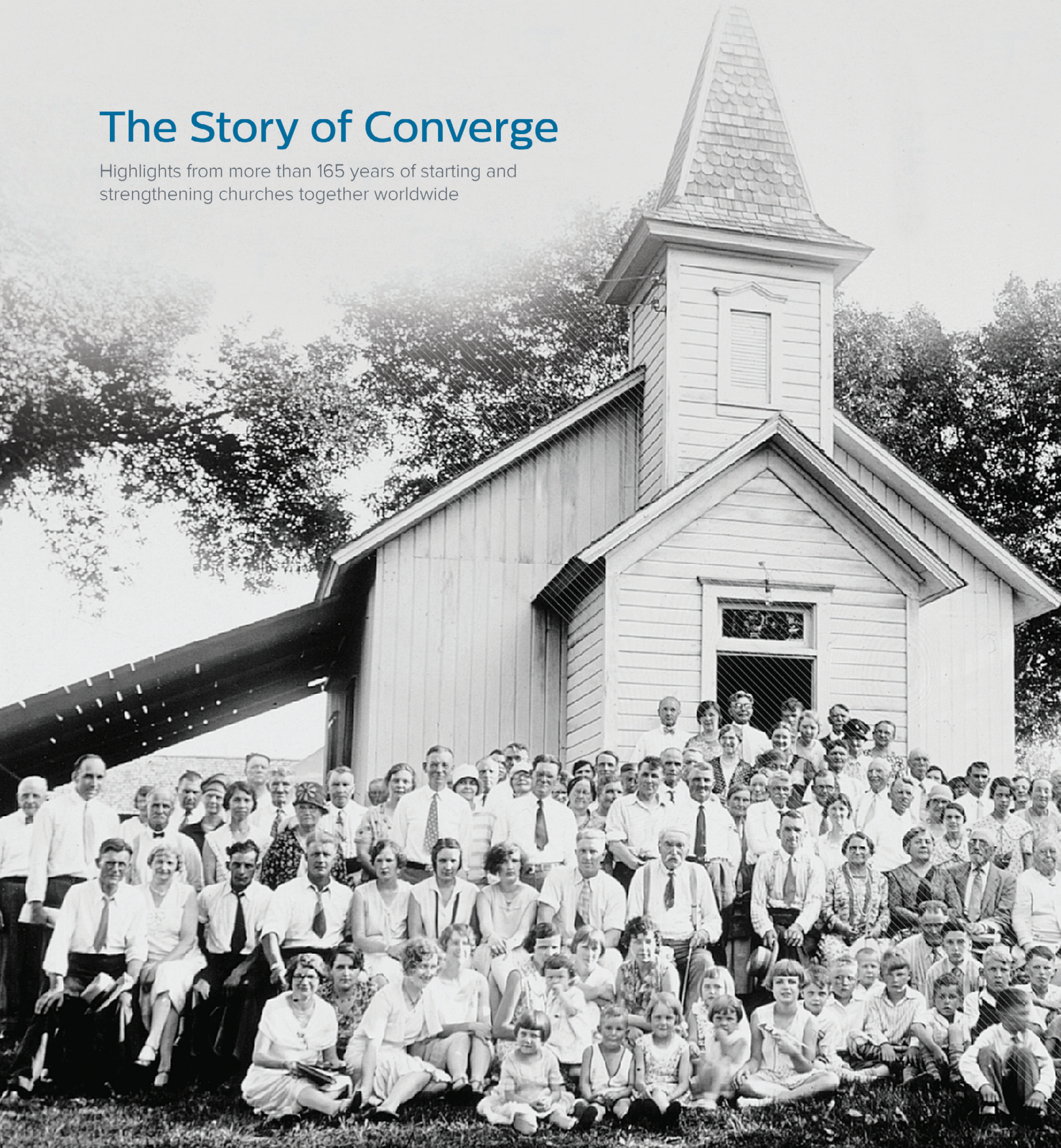


The Story of Converge

Highlights from more than 165 years of starting and strengthening churches together worldwide



What makes us better together

In Converge we talk often about being “Better Together.” Throughout our history we have seen generations of churches, leaders and missionaries join forces through God’s power to accomplish the impossible. The command of Christ to go and make disciples resonates in our hearts and resounds from our pulpits. It is evidenced in the ministries of our congregations and of our mission fields. I am so proud to be a part of the Converge movement.

What brings us together for all this activity is much greater than our compelling mission. What brings us together is the cross. The completed work of Christ on the cross resulted in the removal of guilt and the forgiveness of sin. On the cross, Christ accomplished our redemption and reconciliation and restored our right relationship with God. The cross is a reminder of the good news Christ has risen and Satan, sin and the grave have been defeated. As a result, you and I have the overwhelming privilege of telling the world about the love and power of God.

We come together because of the love of Christ—to know him and make him known. We minister out of gratefulness for his finished work on the cross.

Our prayer is you will join us in God’s journey for us—something we can accomplish only if we work together in his strength and for his glory.

Better Together,



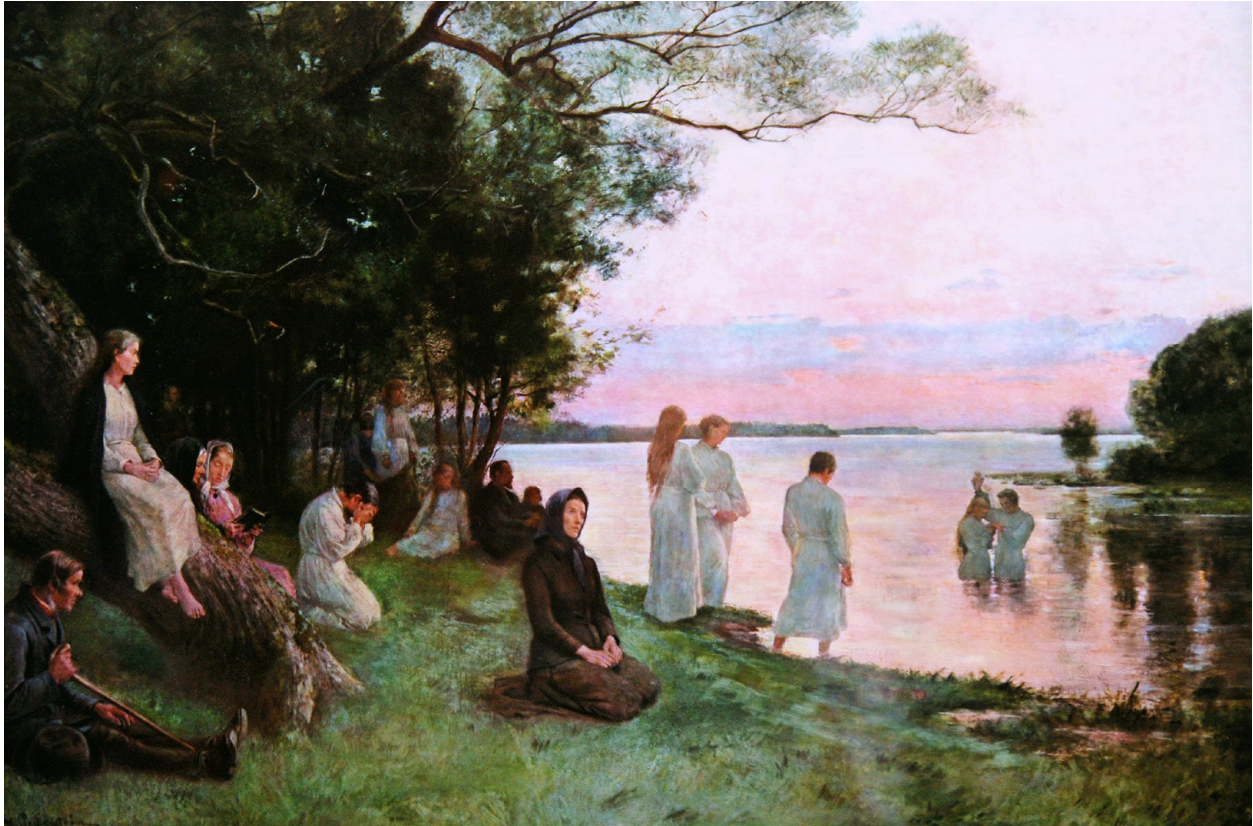
Scott Ridout

President, Converge



“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

1 Corinthians 1:18



“The Baptists” This Gustav Cederström painting was first displayed in Paris in 1887. A copy hangs at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. The scene is at dawn. Baptisms in the 1850s were often performed in secret, regarded illegal by Sweden’s state church.

Deep spiritual hunger

Organized in 1879, the Swedish Baptist General Conference evolved into the Baptist General Conference in 1945 and into Converge in 2008. Like many Christians across the centuries, Converge believers combine doctrinal orthodoxy with life-changing experiential faith.



Paternal home of sea captain Gustavus Schroeder, considered the first Swedish Baptists.

In nineteenth-century Sweden and its largely secular State-sanctioned church, the clergy’s cold formalism caused many lay people and clergymen to seek spiritual nourishment elsewhere. A general aridity in post-Reformation Protestantism and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prompted a remarkable series of spiritual awakenings or “evangelical revivals.” An important part of that awakening was the rise of “evangelical pietism.”

Converge is rooted in pietism—the *läsare* (“Bible readers”) movement. Their deep spiritual hunger brought them together for Bible study, prayer, mutual support and edification. Persecuted for their beliefs, many sought religious freedom in America. They were the nucleus of what became Converge.

Swedish Baptists exiled

As a part of the larger evangelical awakening, Baptist believers in Europe and America began an expansion that eventually made them one of the dominant groups within Christendom during the nineteenth century. Marked by incessant evangelism and a simple biblical faith, by mid-century Baptists began to make their impact upon Scandinavia, growing in the fertile soil of the *läsare* movement.

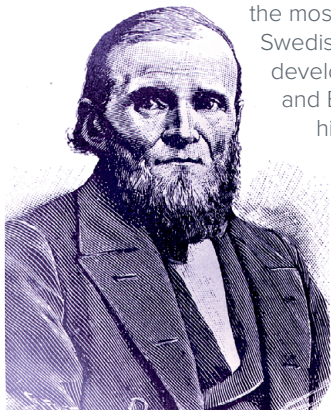
A newly converted people’s enthusiasm about their faith, and their concern for the lostness of men and women without Jesus Christ, prompted aggressive evangelism

in pulpit and pew. The atmosphere in Sweden was “surcharged with revivalism.”

The conversion and baptism in 1844 of Captain Gustavus W. Schroeder was an especially significant event for Swedish Baptists. Just three years later he baptized Fredrik O. Nilsson, also a seaman, who went on to found the Baptist movement in Sweden.

Nilsson’s aggressive witnessing soon brought both converts and persecution. After legal trials and amid much publicity, he was banished from Sweden in 1850. Following a period of exile in Denmark, he sailed for America in 1853 as the spiritual shepherd of a small group of believers. He traveled as an evangelist, founded Sunday schools, distributed millions of tracts and more than 50,000 Bibles.

In their new land, Nilsson and two other early leaders—Anders Wiberg and Gustaf Palmquist—shaped the lives of Swedish Baptists. Anders Wiberg, a devout and scholarly



Fredrik O. Nilsson

Lutheran clergyman, was perhaps the most influential leader among Swedish Baptists in their early development both in America and Europe. Responding to his friendly contacts with Nilsson and other Baptists, Wiberg had set out to write a book refuting their Baptist position on immersion. Instead, his study became a classic defense of the view he had set out to challenge. Nilsson baptized him in 1852.

Thereafter, Wiberg maintained a heavy schedule of writing and preaching. His books on Baptist principles had a profound stabilizing influence upon the young fellowship of Baptist churches in America that had neither literature nor a theological seminary.

Gustaf Palmquist, then an earnest Lutheran lay preacher and school teacher, was the third of the early Baptist leaders in America. Palmquist, like Wiberg, had been impressed by the simple biblical faith and godly lives of the Baptist läsare in Sweden. Soon after his arrival in the United States in 1852 a revival in a Baptist church in Galesburg, Illinois, further convinced him to cast his lot with the new movement.

Ordained shortly thereafter, Palmquist traveled from Galesburg to nearby Rock Island, where his effective preaching and personal witnessing attracted a small



Gustaf Palmquist

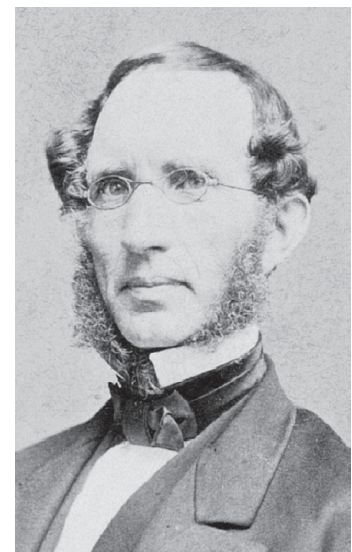
group of believers. With his baptism of three adults on August 13, 1852, they established the first congregation of Swedish Baptists in the United States. Although Palmquist remained in the U.S. only a short time, he helped the new churches through their difficult early years. In the U.S. as well as in Sweden, the early decades of Swedish Baptist churches were marked by almost perennial revival. The lives of pastors and lay people were characterized by persistent personal evangelism. “My friend, are you saved?” was the question they addressed to everyone they encountered. Pastors, who were often lay preachers, traveled long distances on foot or horseback to share their message of salvation with other Swedish immigrants. Preachers and churchgoers alike were on mission, conveying with persistence and remarkable enthusiasm an experience and a message that had profoundly changed their lives.

Devotion to God, the Word, Evangelism

One word that captures the essence of the faith of early Swedish Baptists is “biblical.” The läsare were “readers” of the Word. They came to the Bible out of a spiritual hunger and claimed it as their sole authority. They based their lives and teaching on it. Much of the appeal of pietism centered on commitment and godliness. Members walked in love and purity within the church and toward the world. They were people of the Book, and the central message they shared was man’s deep need and God’s gracious salvation.

Theirs was a theology of “redeeming grace” that clearly gave central place to the cross of Christ. God’s Word held the supreme place, and the message of the Crucified One was their theme. Adolf Olson, historian and professor of history and theology at Bethel College from 1915 to 1955, described the values that guided our predecessors: “A continued walk with the Master in holiness, purity, love and humility.”

Faith meant changed lives as well as doctrinal truth and commitment of heart, will and intellect. Like evangelical pietism, the Swedish Baptists’ reaction against established churches did not involve orthodox doctrine as much as the dead



Anders Wiberg

formalism of church and clergy. This coldness fostered indifferent and even immoral lives. Swedish Baptists and other evangelicals demanded a regenerate (“born again”) clergy and regenerate church members. Believer’s baptism provided the best assurance of this, and the Scriptural mode of baptism was clearly immersion.

Early Swedish Baptists so thoroughly and joyously believed in baptism that they immersed new believers in rivers, lakes or oceans, wherever they found water. The Mississippi River was the site of the first recorded baptism among Swedish Baptists in America (1852). Baptisms were held not only in spring and summer but in winter’s biting cold. Minnesota pioneers cut through thick ice to follow their Lord’s command. Although baptistries eventually were available, new converts sometimes walked or drove home in wet clothing, even in the dead of winter.

Such was the faith of the Swedish Baptist pioneers who survived their difficult early decades in a new land. Scattered, few in number and often living in extreme poverty, these devout people of the Word were committed to radical life change and aggressive witnessing. These characteristics enabled them to grow, so that by 1871 the first tiny group of believers in Rock Island had become

1500 persons in seven states. Small as the number now seems, it represented healthy, steady growth, considering the handicaps under which the pioneers labored.

Districts organized

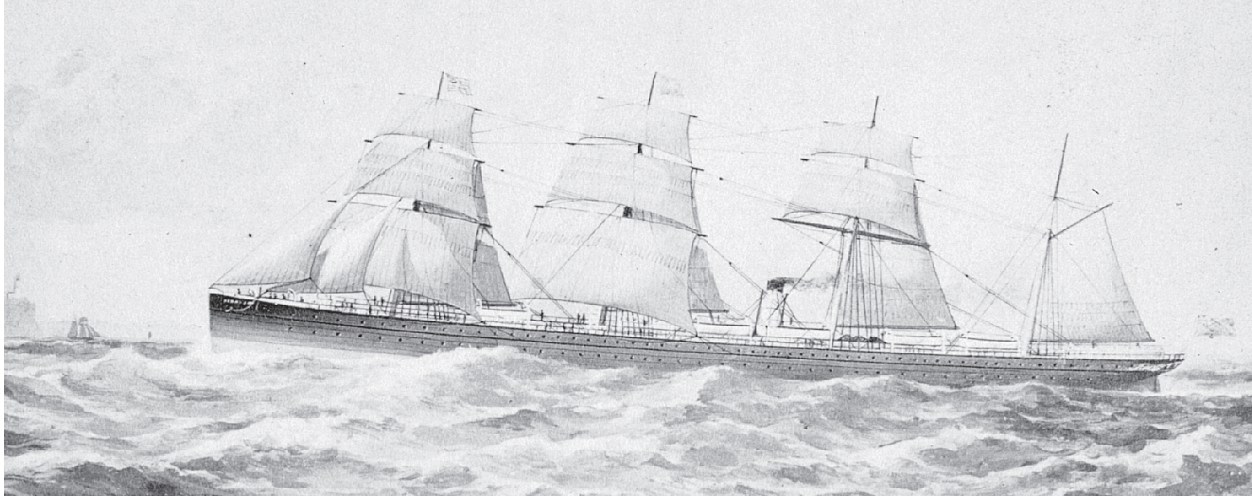
Four years after the 1852 organization of the Rock Island church, the immigrant churches—by then numbering nine with 179 members—met in conference in that same city. The Rock Island gathering was, in a sense, the first annual meeting of Converge.

District conferences were formed shortly after that initial gathering in Rock Island. Distances and difficulty of travel prompted the Minnesota churches to be the first to form their own organization. They held their first statewide meeting in 1858, four years before the forming of the Illinois and Iowa Conference. In 1872 the congregations of western Iowa withdrew to join with those of Nebraska.

It was not until 1879 that Swedish Baptists met in a conference embracing all their then American congregations. By that date churches in the three states of 1856—Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota—had been joined by those from Maine to the Dakotas and as far south as



These Minnesota pastors posed for a church-entrance photo.



Swedish immigrants made the hazardous Atlantic crossing in ships such as this.

Kansas and Missouri. The original nine churches with their 179 members had multiplied to 65 churches with about 3000 baptized believers.

In 1883, the churches of Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska reorganized into separate state bodies. In the same year, the Swedish Baptist General Conference of the eastern states organized, embracing all the territory from New England to Ohio, eventually covered by MidAtlantic and Northeast districts. By the turn of the century most Midwestern and far western states had also achieved cooperative organizations and programs. In the Midwest, districts emerged in lower and upper Michigan (1884 and 1893), Wisconsin (1884), South Dakota (1874, final in 1911), Kansas (1891) and North Dakota (1902). On the West Coast, meanwhile, the Columbia district emerged in 1930 from a series of realignments of the Pacific Northwest churches begun in 1889. In that same year a mission society was formed in California that in 1899 became the Swedish Baptist General Conference of California.

The first constitution (1880) of the Swedish Baptist General Conference made missions one of their main objectives. The most important decision made by the Conference that year was the commissioning of its first missionary, Christopher Silene. Similarly, the district conferences placed missions and evangelism at the center of their programs.

Nearly 1500 percent growth

During the third and fourth decades of Swedish Baptists in America, several developments combined to initiate rapid expansion. Within a little more than 30 years the infant denomination multiplied nearly fifteenfold. One factor was a huge increase in Swedish immigration. Because

the Baptist movement in Sweden had grown rapidly, many late-nineteenth-century immigrants actively sought that same kind of church home in their new land. Church records during that period reveal large membership transfers by letter, many from Sweden.

The aggressive evangelism of the new immigrants was a second factor in the Swedish Baptists' expansion.

Churches eagerly grasped opportunities to win their unconverted countrymen to the Lord. Olaus Okerson, converted in a great revival in Sweden, held services in his new neighborhood the very day he arrived in St. Paul in 1864. As a long-term missionary in Minnesota and the Pacific Northwest later, he continued to aggressively seek out his fellow Swedes.

At the same time, gifted pastors like Frank Peterson, who each Sunday afternoon took his youth on house-to-house visitations, pressed a message of evangelism and discipleship. Under Peterson, First Swedish (now Bethlehem) Baptist Church of Minneapolis experienced "more or less perennial revival." Both Peterson and Okerson typified the kinds of witnessing that brought rapid growth during the late nineteenth century.



John Alexis Edgren

New developments

Seaman/missionary/scholar John Alexis Edgren's arrival in Chicago in 1870 heralded new and major developments. Edgren was burdened about the scattered churches' lack of a trained clergy and means of communication. That year, in addition to his other activities, he assumed the pastorate of the First Swedish Baptist Church of Chicago (now Missio Dei Wrigleyville)

Despite the demands of a busy pastorate, in 1871 he opened the Swedish Baptist (now Bethel) Theological Seminary and a publication, today the magazine *Converge Point*. The



Representatives of the Swedish Baptist General Conference of America met in Seattle, Wash., in 1905.

church, school and publication all were dealt a setback by the great Chicago fire. But that calamity could not prevent the realization of his dream. The seminary and publication soon became important factors in Swedish Baptist life.

Perennial revival

Despite the stream of immigrants and the developing organizations and programs, the rapid expansion of the late nineteenth century would not have occurred without aggressive evangelism. This was undergirded by vital faith and a deep burden for the church's missionary task. A decade after beginning his seminary, Edgren revealed his own priorities, and those of his students who pastored churches, when he penned the lines: "It had been my prayer that after 10 years through this work we might win 1000 souls for the Lord. Now see, he has given us 2000.... Praise be his name!"

Edgren's students had been active in church planting as well as in personal evangelism. "Through them," he wrote, "at least 55 churches have been organized, 25 Sunday schools organized and 27 churches built...." In fact, during this era the seminary students played a vital part in starting almost every Swedish Baptist church in the greater Chicago area.

Under pastors with such devotion to the church's evangelistic mission, it's little wonder that in congregation after congregation spiritual awakenings continued to take place. A revival in Worthington, Minnesota, packed the church for many days and continued during most of the winter of 1875. That and revivals in churches in Chicago and the Twin Cities during the 1880s, and in New York City between 1890 and 1895, were notable examples of remarkable stirrings of God's Spirit in churches in those decades. For this period, too, "more or less perennial revival" seems an appropriate phrase for the immigrant churches.

By 1902, as a result, almost every facet of Converse life showed striking growth. The single congregation of 1852 and the 65 churches of 1879, for example, had multiplied to 331 with more than 22,000 members. The seminary

had also experienced steady growth. And the publication Edgren had begun amid such difficult circumstances in the 1870s had developed into an important unifying force and source of inspiration and training for the scattered members. What Nilsson, Wiberg and Palmquist had been to the first generation in Converse churches, Edgren, Wingren and Carl Gustaf Lagergren (Edgren's successor in 1889 as seminary dean), became to the next generation. These influential men, with many other dedicated missionaries and pastors, led the churches through the extraordinary growth years of 1871-1902.

Transition to English

The second half-century of Converse existence was marked by consolidation and institutional advance. This is not to say evangelism, revivals and growth ceased. Indeed, the number of members increased from 22,000 in 1902 to 40,224 in 1945. Converse began to experience declining growth, however, as patterns of evangelism shifted. The early years' spontaneous personal witnessing was increasingly supplanted by pulpit evangelism and by the preaching of professional revivalists. By the late nineteenth century, Swedish evangelists like blind A. J. Freeman more and more supplemented the evangelistic preaching of district missionaries and local pastors. And with the gradual transition from the Swedish language, professional English-speaking evangelists came to prominence in the churches' witnessing, reflecting decreasing lay evangelism. Equally contributing to the lack of membership growth was the end of the era of Swedish immigration by World War I.

By the early 1930s the transition to English had been substantially accomplished in the churches as well as in the seminary. In 1945, the Swedish Baptist General Conference of America dropped the word Swedish from its name.

A big step for Bethel

The Swedish Baptist seminary relocated to Snelling Avenue in St. Paul in fall 1914, ending nearly half a century of close relationships with the American Baptist School in Chicago. This move meant a major financial challenge for the seminary, which for decades had been largely underwritten by the American Baptists. It was by far the largest financial obligation Swedish Baptists had ever undertaken. Responsibility not only for the full faculty's salaries but for the building and the maintenance of what was for that day a large campus fell upon the churches.

Bethel Academy, which began in Elim Baptist Church in Minneapolis in 1905, then joined the seminary. And the churches rallied to support Bethel Academy and Theological Seminary, as the twin institutions had been renamed, successfully assuming the greatly increased operating expenses. A major fund drive later in the decade wiped out the campus indebtedness, then more than \$150,000.

This educational enterprise continued to expand during successive decades. In the 1930s Bethel phased out the Academy in favor of Bethel Junior College, begun in 1931. The latter in turn became a four-year college, graduating its first class in the spring of 1949. Bethel Seminary San Diego was launched in 1977. Faculty and student numbers have grown steadily on Bethel's campuses.

Movement towards independence

Swedish Baptists had leaned fairly heavily upon the American Baptists, not only for support of the seminary but for publications, home missions and world missions outreach. During Converge's first century of existence, they enrolled their missionaries under American Baptist boards. With the loss of churches during the latter part of the language transition period, it seemed likely that the smaller Converge fellowship of churches would eventually merge with the older and larger American Baptist denomination. Many Swedish Baptists looked favorably upon such a possibility, but the trend gradually developed clearly in the direction of independent existence.

The assumption of Converge's control of the Chicago-based Swedish Baptist Foreign Mission Society brought to culmination agitation and practical efforts over more than three decades. Converge churches gave official support first to the Lindstedt family in Siberia and China and then, between 1930 and 1944, to a half-dozen families in Burma and in Assam, India.

This set the stage for what has become known as the "Advance" of 1944-45, centered on world missions. It

was inaugurated by establishing an independent foreign missions program at the annual meeting in St. Paul and Duluth, Minnesota. The Converge vote to create such a board, and to adopt goals far beyond anything the churches had previously attempted, launched an era of growth.

Rapid missions growth

As we have seen, world missions was not a new interest for Converge. The same concern for the unconverted that so motivated pioneer preachers and church members on this continent prompted volunteers for evangelism abroad very early in Swedish Baptist history.

Johanna Anderson, who began her work in Burma in 1888, was the first of at least 16 Converge missionaries to sail before the turn of the century, including such well-known missionaries as Ola Hanson, O. L.

Swanson and Eric Lund. Their evangelistic, literary and educational labors were representative of what a growing number of workers accomplished.

Hanson and Lund, for example, each translated all or parts of the Bible into several languages and established industrial and other schools. So stirred were Converge believers by needs in other lands that by 1945 upwards of 100 Converge members had entered world missions service under American Baptist boards. A large but probably smaller number had entered with other agencies.

Missionaries like the Lindstedts, Holms, Tegenfeldts, Nelsons and first missions board chairman Walfred Danielson provided continuity and experienced leadership during a period of exciting change and outreach. Danielson had served as a missionary in Assam, dean of Bethel Junior College (1931-36) and an associate secretary of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. He guided the world missions advance as its executive secretary from 1945 until his retirement in 1953.

Dynamic growth at home

Home front advances occurred with similar rapidity. From the earliest days, when aggressive pastors and laymen pressed their mission far beyond their own locales, home missions had been an active part of the Swedish Baptist outreach. In addition, most districts had from two to five or more home missionaries engaged in evangelism, church planting and Sunday schools for most of the half century after 1880.

One writer observed that until 1945 the work of home missions and that of Converge were almost synonymous. For nearly four decades after its beginning in 1879, Converge limited its work of evangelism and church planting to areas outside the boundaries of any district



Johanna Anderson

conference. In practice this meant Texas and the Rocky Mountain states. When Converge gave aid to a Detroit congregation in 1917, such great expansion began that by 1951 Converge was wholly or partly supporting over 50 pastors and missions workers.

Converge mission secretaries Olof Hedeem (1920s), G. Arvid Hagstrom and Ragnar Arlander (1933-45) effectively pressed the mission among the churches. When Arlander retired, William Turnwall superintended an era of dramatic growth. In 1953 Converge created the general secretary position to oversee the denomination.

William Tapper, the first to hold that office, allayed fears of excessive centralization of power. Lloyd Dahlquist, his successor during the 1960s; Warren Magnuson, general secretary from 1969 to 1987; and (with title change) Robert Ricker, president 1987 to 2002; Jerry Sheveland, 2002 to 2014, and Scott Ridout, today, continued Tapper's pattern of devoted and humble but effective service to the churches.

Converge continued to grow and diversify in the next six decades.

1960s-1970s

In a period of social and cultural upheaval and progress, during the 1960s and 1970s church membership grew from 72,000 in 534 churches to 132,000 in 780 churches. Bethel Seminary relocated from downtown St. Paul to Arden Hills, Minnesota, and enrollment doubled to nearly 1300.

Converge participated with 34 other Baptist groups in the Crusade of the Americas, providing evangelism training, seminars and events. God's Invasion Army enlisted 270 young men and women to serve for a year without pay, resulting in 5400 people trusting in Christ. Converge and all other foreign missionaries were expelled from northeast India in 1986. Converge joined the National Association of Evangelicals.

Revival began at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, crossing denominational and national borders. Converge began mission work in Cameroon (1978) and Ivory Coast (1977).

1980s-1990s

During the economic prosperity of the 1980s and 1990s, Converge grew to over 140,000 members in 880 churches, even though 72 churches left in 1985 to form the Baptist General Conference of Canada. Fifty career missionaries joined Converge between 1986 and 1988, raising the total to 145. From 1986 to 1990, Converge added 126 churches, a 42 percent increase over the prior five years. Converge reorganized in 1987 under a single board of overseers and elected the movement's first president, Robert S. Ricker. Filipino, Haitian, Hispanic and Vietnamese Cultural Associations formed to provide representation and participation in conference leadership.

Converge provided on-site famine relief in Ethiopia and hurricane relief in the Virgin Islands. President Ricker formed the Prayer Commission in 1988 (later renamed Prayer First) to foster movement-wide prayer. Converge targeted 25 unreached people groups for church planting, and hundreds of students participated in peer-to-peer evangelism training through regional SLAM conferences. The combined enrollment of Bethel College and Seminary exceeded 3300.

During this period Converge started mission work in the Middle East (1987), France (1989), Bulgaria (1994), Central Asia (1995), Estonia (1999-2008), Slovakia (1992-1998), Thailand (1990), Uruguay (1991) and Vietnam (1995). National Ministries launched network gatherings for pastors of large churches, and Women's Ministries implemented a two-year School of Women's Ministries to train women's leaders. Led by the Minnesota district, several districts sent hundreds of short-term workers to Ukraine to assist the growth and development of sister churches.

2000s

During the 1990s and 2000s, Converge appeared to be undergoing a search for identity. Evangelical culture had changed significantly, with megachurches sprouting across the nation. Numerous para-church ministries thrived, performing vital aspects of ministry formerly the province of churches, often with much greater effectiveness. Our movement found itself asking, "So who are we now? What is our role at this point in history?"



A national gathering at Arthur (Iowa) Baptist Church.



BGC general secretary Warren Magnuson (l.) was succeeded by Robert Ricker, its first president, Jerry Sheveland and current president Scott Ridout.

During the first decade of the 2000s, our membership grew to more than 140,000 in 1075 churches and church plants, with worship attendance exceeding 213,000. National and district church planting initiated LEAD teams (groups of six to 10 pastors and church planters) to mobilize and multiply churches and give participants a venue for mutual spiritual support. LEADNET teams were initiated for pastors' wives and other women in ministry. A Cultural Association Team (later renamed People Group Ministries) developed to facilitate movement goals among major U.S. cultural groups.

Converge launched missions work in Cambodia, Haiti and Nigeria in 2003; Senegal in 2006; Singapore and Montreal (in partnership with BGC Canada) in 2008. International Ministries launched initiatives, including HIV/AIDS prevention and care in Nigeria, a short-term missions center in Belize, Ethiopian church planting in the USA and partnership with the Baptist Conference of the Philippines to launch 60 middle-class churches. Through missionary efforts, God brought such growth among the Waray people group of the Philippines and the Apatani people of northeast India that they were deemed "reached." The most productive years were 2000-2005, with 300 church planters deployed in the U.S. and 80 missionaries appointed.

Structural changes

The first decade of the 21st century also brought significant structural changes. In 2004 delegates voted to change the name of Bethel College & Seminary to Bethel University, reflecting the institution's expanded functions. In 2007 they voted to shift conventions from annual to biennial.

Leaders focused the movement's mission on six regions (North America, Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia) and five core ministries: mobilization (focusing churches for kingdom impact), multiplication (church planting), leadership development, compassion and generosity.

In 2008 the overseers approved a new missional name, Converge Worldwide (now Converge), while retaining the historic name Baptist General Conference in some settings and for legal purposes. That year they also approved a plan to lease 5000 square feet of office space in the Bright Ministry Center, then under construction in Orlando, Florida. Many ministry staff relocated to Orlando, while business services continued in the Arlington Heights, Illinois, office. Staff functions were evaluated and numerous positions eliminated.

2010s

As with the culture at large, our current decade has been marked by ongoing and rapid change. From the 1980s through 2000s, as leaders came and went, ministries were often reshaped, eliminated or renamed under each new leader. This resulted in confusion and sometimes distrust among the churches. Under president Jerry Sheveland and his senior vice president Doug Fagerstrom, the district and national offices agreed on the mission statement "Starting and Strengthening Churches."

President Scott Ridout, elected in fall 2014, worked with the 11 districts to tweak this statement into its present form: "Starting and Strengthening Churches Together Worldwide." It is an accurate description of how we help people meet, know and follow Jesus—what we do. At heart, like our founders, our driving passion is first and always the Lord Jesus Christ. We exist because we believe Jesus changes everything, because he is everything (Col. 11:15-20).



Founded by and for Swedish Baptist immigrants, Converge today celebrates broad ethnic diversity.

At the national and international level, four core ministries carry out the ministry God has entrusted to us:

1. **Church Planting**—helping districts and churches start churches in the U.S.
2. **Church Strengthening**—equipping pastors and church leaders and creating healthy church systems.
3. **Missions**—international outreach primarily among least-reached people groups.
4. **Intercultural Ministries**—starting and strengthening churches among ethnic and cultural groups in the U.S. and their nations of origin.

Converge today

We have inherited a rich legacy from those early days and the vigorous faith of our immigrant founders. We celebrate that history as our core values and historic Baptist beliefs continue to shape our labors for God and his kingdom. Yet we are a different people with many contemporary strategies for carrying out God’s work.

We have transitioned from a predominantly Swedish-speaking people to an ethnic diversity that embraces many cultural groups. And in the U.S. we have grown to about 300,000 worshipers in over 1300 churches.

Converge missionaries serve in Central and South America, southern Europe and former Eastern Bloc nations, western and eastern Africa, Muslim North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Asian Pacific rim.

A strong partnership exists between national and district offices to start and strengthen churches together worldwide. Bethel University and Bethel Seminary continue to train Christian leaders for today and tomorrow.

The richness of our spiritual heritage provides direction and encouragement for today and the future. We continue to serve Christ’s kingdom with confidence as we:

- Hold to a conversion-centered experiential faith under the stabilizing guidance and authority of the Scriptures.
- Balance doctrinal conservatism with an irenic (peaceful) spirit.
- Pursue continually a spirit of both missionary and charitable outreach.
- Match our evangelistic passion with growth in personal holiness.

Surely these are timeless values for our generation.



Vision for the next 10 years

By God's grace we will...

Open the front door

Empower leaders in the evangelistic ministries to see more people meet Jesus, be baptized and start the discipleship journey.

Start more church plants and multisites and see more independent churches join us than in any other 10-year season of our ministry. We pray we will have churches in all 50 states by 2025.

Renew our churches' involvement in the "worldwide" aspect of our ministry, resulting in the doubling of our missionary force to 300 missionaries on the field and engaging with 500 new unreached people groups around the world.

Close the back door

Develop stronger churches through spiritual formation, biblical envisioning, strategic planning, mentoring and supportive networks.

Structure personal growth so that:

- Every leader has a coach.
- Every pastor is on a regional team.
- Every regional team implements a strategy of expanded impact (through church planting, missions or community-reaching strategies).

Tear down the walls

Raise our racial/cultural sensitivity, reconcile our differences and restructure our movement to reflect our value of cultural diversity. We pursue this in order to reach more people and raise up more effective leaders for this next generation.

Build the house

Create a compelling collaborative plan for effective marketing, communication and increased resources to start and strengthen churches together worldwide.

Your choice

"The church is not a building you sit in. It is a movement you choose to be a part of."

This truth was repeated in our church almost every weekend. When Jesus described the church in Matthew 16:18, it wasn't with a view to weekend services, small groups and Sunday school. Instead, he talked about the church as a tool of his mandate to advance God's kingdom in this world. And he invited you and me to join him in what he is doing. What a privilege.

Whether you are a lay leader, nurse, businessman, student, pastor or missionary, you have a part to play in Converge's 10-year vision. Over this next season we ask you to commit to pray for God's wisdom, courage and favor so that many people around the world will meet, know and follow Jesus.

Also, we ask you to prayerfully commit to the four challenges below.

God willing, we will change the world one life at a time. Make the choice today to join God in this movement. Trust him to lead you and use you to impact the eternity of others.

How will you get involved?

Each one reach one.

Our prayer is God will use each person to reach one person with the gospel each year for the next 10 years. We pray each of us will engage in friendships with non-Christians, who will eventually place their faith in Christ and be baptized and discipled in the church.

Each one raise one.

Our prayer is each leader will raise up other leaders to expand our movement. We pray each church will create leadership pipelines through residencies, internships and intentional training and mentoring.

Each one start one.

Our prayer is each church will be used by God to start new congregations. We pray God will grip the hearts of many to start a new work.

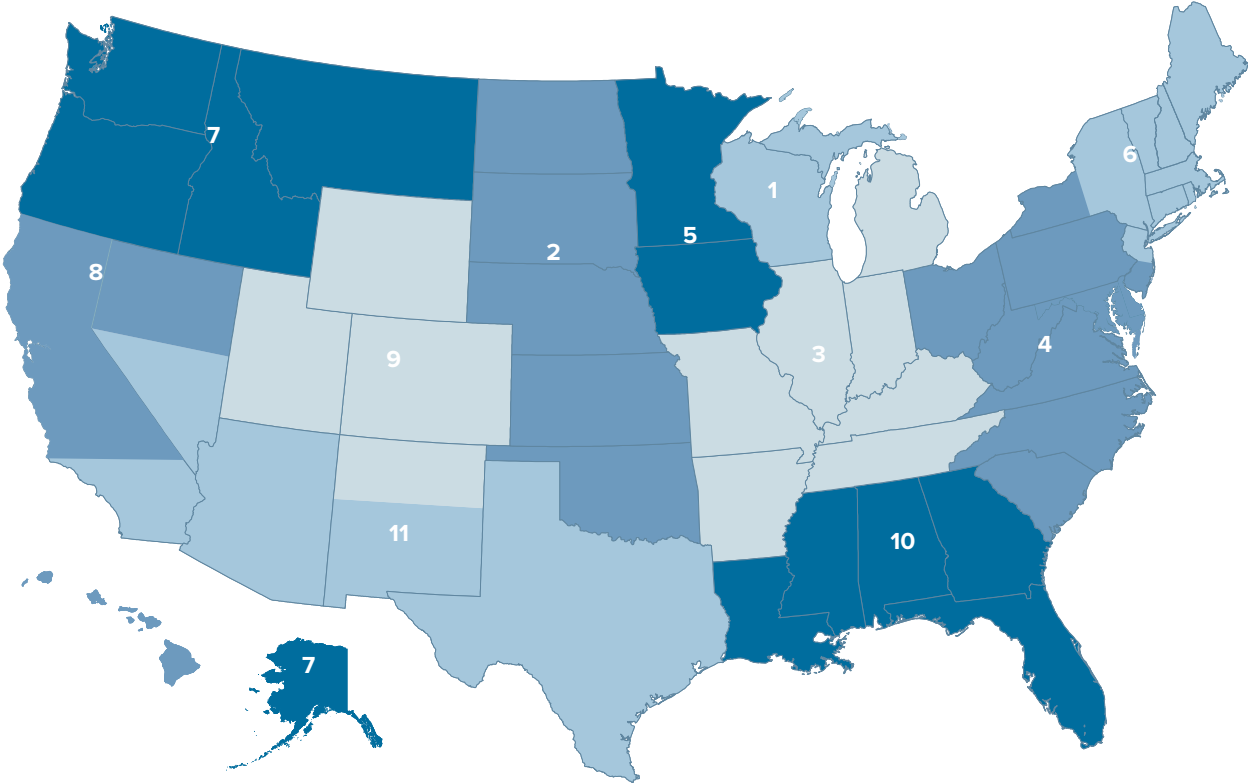
Each one send one.

Our prayer is each congregation will enjoy the blessing of regularly sending missionaries to the work God is doing around the world.

Tell us how you would like to get involved and learn practical next steps at converge.org/next-10-years.

Converge districts

Converge has 11 districts throughout the United States to better serve our congregations.



1 Great Lakes
convergegreatlakes.org

2 Heartland
convergeheartland.org

3 MidAmerica
convergemidamerica.org

4 MidAtlantic
convergemidatlantic.com

5 North Central
convergenorthcentral.org

6 Northeast
convergenortheast.org

7 Northwest
convergenw.org

8 PacWest
convergepacwest.com

9 Rocky Mountain
convergerockymountain.org

10 Southeast
convergesoutheast.org

11 Southwest
convergesw.org

The Story of Converge, by Dr. Norris Magnuson, longtime professor of church history and Resource Center director at Bethel Theological Seminary. Abridged and updated by Bob Putman, Converge director of Communications.

For further reading

A Centenary History, by Adolf Olson (Chicago: Baptist Conference Press, 1952), covering 1852-1952, Olson's book is a storehouse of information on the saga of pioneer churches and backwoods missions born out of the life and labors of some of God's noble servants.

Fifteen Eventful Years: A Survey of the Baptist General Conference 1945-1960, ed. David Guston and Martin Erikson (Chicago: Harvest Publications, 1961).

Seventy-five Years: A History of Bethel Theological Seminary, by Adolf Olson and Virgil Olson (Chicago: Conference Press, 1946).

The 1960s in the Ministry of the Baptist General Conference, ed. Donald E. Anderson (Evanston, Ill.: Harvest Publications, 1971).

The 1970s in the Ministry of the Baptist General Conference, *ibid.*

The 1980s in the Ministry of the Baptist General Conference, *ibid.*

Missionskolan: A History of an Immigrant Theological School, by Norris Magnuson (St. Paul: Bethel College and Seminary, 1982).

New Century, New Directions: The Baptist General Conference/Converge Worldwide, ed. James and Carole Spickelmier (St. Paul: The History Center, Bethel University, 2012).

