



## **CASE FOR SUPPORT**

July 20, 2018

*“The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) does so very much at relatively little cost. The organization does not seek to control the pulpit, or anything else for that matter, in the local church. Rather, it strives to provide what is needed to assist churches in doing what God intended, providing sanctuary, support, and challenge to the People of God.... The NACCC does a very good job at fostering the three F’s: Faith, Freedom, and Fellowship.”*

NACCC Member Church, Michigan

Located in rural Michigan, on the north edge of town, sits a small church. The road in front of the church is paved, but only to the edge of the church property, and, if you look north, you will see fields of crops and windmills. The building was constructed in the 1970s, and very little has been improved or updated.

Although the church is considered small, according to membership, the congregation has a big heart and is filled with love and devotion for God and their Congregational church. The members wear several hats in the life of the church, and work extra hard helping in any way they can to ensure the success of their church.

However, even with dedicated, hardworking members and a supportive community, reaching outside of your church family for help sometimes becomes necessary. Shortly after joining the NACCC, the church was in the midst of a search for a new minister. The NACCC helped with the entire process, and successfully assisted the search committee to connect with a qualified minister, who also had been a graduate student of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies program. The minister continues to faithfully serve at the church, and the congregation couldn’t be happier.

Like many churches in the NACCC, its membership is both aging and declining, and often it is challenged financially. Replacing the original boiler was the next hurdle. Once again, the NACCC was there to help. The NACCC “Hurting Churches Fund” provided a generous grant towards the fundraising effort to purchase a new heating system.

*“The NACCC was the help we so desperately needed.”*

-Minister, NACCC Member Church

Fellowship and education for member churches is key to their success. However, it is often difficult for ministers to justify using church funds for such activities. Like many congregations, the church looked to the NACCC for help and guidance. The church’s application to the “Providence Fund,” established to provide grants to churches to assist with sending a delegate to the Annual Meeting and Conference, was accepted, and their minister attended this important fellowship event.

*“We choose to give at this level because we are grateful for all the NACCC has done to help our church. The church is aware that organizations providing services to the local church cost money. The budget for the NA is not extravagant. And we have certainly benefitted from the organization.”*

-Minister, NACCC Member Church

The parishioners place an important value on their Association membership and believe in the NACCC's mission, services, and fellowship for all its member churches. Because of their dedication to the Association, they find a way each year to acknowledge the importance of this relationship by committing a gift to the NACCC's "Shared Ministries Fund" at the Fair Share Plus Level (\$15.00 or more per member).

## **DISTINCTIVE FAITH AND HISTORY**

Congregational churches trace their roots to a group of English Separatists, who gathered in the 16th century and were known as 'dissenting' churches by the Crown and the Church of England. In the context of the Protestant Reformation, these believers chose to risk life and liberty in order to follow their conscience as they worshiped God in accordance with their understandings of Scripture. They sought to form a church that would be under God's authority alone, not bound by edict or canon law. For these religious pioneers, freedom of conscience and autonomy of the local church were guiding principles. Strong convictions led to the 1620 journey on the Mayflower that brought some of these dissenting Christians to America. As Congregationalism developed, these faithful people sought to honor Christ, to transform society, and to reflect a model of faith and life set forth in Scripture. This model is defined by covenantal relationships, which bind together individual members, local congregations and God. From the beginning of Congregationalist life, the principles of *faith, freedom, and fellowship* were emphasized.

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches was born in the 1950s. In 1955, a group of 200 churches created a voluntary association of churches who placed God and the Word of God as their authority. The Association resolved to follow a particular way of relating to each other and worshiping God with lively spirits, open hearts, and open minds. The core principles and practices of the historic Congregational Way – followers of Jesus Christ, faithful worship of God, freedom of conscience, a priesthood of all believers, local church autonomy, individuals who voluntarily accept the covenant of their church, and fellowship with sister churches – were the driving values in the formation of the NACCC. Over the years, the organization's membership grew to over 400 churches at its peak, with each congregation using the Bible as their guide and authority and looking to the NACCC for assistance with fellowship, resources, and financial support.

In 1974, the NACCC congregations initiated a national effort to raise funds to help build an office in Oak Creek, Wisconsin to house the Association's headquarters and staff offices. Most of the staff work out of that office and coordinate with hundreds of NACCC leaders and other volunteers throughout the year providing services and support to all member churches.

The NACCC carries Christ's message into the future by supporting over 340 member churches in 36 states.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION**

In June 2018, the delegates at the Annual Meeting and Conference adopted a new Mission Statement for the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.

*To nurture fellowship among Congregational Christian Churches and to support ministries of the local church in its community and to the world, all in the name of Christ.*

The delegates at the 2018 Annual Meeting also adopted the following NACCC Vision Statement:

*Vital and healthy Congregational Churches, sharing the love of Jesus the Christ.*

Gifts to the NACCC support its mission and vision through the NACCC's programs and funds, which in turn support church ministries, education and leadership development, growth, and the health of local churches.

Encouraging the active fellowship of the NACCC member churches hinges on the belief that God has given each Congregational church every power and gift necessary for its spiritual life and development for ministry. Advancing the Congregational Way and its principles is at the heart of the NACCC's mission. Christ alone is the head of the church; each congregation is free to determine its statement of faith, select and ordain its clergy, and maintain stewardship of its resources and property. According their covenant, and relying on the Holy Spirit, each church discerns God's intentions and purposes for their particular community of faith; therefore, the NACCC does not pass resolutions on social or political issues nor does it make statements on behalf of or binding upon the member churches.

Because the NACCC is an association of individual churches, it depends on a structure of volunteers to determine and manage programs and policies. The NACCC fosters relationships between congregations while promoting faith, freedom, and fellowship. The Association helps churches thrive, primarily by delivering services that individual churches cannot easily or efficiently provide for themselves.

- Each year approximately two dozen national and international missions receive significant contributions and financial assistance from individuals, foundations, member churches, and NACCC endowments.
- There are over 300 qualified and motivated volunteers who provide leadership and guidance to the NACCC each year.
- Annual Meeting and Conference is held in June, coordinated by the NACCC, and hosted by a group of member churches, in a different location each year.
- Approximately 600 contributions from individuals and foundations support the NACCC and Congregational Foundation each year and more than 90% of member churches are donors.
- On average between 20-25 member churches call new ministers to their pulpits each year through the "Pastoral Search" program, and another 30 churches throughout the year are at different stages in the process.
- Each year, approximately 34,000 copies of *The Congregationalist* magazine are published and distributed throughout the country.

## **STRENGTHENING MEMBER CHURCHES**

The NACCC exists to serve its membership through services and fellowship opportunities. Over the years, Congregational churches have joined in voluntary fellowship with other Congregational churches. The NACCC serves as a conduit for that fellowship and encourages member churches to realize the importance of seeking and giving advice and support from one another.

Member churches look to the NACCC for resources and services. For instance, congregations may need assistance in finding a new minister, or resources for understanding Congregationalism, stewardship, Christian education, youth ministry, leadership training or revitalization. Included in the many services offered is important research and evaluation of national and international missions which assure donors that their financial contributions are making a difference. Examples of NACCC services:

- **Pastoral Search and Call:** The process of finding a new minister is one of the most important transitions in the life of any church; however, it can be daunting. Therefore, resources and leadership advisors are available to all member churches to assist in this process.
- **Fellowship:** An Annual Meeting and Conference, coordinated by the NACCC each year, affords member churches a voice and vote in the direction of the leadership and the strategic direction of the Association. This gathering also offers educational workshops, seminars, Bible lectures, mission projects and fellowship.

- **Missions Connection and Validation:** The NACCC, through member church recommendations, strives to select mission projects that epitomize Congregational Christian faith. Currently, the NACCC through endowments and contributions annually funds some two dozen national and international missions. Unlike many other organizations, contributions go directly, dollar for dollar, to the work in the mission fields. Nothing is withheld for administrative purposes. Administration is funded separately, through the Shared Ministries Fund. Communication, review, and evaluation are characteristics of the NACCC – mission relationship.
- **One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) Coordinated Response to Worldwide Emergencies:** What began as a challenge from the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church 65 years ago to raise one million dollars a year for world relief, became a tradition for many Christian churches. The NACCC has kept that tradition alive. In the spirit of Christ, OGHS helps people help themselves in places of poverty, hunger, sickness, conflict, and natural disaster. Over the past five years the NACCC has allocated over \$250,000 for disaster and emergency relief.
- **The Center for Congregational Leadership:** Founded in 2008, the Center and its staff is committed to excellence in education, leadership, and vision, and offers opportunities for clergy and lay leaders through training, education, and advising, in order to strengthen and equip them to meet the challenges of the church in the 21st century. **Education and Training for Clergy and Laity:** Seminars and continuing education classes that enhance leadership skills for clergy and laity are available through the Center for Congregational Leadership. Many of these seminars are web-hosted or live streamed, allowing people coast-to-coast to participate without incurring the cost of travel to attend on site. The NACCC’s online Congregational History and Polity courses offer important instruction and education of Congregationalism.
- **Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS):** This program educates seminarians for leadership in Congregational churches and ministries. Graduates of CFTS are uniquely prepared to meet today’s challenges through the vibrant traditions and practices of Congregationalism. It is the only program in existence whose sole purpose is preparing men and women for ministry in churches committed to the Congregational Way. CFTS also includes a Lay Ministry Training Program, educating individuals who serve churches as lay ministers and lay leaders.
- **The Congregationalist Magazine:** Since 1849, *The Congregationalist* has been a notable voice, providing resources for local churches as well as expressing theological definitions and difference, defining and shaping the Congregational Way. Today the publication combines new knowledge with tradition and spiritual insights to serve their readers. The NACCC celebrates the magazine’s freedom to express a variety of opinions, and is committed to administering and publishing the magazine four times a year.
- **Financial Aid and Services:** The NACCC makes various funds and financial services available to member churches. The Congregational Investment Trust program is an endowment investment service, allowing churches to become part of an investment pool with other churches, and, likely, increasing investment return potential and lowering investment fees. The “Building & Loan Fund” was created to assist churches with facility projects and building improvements. Churches can apply for financial assistance to “The Hurting Churches Fund,” established as an emergency fund for one-time capital or operating needs. Scholarship and grant funds are available for ministerial assistance and enrichment, newly settled ministers, retired ministers, and for ministerial students accepted into the CFTS program.

## FAITH-FREEDOM-FELLOWSHIP

Traditionally, Congregational churches and the NACCC have stressed three core values: Faith, Freedom and Fellowship. Within those core values, simplicity, sincerity, and service are a few fundamentals which enhance the dynamics of the Congregational way. The NACCC works to assist, encourage, and support

member churches to advance the Kingdom of God. However, the NACCC does not claim any sort of authority over the member churches, allowing local churches maximum flexibility and autonomy, a cornerstone of Congregationalism.

A Congregational church's "Faith" is organized around a covenant, a binding promise between the people and God, and that defines their life together. Covenants and the relationships formed by them depend upon faithfulness to the agreements and promises. Members of the NACCC are followers of Jesus the Christ who embrace the idea that, in God's eyes, all of the faithful are spiritually united. While some may be more mature in faith than others, everyone is equal before Christ who is the head of the local church.

Every church is complete under Christ with the authority to be "Free" to administer its own affairs as it seeks to be faithful to Christ. NACCC churches practice a variety of worship styles, ministries, and mission work as each local church is called by God. Each congregation interprets Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit to arrive at its decisions and actions. No Congregational church is exactly like another. The ability for each individual member to exercise his or her rights and responsibilities in the church is assured by a process of democratic decision-making and structure of representative boards, committees, and teams. The seeds of democracy can be found in the earliest beliefs of Congregationalism.

Congregational churches have always valued "Fellowship" and have depended upon other churches for advice on important matters. Through vicinage councils, Congregational churches actively seek guidance from one another to aid in discerning the work of the Spirit among them. While each Congregational church is autonomous, it reaches its fullest expression as a Congregational church in Christ only through fellowship with other autonomous Congregational churches. From the very inception of Congregationalism, fellowship with one another was a key marker of being a Congregational church.

## FINANCIAL NEEDS

The NACCC's primary purpose is to assist and strengthen Congregational churches in their development and growth. Fellowship with Congregational brothers and sisters also has been a longstanding priority of Congregationalists. The primary question is not, *"What do we get?"* but *"What do we bring to the NACCC and its membership that will enable the witness of the Congregational Way to prosper?"*

Financial support to the NACCC is vital to our success, and will help to maintain our continued growth, improved resources and fellowship opportunities to our member churches. Gifts to the NACCC fund the following initiatives and entities.

- **Shared Ministries Fund:** The operations of the Association are funded primarily through generous donations of member churches and other individuals who believe in the important work of the NACCC. Donations assure the continuation of invaluable educational programs, church resources, fellowship opportunities, and administrative support. Expenses for coordination and publishing of *The Congregationalist* magazine also are allocated through this fund.

*"...Just to hear folks say, "this will be so helpful back home" or "this resource will help our board understand better" or even, "this will free up some of my time." Those are words I have heard more than once after a workshop at our Annual Meeting and Conference. To me, that means we've done our jobs and truly provided the support a church needed."*

-Dawn, past leadership- Growth Ministry Council

- **Mission and Outreach Ministry Council:** The NACCC operates its mission program on the principle that "every last cent" given to missions will be used by missions. All expenses for administration, communications, and evaluation are paid from the NACCC Shared Ministries Fund, which supports the operation of the Association. All donations made to the missions program go directly, dollar for dollar, to the work in the mission fields.

*“The Missionaries that I have met and the relationships I have formed literally around the world are priceless. The prayers and financial support we are able to extend around the world on behalf of the churches of the NACCC is humbling.”*

-Greg, past leadership-Mission and Outreach Ministry Council

- **Vitality Ministry Council:** The NACCC, through its Vitality Council, places emphasis on encouraging, supporting, and strengthening church life in member churches. Ministerial search and training, spiritual support for seminary students, and enhancing revitalization efforts are some of the many responsibilities of this council.

*“When my church needed pastoral search support after the retirement of our long-time minister, the NACCC was there to offer guidance and support.”*

-NACCC Member Church, Michigan

*“I graduated from seminary with only one thousand dollars of debt, in part because of the generosity of CFTS. Their support and encouragement cemented my bond with the NACCC.”*

-Don, CFTS graduate

- **Growth Ministry Council:** This Council aims to establish new churches while encouraging and supporting NACCC congregations in their mission of spiritual growth experiences and discipleship.

*“The NACCC could not have been more helpful in planting this new church. The NACCC also made a loan when we really needed it. It was a loan just on our good faith to repay which we did as we were able.”*

-NACCC Member Church, Florida

Much of the Council’s work not only focuses on establishing new Congregational churches, but provides local churches and NACCC-wide youth programming.

*“I have many stories that I could share about the NACCC and how it positively impacted people. Most of them come from the youth ministries of the Association. Many of my dearest friends had life changing experiences through NACCC youth events. I am forever grateful for the relationships I have built with so many great people.”*

-Laura, former Youth program participant

- **Congregational Foundation** The Congregational Foundation is a nonprofit organization established with the sole purpose of raising funds to benefit the NACCC, through ongoing fundraising and development activities. Overseen by the Board of Governors, all funds raised through the Foundation are administered with strict adherence to donor wishes and are financially managed for long-term stability.

*“I give to the Congregational Foundation because it is focused on the future of the NACCC. My contributions will directly support its development, marketing, and funds management work in support of the NACCC.”*

-Jim, past leadership and longtime donor

## **GIVING OPPORTUNITIES**

There are various ways to support the NACCC and it is desirable that the Association secure contributions from a variety of resources. Gifts to the NACCC from member churches, individuals in those member churches, foundations and others who believe in our work and advancement of the Congregational Way will help to annually sustain us and secure our future growth.

- **Unrestricted Gifts**

We call upon member churches to provide an annual gift to the Shared Ministries Fund, which supports the operations and services of the NACCC. However, because not all churches can give at the Fair Share Level (\$13.00 a member and above), a gap arises in our operational budget that makes it necessary to secure contributions from other sources. Through the generosity of corporations, foundations and many

individuals, gifts are made each year to fill this budget gap, and allow the work of the NACCC to continue. Donations through unrestricted gifts become critical investments to the future health and growth of the NACCC. This support allows the Association to use these donations where they are needed most.

- **Restricted Gifts**

NACCC donors often choose to support specific projects, programs, missions, scholarships, and endowments. The Association will pursue gifts through customized solicitations describing the specific use of an individual's donation. Upon receiving that gift, the NACCC places the appropriate restriction on it and limits its use for that purpose only, providing the donor assurance that their gift will be used as they envisioned.

- **Planned Giving**

Wills and bequests provide a simple way to make a gift that will keep on giving after a person's life time. Designating the NACCC or Congregational Foundation in a life insurance policy or retirement account, is commonly used. Declaring a specific dollar amount or percentage of an estate to the Association is also used. Planned Giving contributions help to ensure the longtime health and success of the Association.

All gifts, no matter the amount, are important to the NACCC, and you can be confident that your investment will be used wisely and in accordance with your wishes.

Congregationalism needs courageous and dedicated people who love how Christ is working in their lives and in the life of their church. Each church owns its structure, develops its own bylaws, organizes the service of worship, and decides how responsibilities are assigned to elected bodies. With this diversity among churches comes the charge to organize and carry out these practices while "walking together" with Jesus Christ as the head of the Church. As Congregationalists, we value freedom, but freedom comes with responsibility. We have a bond with one another and with those who follow after us. It is not about how much we have, but what we do with what we have been given. As we seek to serve and nurture our congregations and advance our tradition, our prayer is that you will partner with us by making a generous contribution to the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.

*"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

-Luke 6:38 NIV