

A 2020 Vision requires a Visionary Budget Plan
Here's the basis of our "3-2-5" Plan and the idea of "Step One"

A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCHES OF THE EAST COAST CONFERENCE

The *East Coast Conference* celebrates 120 years of ministry this year. We began as the *Eastern Missionary Association*, and though the name has changed the mission remains the same. **We are, by charter, a servant to and extension of our member congregations.** We exist to equip, extend and multiply the missionary influence that has been in the heart of Covenanters from the beginning. We honor and celebrate the stories of generations past whose depth of faith, zeal, perseverance and sacrifice started 45 churches in 30 years between 1885 and 1915.

The Covenant Church is organized into regional conferences – 11 of them across North America. Our mission territory comprises 12 states from Virginia to Maine and the District of Columbia (we split Pennsylvania and New York with the Great Lakes Conference). The conference stretches over 1,000 miles from north to south and as much as 400 miles east to west. It covers the most densely developed and diversely populated portion of the country.

Across the Covenant Church, regional conferences that have grown best in size and strength have progressively invested in staffing. Currently across the Covenant (excluding the East Coast Conference) **the average ratio of churches to conference staff (excluding office/administrative staff) is at 27 to 1. With no Associate Superintendent in place our ratio is 76 to 1** – the highest in the entire Covenant. Once we call an associate superintendent, that ratio will drop to 38 to 1 – *which is still about 40% higher than the norm.* This does not position us to sustain the current growth of the Conference. We are not called merely to survive – but to thrive in mission. But we cannot do it by presuming upon our already overextended staff.

The average ratio of churches to conference staff is 27 to 1...our ratio is 76 to 1. Even with one associate that will drop to 38 to 1 – 40% higher than the norm.

As we look to the near future we see continued opportunities for planting new churches and helping long established churches extend and renew their missionary endeavors in their own communities and beyond. **In order to sustain and strengthen those efforts, the Conference needs to add more staff to meet the increasing opportunities and demands that are set before us.** Our Board believes that this is the time to prayerfully challenge one another – as Covenanters and as congregations to strengthen our partnership in the East Coast Conference.

With our plans to plant 3 or 4 new churches each year, as well as the growing demand to assist established churches committed to revitalization, **our Conference Board recognizes that we need not one, but two Associate Superintendents already.** With three full time staff consistently out in the field we would be poised to adequately support the growing work of the Conference without inadvertently sacrificing the health, home life and humanity of those God calls to serve on our Conference staff. If we are able to keep pace with the 2020 Vision set before us, over the next 10 years we will plant and nourish 30-40 new congregations. These new churches will stretch the Conference towards the borders of our territory in both the Mid-Atlantic and New England states.

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If our churches will rise to the challenge and grow in support of our common work financially by taking measured steps over the next several years we can achieve the vision of becoming a conference of thriving missional churches. We believe the financial investment will produce both great missional returns and stimulate ongoing vitality and generosity within our established base of churches.

To make this challenge both real and realistic we urge each congregation, through their own Board, Council, or Leadership Team, to review their history and practice of financially supporting the Conference. We still have churches that give little or nothing to our common work in dollars or percent of giving, and too few churches that give a full 5% to underwrite this mission. On average our churches support us with just over 2% of their tithes and offerings.

To meet the current and emerging needs of both church and mission we need our income from churches to more than double! That's why we've dubbed the challenge "3-2-5" – 3 years 2 grow to 5% support for Conference ministries. All of our new churches support the Conference (5%) and ECC (10%) from the first month and each month. They practice generosity and they reap generosity as a result. We are not expecting equal gifts, but we are asking for equal and proportional giving.

Across the eastern seaboard, from state to state what is remarkable to observe is that the churches that are evangelical in spirit and practice are growing – but the rate of growth is still insufficient compared to the growth of population. Overall the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are declining. We believe that God is calling the *East Coast Conference* to be a continuously growing movement of dynamically networked missional churches that extend God's Kingdom. We will do this by planting and strengthening churches whose lifestyle of worship, evangelism, discipling, compassion and justice conveys the heart and invitation of Jesus Christ.

The proposed "Step One Vision Budget" included in your annual meeting materials is built on a foundation of giving across the Conference at 4%. It is undated, which means that we wish to hold it out before our churches for prayer, discussion, and future action. When our support reaches this threshold we will be able to take "Step One" in adding a second Associate Superintendent to our Conference team. When we grow to 5% in support we will take "Step Two" which will allow us to fully fund our foundational ministry initiatives across the conference.

Will your church take the first step to join the "3-2-5 Challenge"? A journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step and is accomplished by progressively advancing towards the finish line. So does the journey of fulfilling the *2020 Vision* for the *East Coast Conference*.

If you would welcome a visit with your church leaders, missions team, or congregation to explore this challenge, please contact our office to inquire about scheduling a visit.

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