenant Companion*, October 16, 1959, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur R. Zylstra, “Call of the Arctic,” 1959. Record Series 2/2, Box 1, Folder 5, CAHL.

and world mission fields.”<sup>17</sup> The program featured a skit called “Filling the Bookshelves,” written by missionary LeOla Johnson.<sup>18</sup> The skit depicts a Christian woman in a bookstore with missionaries discussing the importance of, and the need for, Christian literature. In the drama, one missionary notes: “Investing in Christian literature means investing in the Word that will not return void!” Another woman adds: “Isn’t it a pity that we Christians in general are often guilty of feeling that just anything is good enough for the mission fields and that they ought to be mighty grateful for whatever we give them?”<sup>19</sup> Thus, through drama, the CWA was able to offer a gentle critique, without being overly harsh. Skits can function like parables as they invite us into the story and then offer us a mirror for further introspection. The piece ends with instructions on how to contribute to the CWA project. Mrs. Johnson notes that the offerings received for this exceeded \$16,000.<sup>20</sup> Overall, the project that year brought in \$22,975.44 (2021: \$201,677).<sup>21</sup>

In 1961, the National Project focused on its home missionaries and raised funds for both a parsonage at the Wallens Creek Covenant Church (a part of Covenant Mountain Mission in Virginia), and a home for missionaries serving the Covenant Mexican Mission in La Villa, Texas.<sup>22</sup> Two skits were written to support the fundraising for this project. The skit, “You All,” written by Francis Anderson, presents mock interviews with people who had been affected by the work of Covenant Mountain Mission, including people from Wallens Creek Covenant Church (Virginia) and Mulberry Gap Covenant Church (Tennessee). The piece explains the work of Covenant Mountain Mission and calls for women to pray for, and give financially toward, the mission.<sup>23</sup> Esther Elving also wrote a skit entitled “Unto Thee Also,” which details the work of the Covenant Mexican Mission.<sup>24</sup> The fundraising goal was \$20,000 and \$21,531.64

<sup>17</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1961* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 191.

<sup>18</sup> “Women Raise Funds for Missionary Literature,” *Covenant Companion*, January 20, 1961, 6–7.

<sup>19</sup> LeOla Johnson, “Filling the Bookshelves,” January 1961, 4, 6. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>20</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1961*, 191.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that during this time, as well, the CWA Canada Conference produced a skit entitled “Unto Him” written by Lorraine Quarnstrom for “use in presenting the 1960–1961 Canada Covenant Home Missions Project to the Canada Conference CWA.” In it, women discuss 2 Corinthians 8:5 as it relates to CWA. See “Unto Him,” 1, Record Series 2/2, Box 12, Folder 12, CAHL.

<sup>22</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1962* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 188.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Anderson, “You All,” 1963. Record Series 2/2, Box 33, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>24</sup> Esther Elving, “Unto Thee Also,” n.d. Record Series 2/2, Box 53, Folder 10, CAHL.

was raised (2021: \$187,743).<sup>25</sup>

## 1962–1968: A New Name and a Fiftieth Anniversary Drama

The year 1962 brought a new structure and a new name for the ministry. Indeed, a plan for a unified woman's organization was approved, and CWA was renamed "Covenant Women" in 1963.<sup>26</sup> The 1962 National Project was to raise \$25,000 for Christian education, to be divided equally between the Covenant Youth Department's publication fund and the Congo Polytechnic Institute, and also, to begin a CW scholarship endowment fund at North Park College.<sup>27</sup> CW raised \$19,429.64 toward these projects (2021: \$167,186). A skit connected to this effort may have existed but has not been found to date in the records. In 1963, CW elected a new president: Pearl Green. Covenant High School in Unalakleet, Alaska, became the beneficiary of its National Project.<sup>28</sup> Assisting the World Missions Department, CW raised \$16,598.84 (2021: \$140,516) to help build a boys' dormitory at the high school.<sup>29</sup> To assist in this fundraising, CW produced a skit named "Covenant High School Takes a Long Step." The skit depicts a conversation between a retired pastor's wife, a lay woman from the village, and a couple who just graduated from Covenant Bible College, who will leave soon for their first pastorate in the village of Koyuk. The couple recounts how they met at Covenant High School, got married, and felt called to the pastorate. Finally, the skit discusses the need for a boys' dormitory.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the skit helped personalize the needs in Alaska.

In 1964–1965, CW embarked on a special, two-year golden anniversary project to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary in 1966. The two-year project focused on Christian education and hoped to raise \$50,000. The first half was to provide a Grant-in-Aid endowment fund to benefit the children of Covenant missionaries and ministers. The other half was meant to establish a fund for Christian Education in the Covenant, so as "to launch a new course of study for the use of Covenanters in every age bracket, from the youngest to the senior adult classes, including

<sup>25</sup> "National Projects of CW," n.d. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL.

<sup>26</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1963* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 197.

<sup>27</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, 188.

<sup>28</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1964* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 165.

<sup>29</sup> "National Projects of CW"

<sup>30</sup> "Covenant High School Takes A Long Step," 1963–1964. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

women's study groups."<sup>31</sup> A creative skit was also developed to support these fundraising efforts. Its purpose was to "help arouse interest and promote giving to the anniversary project," and "mimeographed copies of a dialogue presented" at the Annual Meeting in 1964 were made available for local CW chapters to use.<sup>32</sup> The dialogue was written by Dagmar Gustafson of Villa Park, Illinois, and she and Mrs. Robert Wilson (also of Villa Park) acted out the dialogue at the Annual Meeting. The hope was that other women would do the same at their local churches.<sup>33</sup> CW raised \$48,641.72 (2021: \$400,120) for the anniversary project.<sup>34</sup> However, Hazel Anderson notes in a letter to the stewardship committee that as of July 1966, over \$55,000 had been raised.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of CW in 1966, a skit was written by Dora Anderson of Wausa, Nebraska. The goal was for the skit to be presented at local churches on Covenant Women Sunday that year—January 16, 1966—in hopes of informing "all Covenanters and to interest women of all ages in our on-going programs."<sup>36</sup> The skit creatively describes a building of stones representing CW: the foundation of the structure is described as Scripture, its design as inspired by the Holy Spirit, its materials as furnished by God, and its walls as representing living stones, that is, human beings. As such, this building "stands as a monument of all the things that our Covenant Women have done and are still doing."<sup>37</sup> Each room in the building is further described and represents a different CW project. Near the end of the skit, one of the characters states: "Our great task for the future is to provide avenues of interest and work that will touch the heart, life and ability of every woman, young and old, in the Covenant, and draw her into active service for God."<sup>38</sup> The skit concludes with an opportunity to give toward the anniversary project. In this way, the skit allowed the women of the Covenant to see themselves in this ministry work and to

<sup>31</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1965* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 171. Note also the document detailing the special anniversary project: "1964-1966 Special Golden Anniversary Project," n.d. Record Series 2/2, Box 6, Folder 6, CAHL.

<sup>32</sup> "With Gratitude, We Give!" *Covenant Companion*, November 20, 1954, 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> "National Projects of CW."

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Hazel Anderson to the Covenant Women Stewardship Committee, July 1966. Record Series 2/2, Box 2, Folder 4, CAHL.

<sup>36</sup> Dora Anderson, "A Building of Living Stones," January 1966, 1. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

experience the fruit of their mission come to life.

In 1966, Hazel Anderson was named as the first executive director of CW, a role described as taking “creative leadership in the total program of Covenant Women.”<sup>39</sup> That year CW focused their giving on two areas: their missionary budget, which supported eight female missionaries, and their National Project to raise as much as they could to augment the Covenant Ministers Widows’ Pension Fund.<sup>40</sup> Although their fundraising for these efforts technically began in 1963-1964, CW raised a total of \$62,161.84 (2021: \$494,238) toward missionary support and the pension fund for 1966.<sup>41</sup> Hazel Anderson often wrote to missionaries or to those involved with the project, asking them to write a skit for CW each year. In one piece of correspondence, she explained: “Sometimes when women can take part in a skit they become enthusiastic and interested.”<sup>42</sup> A skit was indeed written for the 1966 National Project. Hazel Anderson wrote to the stewardship committee to tell them: “A skit is being prepared to be used to promote our new Project and this could perhaps be used in connection with Covenant Women’s Sunday which will now become an annual date in the Covenant calendar—the third Sunday of January.”<sup>43</sup> That year a liturgy was written entitled “Because We Care . . . We Share.” This material consisted of prayers, readings, and hymns centered on the importance of sharing generously with others. Intended to be used for Thanksgiving, this liturgy reminded women of needs in the world. They are also called to actively fundraise for those needs in the context of their local churches.<sup>44</sup>

In 1967, CW continued the work of fundraising for the Covenant Ministers’ Widows’ Pension Fund as their National Project. They raised \$20,745.28 (2021: \$160,076) toward the fund.<sup>45</sup> CW President Pearl Green notes in her annual report that between the special project and funds from memorial and honorary memberships, \$27,000 (2021: \$208,340) had been netted that year for the pension fund.<sup>46</sup> Violet John-

<sup>39</sup> “Women’s Board Names First Executive Director,” *Covenant Companion*, March 1966, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1967* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 168.

<sup>41</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>42</sup> Hazel C. Anderson to William and Virginia Rigmark, March 3, 1972. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL

<sup>43</sup> Hazel Anderson to Covenant Women Stewardship Committee, July 1966. Record Series 2/2, Box 2, Folder 4, CAHL.

<sup>44</sup> “Because We Care . . . We Share,” 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 29, Folder 2, CAHL.

<sup>45</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>46</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1968* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 150.



son also composed a skit that year entitled “These Wonderful Women,” which portrayed a group of older women discussing their lives and the lives of ministers’ widows.<sup>47</sup> This helped create a more palpable connection to the beneficiaries of the pension fund, the focus of the fundraising efforts that year.

The 1968 National Project for CW was to fundraise \$28,000 for a Mobile Clinic for Congo. A decision was also made to partially support all Covenant missionaries, rather than the select few who had been receiving support to that point.<sup>48</sup> Hazel Anderson wrote to Marian Enos and asked her to write a skit for the project, to be presented on CW Sunday that coming January 21, 1968.<sup>49</sup> The record shows that Enos responded by stating that she was not sure if she could write a skit, but would try to develop something.<sup>50</sup> Anderson responded further, by noting that something other than a skit would be “most acceptable,” if that is what happened, and perhaps they could speak at the annual meeting if Enos would be there.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether Marian Enos ended up being the actual author or not, but a skit was in fact produced for the project. The skit, entitled “Mobile Clinic for Congo,” dramatizes a mother recalling a letter from her friend serving in Congo, while also remembering when a Congolese man preached about his experience of the gospel at her church in the U.S. The time of recollection is juxtaposed with the mother’s young children yelling that they need a bike or a car or some other thing. This leads to the skit highlighting the need for a dispensary on wheels.<sup>52</sup> Once again, we observe how the dramas of the CW function as embodied parables.

Hazel Anderson also wrote to missionary nurse Barbara Johnson, who was serving in Congo, asking if she would write something as well. She agreed to write a poem, which she entitled “From Out of the Dark Jungle.”<sup>53</sup> This poem vividly details life in Congo and the needs present

<sup>47</sup> Violet Johnson, “These Wonderful Women,” 1966–1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 12, Folder 12, CAHL.

<sup>48</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1969* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 130.

<sup>49</sup> Hazel Anderson to Marian Enos, May 24, 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>50</sup> Marian Enos to Hazel Anderson, June 14, 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>51</sup> Hazel Anderson to Marian Enos, June 16, 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>52</sup> “Mobile Clinic for Congo,” October 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>53</sup> Barbara Johnson to Hazel Anderson, July 24, 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

there, as well as the need for a mobile clinic. One line highlights the benefits the mobile clinic would bring:

At last they'll have hope that there's help on the way  
And know that tomorrow's a far brighter day.<sup>54</sup>

The poem concludes with the call to give:

Don't give just from extra that you've got to spare  
But dig down where it hurts and give that to share...  
And so, for this project for '68—GIVE,  
That generous gifts might cause others to LIVE!<sup>55</sup>

Anderson wrote to all CW reminding them that Covenant Women Sunday was coming up in January of 1968 and that they would soon be receiving a skit and poem to use that Sunday in conjunction with presenting the CW national project for that year.<sup>56</sup> CW raised \$28,496.94 (2021: \$209,980) for the mobile clinic.<sup>57</sup>

### 1969–1978: Growing beyond Gleaners

In 1969, Erma Chinander was elected CW president, and a new type of fundraising was introduced: “Thank Offering Banks.” These banks replaced the Gleaner Envelopes that had previously been used for annual, month-long fundraising efforts, instead of the year-round effort the banks would now provide. The reason given was that “The significance of the ‘Gleaners’ program had dulled over the years, and the new program emphasizes a worship experience as well as an opportunity for stewardship.”<sup>58</sup> Many churches indicated that this led not only to an increase in giving, but also to an increase in enthusiasm. The success of this effort is clear, as the banks program raised \$19,394.65 (2021: \$134,570) above what the envelopes did the previous year.<sup>59</sup>

A service was also written by Elsa Magnuson to be used for Thanksgiving that year in conjunction with the Thank Offering Banks. Erma Chinander noted that: “Another first in our CW work will be the Thank Offering Service this fall. Our Thank Offering boxes have been in our

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Johnson, “From Out of the Dark Jungle” 1967, 2. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Hazel C. Anderson to Covenant Women, October 1967. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 7, CAHL.

<sup>57</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>58</sup> Erma Chinander, “We’re Rejoicing,” *Covenant Companion*, March 15, 1970, 15–16; see also *Covenant Yearbook 1970* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 137–38.

<sup>59</sup> Chinander, “We’re Rejoicing,” 15–16.

homes—on our dressers or kitchen tables or wherever—since CW Day in January of this year.”<sup>60</sup> The service was a dramatic liturgy that used a series of readings posing questions such as: “Have you ever been hungry? Have you ever been poor? Have you ever been rejected [because of your skin color]? Have you ever been lonely [like an elderly woman in a retirement home]?” The liturgy calls for thanksgiving to God for good fortune as well as repentance for not helping those who experience these circumstances. The liturgy then asks: “How often have you said: ‘I wish there was something I could do...?’”<sup>61</sup> The response was to accept that Jesus loves us and that we should stand not in guilt but in thanksgiving and devotion for God’s goodness, which should then motivate us to bring our Thank Offering Banks (containing our financial gifts) up front.<sup>62</sup>

The National Project for 1969 was to raise \$15,000 for a new denominational hymnal. To support these efforts, Mrs. Paul Olson of Ridgeway, Pennsylvania, created a worship service to be used in churches that included some of the new hymns featured in the hymnal. Also, the liturgy included a poem entitled “I Am Your Hymnal,” a responsive reading entitled “What Is Worship,” and an explanatory statement for the needed revision of the hymnal.<sup>63</sup> That year, however, there were women who did not approve of the 1969 National Project for new hymnals. In one letter, a CW member described her (and others’) disapproval; she believed they should be focusing their fundraising efforts on missions. She went so far as to ask what the missionaries in the Congo would think to learn money that could have been sent to them was spent on new hymnals instead. She thought it was “a slap in the face” to Evangelical Covenant Church missionaries.<sup>64</sup> Despite the protest, the project was oversubscribed, and the women raised \$18,346 (2021: \$127,294) for the new hymnals. A “Playlet for Reading at Covenant Women’s Teas” was also written that year, which detailed the past work of CW and their projects.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Erma Chinander, “To All Women, By All Means,” *Covenant Companion*, September 1, 1969, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Elsa Magnuson, “Gratitude to God,” 1970. Record Series 2/2, Box 1, Folder 2, CAHL.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Hazel Anderson to Esther Hallock, November 11, 1968. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL; Mrs. Paul Olsson, “Worship Service from the New Hymnal,” 1968. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

<sup>64</sup> Hazel Anderson to Mildred Holmberg, November 22, 1968. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL (among many other letters).

<sup>65</sup> “Playlet for Reading at CW’s Teas,” in “To All Women, By All Means,” 1970–1971. Record Series 2/2, Box 10, Folder 1, CAHL.

At the opening of the 1970s, CW membership grew, but President Erma Chinander also noted in her annual report that, “We are not as interested in a membership figure as in encouraging our local C.W. organizations to reach all the women in their churches and communities. When God has touched our lives and made them whole, we want to share his love and grace, and in his name to help alleviate some of the needs and hurts of the world.”<sup>66</sup> CW was about the business of mobilizing women for the mission of the Evangelical Covenant Church. 1970 brought another exciting first: Covenant Women brought in more than \$100,000 in total receipts during their fiscal year, specifically \$112,675 (2021: \$740,547). The National Project for 1970 was named “Project Appalachia.” The goal of this project was to raise money to build additional buildings for the Cumberland Mountain Mission in the Appalachian Mountains of southwestern Virginia.<sup>67</sup> To encourage these efforts, a filmstrip was created with slides from Cumberland Mountain Mission. The narration was written by Frances Anderson, at the request of Hazel Anderson.<sup>68</sup> The project was successful, as CW raised \$25,000 (2021: \$164,310), which allowed a clothing center and a community center to be built in the Virginia mountains.<sup>69</sup>

In 1971, Jane B. Nelson was elected president of CW and Erma Chinander took over as executive director. The National Project for that year was dubbed “Operation Concern.” The goal was to raise \$30,000 to “supplement the personal allowances of residents in need” at Covenant retirement homes.<sup>70</sup> Hazel Anderson (who was still executive director during the preparations for the 1971 project) wrote to both Lorraine Quarnstrom and Ebba Arell, asking them to consider writing a skit for Operation Concern to emphasize the needs for the project.<sup>71</sup> However, the record bears out that the script was eventually written by Ruth Lundberg and Aggie Johnson.<sup>72</sup> Still, the following note from Hazel Anderson

<sup>66</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1971* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 127.

<sup>67</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 138.

<sup>68</sup> Hazel C. Anderson to Winnifred Swenson, July 17, 1969. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL; Hazel C. Anderson to Frances Anderson, September 2, 1969. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

<sup>69</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 127.

<sup>70</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1972* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 128.

<sup>71</sup> Hazel Anderson to Loraine Quarnstrom, June 30, 1970. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL; Hazel Anderson to Ebba Arell, July 1, 1970. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

<sup>72</sup> Hazel Anderson to Ruth Lundberg, September 21, 1970. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

was handwritten on the front of the letter from the two women (within which the script was enclosed): “These women did not know of the membership theme ‘Let’s surround them with our love.’ I stuck it on a couple places at the end. Could it be used rather often in the pulpit—or what do you think?”<sup>73</sup> The skit was named “Surround Them with Your Love,” and it was introduced with the goal of showcasing “how far this small amount of money will go to take care of the personal needs of those who took such good care of us when we were young and need our help now.”<sup>74</sup> The skit contained a conversation between an elderly woman and a young lady, followed by vignettes of elderly people receiving financial help and how it had impacted them.<sup>75</sup> Hazel Anderson, in an effort to tie in the theme, added “Surround Them with your love” at the end of the skit.<sup>76</sup> \$30,000 was raised that year for the project (2021: \$190,936).<sup>77</sup>

The 1972 National Project for CW focused on raising funds for the World Mission Department, specifically towards the Fuji Dorm Fund, which would aid in the completion of a men’s seminary dormitory at the Covenant Seminary in Tokyo, Japan.<sup>78</sup> Hazel Anderson wrote to Covenant missionaries in Tokyo, Virginia and William Rigmark, and asked if they might consider writing a skit, or some kind of promotional material, for the National Project that year. Virginia Rigmark responded that she thought a skit could be easily developed.<sup>79</sup> It is unclear what the final skit actually was, but CW raised \$25,000 (2021: \$153,872) for the project.<sup>80</sup>

The National Project for 1973 was entitled “The Library Lift.” With this effort, the goal was to provide monies to update the North Park College library.<sup>81</sup> A skit entitled “Library Lift” was written, which portrayed two librarians discussing the current problems with the library and ends with one of them exclaiming: “I believe it is our Christian responsibility to

<sup>73</sup> Ruth Lundberg and Aggie Johnson to Hazel Anderson, October 14, 1970. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

<sup>74</sup> Ruth Lundberg and Aggie Johnson, “Surround Them with Your Love,” 1971, 1. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 8, CAHL.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>78</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1974* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 125.

<sup>79</sup> Hazel Anderson to Virginia and William Rigmark, March 3, 1971. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL; Virginia Rigmark to Hazel Anderson, March 11, 1971. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL.

<sup>80</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>81</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1974*, 125.

provide the best, academically excellent libraries possible for students and faculty.”<sup>82</sup> CW raised \$25,000 (2021: \$141,549), which they presented to Betty Jane Highfield, the North Park College librarian at that time.<sup>83</sup>

In 1974, Christian education was the focus of the National Project, aptly named “Outreach—Teach!” The project hoped to provide “training and resources for those who will lead children to a richer and fuller experience of faith.”<sup>84</sup> A skit, also named “Outreach—Teach!” was written with the purpose of portraying the importance of Christian education in the local church. The skit portrayed a number of church members discussing which areas of ministry the church should focus on (a familiar scene for any church), when a Sunday school teacher shares how she would reach a whole family for Christ through their young son who was attending her Sunday school class.<sup>85</sup> Overall, CW efforts raised \$25,000 that year (2021: \$126,003) for Christian education.

In 1975, CW embarked on an ambitious, three-year national project that would be the National Project for 1975, 1976, and 1977. The campaign was entitled “Giving for Growing,” and sought to raise \$100,000 over three years to benefit all the departments of the denomination.<sup>86</sup> In its first year, the project raised \$30,000 (2021: \$141,396).<sup>87</sup> By 1976, the membership of CW had grown to over 30,000 and the group also celebrated its sixtieth anniversary.<sup>88</sup> The anniversary was recognized on Covenant Women Sunday—January 18, 1976—when the triennium project was also emphasized.<sup>89</sup> To aid in their appeal, a skit was created for use in local churches around the country on Covenant Women Sunday for that year. The skit was named “Help! Help! Come Help!” and featured youth and people who were aging calling for help, as well as people serving in dormitory construction and medical missions. The skit then demonstrated how women had heard and answered the call, by presenting a series of vignettes of projects CW had done over the years. The skit ended by highlighting the “Giving for Growing” campaign.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>82</sup> “Library Lift,” 1973, 2. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 9, CAHL.

<sup>83</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1975* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 138.

<sup>84</sup> Erma Chinander, “Ministries through C.W. National Project,” *Covenant Companion*, February 15, 1974, 14.

<sup>85</sup> “Outreach—Teach!” 1974. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL.

<sup>86</sup> “National Project for the Triennium, 1975–1977,” n.d. Record Series 2/2, Box 16, Folder 9, CAHL; see also *Covenant Yearbook 1975*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> “National Projects of CW.”

<sup>88</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1976* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 142.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> “Help! Help! Come Help!” 1976. Record Series 2/2, Box 69, Folder 10, CAHL.

To celebrate its sixty years, CW also produced an anniversary pageant entitled “God Gave Us This Day,” which was performed at the annual meeting in June 1976, on Pacific Lutheran University’s campus in Tacoma, Washington. Written by Mary Almer, the pageant was presented by the CW of the North Pacific Conference, and according to President Jane Nelson’s annual report:

About 1,200 persons filled the auditorium to review the past, look at the present, and listen to some dreams for the future of our organization. Thirty tapes with script were made available to local units on a rental basis so that all might hear and share in the accomplishments of our group.<sup>91</sup>

The pageant progresses through the entire history of CW, beginning with singing the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The opening scene depicts a group of suffragettes declaring their political allegiances, contrasted with Covenant women calling out for women to unite around the mission of the church. After the history is presented, the pageant ends with a new song, “God Gave Us This Day,” set to the tune of “To God Be the Glory.”<sup>92</sup> At the end of the second year of the campaign, CW had raised another \$40,000 (2021: \$179,781), bringing the total to \$70,000 out of the \$100,000 goal.<sup>93</sup>

The year 1977 brought a number of milestones for CW: Triennial, a new magazine (Covenant Women Magazine), a new pin to wear, and the end of the three-year project, as well as a new president, Betty Carlson.<sup>94</sup> The third phase of the “Giving for Growing” campaign brought in \$30,000 (2021: \$126,368), thereby reaching the \$100,000 goal set for the project.<sup>95</sup> That is the equivalent of raising over \$400,000 in three years today. Looking forward to 1978, CW decided to focus their efforts on providing help to the women of Zaire. This brought new possibilities for service, using the arts to mobilize the women of the Covenant for the mission of the church.

Overall, this review of the period ranging from 1958 to 1978 demonstrates the vitality and creativity of the ministry of CW. Through the use of the arts, particularly drama, CW helped women embody the mission of

<sup>91</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1977* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 145.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Almer, “God Gave Us This Day,” 1976. Record Series 2/2, Box 6, Folder 2, CAHL. See Appendix B to read the opening scene.

<sup>93</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1977*, 145.

<sup>95</sup> *Covenant Yearbook 1978* (Chicago: Evangelical Covenant Church), 145.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

the Evangelical Covenant Church, and then fundraise to make that mission a reality. While drama was certainly used before 1958 and continued after 1978, this particular time in the history of the Evangelical Covenant Church reveals itself as a rich period of ministry connecting the arts to the mission of the gospel for CW. These women harnessed the power of the arts to reach people in ways that mere recitation of facts probably could not. Further, they used that power to mobilize the women of the church to meet the needs of a hurting world. The fruits of their efforts are still seen today and, perhaps, they can teach us something about the intersection of art with ministries of mercy and justice.

### **The Women of the Covenant Today**

Through its history, Covenant Women's Auxiliary/Covenant Women have gone through a number of transitions and structural changes. Covenant Women became the "Department of Covenant Women" by vote at the Annual Meeting of 1982. In 1990, the name changed to "Covenant Women Ministries," and then to "Women Ministries" in 2004.<sup>96</sup> Recently, the department has transitioned out of its traditional centralized structure and has been restructured as a mission initiative called "Fostering the Flourishing of Women" that will interact with all five of the Evangelical Covenant Church's mission priorities.<sup>97</sup> However, CW circles at local churches can still be found, such as at my previous church—Trinity Evangelical Covenant Church in Oak Lawn, Illinois. Trinity Covenant maintains a CW group that holds annual fundraisers for various missions and causes. Although they are no longer fundraising in a united, national effort, women of the Covenant continue to find ways to band together to make a difference in their communities and in the world around them.

For example, the chair of Trinity's CW group is the leader who brought a men's recovery shelter to the church's attention. She, with the help of some other faithful women, began soliciting church members for clothing and toiletry donations to help the men at this shelter. Each week, she collects the donations, washing and folding the clothing donations, organizing the toiletries, and using any monetary donations to find bargains at local thrift stores. She brings them to the shelter and sets them up in

<sup>96</sup> The Evangelical Covenant Church, "History of Women Ministries," *Covenant Newswire Archive*, January 31, 2006, <http://blogs.covchurch.org/newswire/2006/01/31/history-of-women-ministries>.

<sup>97</sup> More information on Fostering the Flourishing of Women and the Evangelical Covenant Church's mission priorities may be accessed at <https://covchurch.org/ffw-2>.



a room, organizing them by size and type, where the men can come pick out whatever items they need. She continues to remind the congregation of the importance of this work by sharing stories and posting thank you letters from the men on a bulletin board in the church.

Each December, Trinity's CW puts on a wonderful event for women called Jul Fest (Christmas Festival). This event (housed at the church) includes a craft bazaar, a musical entertainment program, and a luncheon complete with a Swedish smorgasbord. I experienced my very first Jul Fest in December of 2018 and was delighted to meet women who came from all over our community. I even tried my first pickled herring! Trinity's CW use the proceeds from the tickets they sell for Jul Fest to make donations to several charities that they decide upon each year.

These brief examples from a local church setting highlight the fact that the tradition of connecting the arts to fundraising is still alive among some of our CW groups. I hope to see that tradition continue as we consider how the arts might be used to bring awareness to, and to fund-raise for, other mission priorities. In the last few years, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, Academic Dean and Professor of Theology and Ethics at North Park Theological Seminary, led the efforts to establish the School of Restorative Arts (SRA), a unique educational program inside Stateville Correctional Center, near Chicago, Illinois. I have observed an amazingly talented and creative group of women join Clifton-Soderstrom in this work. This work was inspirational for me. Having an arts background myself, I wondered how I might partner with the mission of the SRA. Out of that wondering and partnership with the SRA, "[re]story" was born, a redemptive storytelling cohort using theater and improvisation as a way to tell the stories of our incarcerated brothers and sisters, and to increase awareness to mass incarceration. More than just awareness, [re]story's goal is that hearts might be changed in support of reforms in the justice system, through the sharing of embodied stories. The Covenant Women of our past and present have taught me and inspired me. As I've attempted to demonstrate in this article, our CW predecessors have shown us the importance and effectiveness of embodying our mission through the arts. In the end, my hope is that we would continue to walk in their footsteps.