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**C**ONGREGATIONALIST

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Jennifer Mandelbaum Rock

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**59th Annual Meeting and Conference**  
National Association of Congregational Christian Churches  
**June 22-25, 2013**

# The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way

Vol. 165/No. 1

Congregationalist.org

March 2013

## Forty Years OF NEEDLING: PLYMOUTH-MINNEAPOLIS COMPLETES A MONUMENTAL PROJECT



THE  
PROMISE  
OF EASTER

COME TO  
ORLANDO!  
(THEN ON TO LONDON ...)

CONFESSIONS  
OF A BAD  
PEW SITTER

*and more ...*



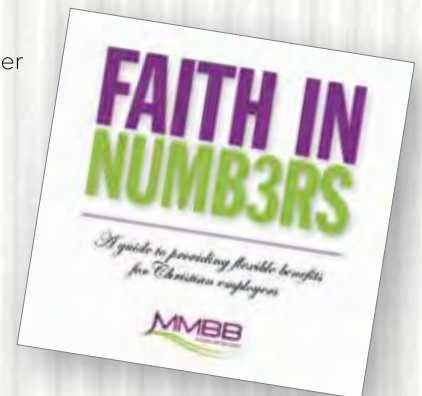
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## FEATURES



**8 NEW LEADER  
IN OAK CREEK**

**10 THE PROMISE OF EASTER**

*by Joyce Acree*

**12 CONFESSIONS OF A BAD  
PEW SITTER**

*by Betsey Mauro*



**14 NEEDLING THROUGH  
FOUR DECADES**

*by Larry Sommers*



**20 COME TO ORLANDO!**

**22 THE POWER OF LOVE  
IN RAPID CITY**

*by Tom Boehne*

**22 THE ANNUAL MEETING  
AND CONFERENCE**

*by Helen Gierke*



**26 A PILGRIM PEOPLE:  
WE ARE ON OUR WAY**

*ICF London Conference and CFTS British Seminar*

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Larry Sommers

**ON THE COVER:**

With Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell in the background, George Washington stands on the supplanted shield of British empire and dips a toe in the stream of American political and religious thought in a central detail from *Summer of the First Amendment*, a huge embroidery by the Needlers of Plymouth Congregational Church, photographed last June on their work table in Minneapolis. For "the rest of the story," see pp. 14-19.

## BOOK OF INTEREST

**34 The Elephant in the Boardroom**

*reviewed by Barry Szymanski*

## DEPARTMENTS

**5 Relation**

*Dauntless Dutchman*

**6 NetMending**

*"Yeah, that's great. But what is it actually for?"*

**7 Strangers and Pilgrims...**

*The Massachusetts Bay Colony*

**28 Letters**

**31 Missionary News and Needs**

**36 Along the Way**

**38 Necrology**

**39 Pastorates and Pulpits**

**39 Calendar**

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## Dauntless Dutchman

*“Joe Polhemus did not seek challenges during his lifetime,” his family wrote recently, “but when they came he met them with a fierce determination befitting his Dutch heritage. He met challenges with his own sense of wry humor.”*

Joe’s humor was not just wry; it was dry. So dry that often, you didn’t know whether it was humor or not.

The barest facts of his life are stated in our “Necrology” piece on p. 38. But it’s fitting here to offer some interpretation of those facts, especially regarding his stewardship of this magazine.

Joe came out of retirement to take over as editor from Louis B. Gerhardt in May 1989. His continuous improvement of this venerable magazine as a product has been noted by all; and his regular inside-the-cover editorials were so attentively read that he was prevailed on to publish them in a little book, *From the Editor: 15 Years of Comment in THE CONGREGATIONALIST* (NACCC, 2004), available from the Oak Creek office at \$5.00 per copy.

But it needs to be said that Joe became editor of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* during a major sea-change in America’s religious habits, when traditional bonds were weakening and fewer people paid attention to denominational publications: It was one of those challenges that Joe “did not seek . . . during his lifetime.”

Yet, there it was. So he hiked up his Dutch determination and revved up his wry humor.

There followed endless months and years of meetings and wrangles with NA committees, executives, volunteers, printers, mailers—mostly over how to get *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* out of the red and into the black.

As the subscription model was failing, the Communications Commission made the bold decision to stabilize and increase circulation by sending the magazine to requestors for free. The hope was to make up the lost revenue through donations and advertising. But with mailing lists in disarray, a well-coordinated donor appeal was virtually impossible.

Through it all, Joe held on tenaciously and edited harder.

He edited so well, and made the magazine such a reflection of the wider fellowship, that impassioned Congregationalists, one by one, rallied to the cause and began supporting *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* with generous donations through the newly-formed Editor’s Round Table.

*Continued on p. 34*

### PLEASE TELL US WHERE TO GO!

In the quest to figure out what is relevant and important to our readers, we have developed an online survey, which we hope all our readers will take. It should not take you more than ten minutes to complete.

Please go to  
[www.surveymonkey.com/s/congregationalist2013](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/congregationalist2013)  
 and help us plan the future editorial direction of  
**THE CONGREGATIONALIST.**

### SPECIAL

#### NOTE TO ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE REGISTRANTS

The “MEALS & EVENTS” section on Side Two of the registration form (bound just before p. 21 in this magazine) incorrectly states that group breakfasts **and dinners** are available at the hotel for a fee. This is NOT true—only breakfasts are available, as shown on the sign-up lines of the form.

We regret the error, discovered only after the form was printed.



## “Yeah, that’s great. But what is it actually for?”

I can’t even count how many times I’ve heard this question. As sure as day follows night, this question follows any time I introduce an older church member to a new piece of technology, especially Internet technology.

Most NACCC pastors serve small, long-established churches, and no small organization survives a hundred years without a conservative streak. So the question is never “What does it do?” It is always and ever shall be, “*What is it good for?*”

This is not a bad thing! It keeps early adopters like me firmly grounded in church life, where the work gets done. To loosely quote Paul, “If I have the broadest of broadband, and the widest of Wi-Fi, and have not love, I am nothing.” Even our most cantankerous members are not truly anti-technology. (You do use telephones, right?) They just share every human’s aversion to ambiguity, with an extra helping of don’t-waste-my-time.

**Here’s the problem:** With any new technology, we discover its greatest usefulness only *after* we use it. Cars, electric lights, television—they all started as unreliable toys for people with more curiosity than common sense. Why should the Internet be different?

A few early adopters set up a Facebook group for NACCC clergy. At first, it was empty. We’d go months between posts. Then it was annoying, with people picking fights and posting advertisements. Now, it’s my first stop when I have a question about how to be a better pastor. It took time to figure out what it was for.

The moral of the story is: do not push new tech on your church, or on your pastor. Build a small crew of early adopters, and let them play with it first. Roll it out more widely only when you have the answer to the inevitable question: “What problem does this solve?”



The “NACCC Clergy” Facebook page started slowly but has become an essential resource.

Want to add a viewing screen to your sanctuary? Start with movie clips in Bible Study. Do that until you can do it with simplicity and excellence, so that it adds to the class and saves time. Then, and only then, are you ready to show a clip in the sanctuary. Same goes for a new church Web site, Facebook page, Twitter account, or whatever.

When it actually starts to solve a problem, you won’t have to push. Everyone else will pull.



**THE REV. ROBERT J. BRINK** is senior minister at First Congregational Church, Saugatuck, Mich. If you have a technology-related question for “Net Mending,” e-mail [Rob@RevSmilez.com](mailto:Rob@RevSmilez.com) or write Rev. Rob Brink, P.O. Box 633, Saugatuck, MI 49453.

## Your e-mail address, please!

Let us add you to our *CONGREGATIONALIST* e-mail list. Each quarter, you’ll receive a message previewing our new issue—and occasionally, we may send an urgent announcement of major news that *just won’t keep*.

E-mail Courtney Schultz at the NACCC office, [cshultz@nacc.org](mailto:cshultz@nacc.org), from the e-mail account you want us to use, and put “Congregationalist E-blast” in the subject line.

*Thanks and blessings,*

Larry Sommers, *Editor*

## The Massachusetts Bay Colony

In the beginning, the Puritan movement was very broad. In its mildest form, it was a group of Christians who wanted to remain within the established Church of England, but to have the freedom to use or not to use, as each congregation chose, the prescribed rituals, liturgy, prayer book, and priestly vestments of the state church. In its most extreme form, it was represented by the Separatists—people like the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony—who insisted that the local congregation was the whole Church, without ties to any higher earthly authority and without accountability to any other congregation. In the middle were those who would develop into the Presbyterians and Baptists.

Also in the middle—but closer to the Separatist side—was the group that became known as the Independents, and only later as Congregationalists. These were people like us, who believed in the integrity and sufficiency of the local congregation as a living instance of the Body of Christ, subject to no authority beyond its local leaders (except for the headship of Jesus Christ), but in fellowship with other churches.

In American history, “Puritan” customarily refers to non-Separatist Puritans who started colonies completely independent of Plymouth, thus distinguishing them from “Pilgrims.” Almost as famous as the *Mayflower* was the *Arbella*, the ship that brought the founders of Massachusetts Bay Colony, with their colonial charter and their first governor, John Winthrop, in 1630.

It was Winthrop who gave his famous message aboard the *Arbella* in which he quoted Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and described the new colony as a “City upon a Hill.”

John von Rohr says, “Altogether some sixty ministers arrived in Massachusetts between the years 1630 and 1641, the vast majority of whom were of non-Separatist Congregational persuasion” (*The Shaping of American Congregationalism*, p. 63). No wonder the Separatists who lived in the settlements of Plymouth Colony

were swallowed up in a few decades by the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony!

Von Rohr also reports that the new colony had a form of representative government, but it did not believe that government “received its just powers from the consent of the governed.” It believed instead that government received its authority from God. There was a sense of the separate duties of church and state; but political leaders were expected to be godly men, and church leaders were expected to support the civil authority. There would be only one authorized church in a community, and that would be a Congregational church. In fact, Congregationalism would continue as the established religion in Massachusetts until well after the independence of the United States and the ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In 1833, the state of Massachusetts finally enacted a law disestablishing the Congregational church as the official church of that state.

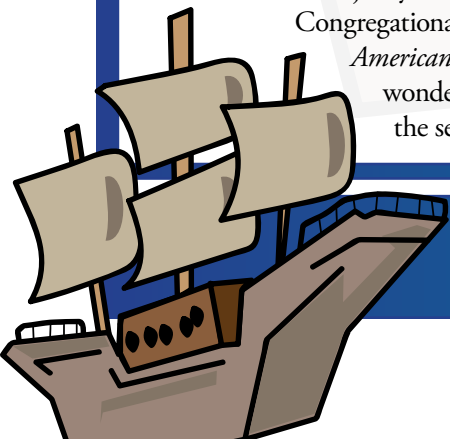
Thomas Hooker, a New England pastor, published his Congregational principles in 1645, including these: “Visible saints are the only true and meet matter whereof a visible church should be gathered. ...” In other words, the true church consists only of true believers. “There is no [Presbyterian] church ... in the New Testament. ... Ordination is only a solemn installing of an officer into the office unto which he was ... called. ... Consociation of churches should be used, as occasion doth require. Such consociations and synods have allowance to counsel and admonish other churches, as the case may require. And if they grow obstinate in error, [the synod] should renounce the right hand of fellowship with them. But [synods] have no power to excommunicate” (Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, pp. 143-147).

This is not Separatism, but true Congregationalism.

Adapted and reprinted, with permission, from *The Congregational Minute*, by Robert Hellam (Seaside, Calif.: Robert Hellam, 2012; amazon.com/Robert Hellam/e/B004VJ49WG)

*All these died in faith, and received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and believed them, and received them thankfully, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

—HEBREWS 11:13 (Geneva Bible)





# A New Leader in Oak Creek

*“The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”*

—Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*

**The Rev. Casey vanderBent will take up duties as interim executive secretary of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches April 8, as the association begins its search for a permanent chief executive.**

The Rev. Dr. Thomas M. Richard, the longest-serving executive secretary in the association’s history, resigned Nov. 29, to become interim minister of the Congregational Church of the Chimes, Sherman Oaks, Calif., starting Jan. 22.

Richard’s long tenure in the post began in early 2001, when he was selected to succeed the Rev. Douglas L. Lobb as executive secretary.

When asked by *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* what he thought the churches wanted, he replied: “A sense of belonging, a feeling of support, a brave voice for an incredible heritage, and services which build up the body of Christ” (April/May/June 2001, p. 6).

It was a time of great hopes for a new and revitalized National Association; but Richard and others were to find the dream of “a new NACCC” difficult to realize. Still, he plunged into his duties with a matchless energy and passion.

## RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In an exit interview, he listed the major accomplishments under his administration:

- Creation of the Congregational Foundation to provide financial support for the association and its programs.
- Launch of the Center for Congregational Leadership at Olivet, Mich., for training the emerging leaders of our fellowship.

- Development of the NA Strategic Plan with its restructuring, Year Round Delegates, and new service delivery model.
- A new church search process and clergy protocol, to provide churches and ministers reliable assistance in transitions of pastoral leadership.

Other accomplishments included the inauguration of a limited legal partnership with the Ministers and Missionaries Benevolent Board (MMBB) for clergy benefits and insurance, encouragement of a “conference” model for the NA Annual Meeting, training a cadre of conflict managers, expansion of the trained interim and experienced ministers list, adoption of new technology, and the designation of decentralized “Ambassadors” to represent the NA to local churches and associations in person.

Tom Richard is a son of the late Clayton Richard, a New England minister and one of the founders of the NACCC. He was educated at Piedmont College and Bangor Theological Seminary, where he was a Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies fellow. He received a D.Min. from the University of Dubuque Theological



Tom Richard

Kevin J. Miyazaki

Seminary in 1998 and an honorary D.D. from Piedmont in 2010.

Before becoming executive secretary in 2001, he served NACCC churches in Brookfield Center, Conn.; South Paris, Maine; Marshalltown, Iowa; and Nantucket, Mass.

### SWIFT SEARCH OF INTERIM

On receiving Richard's resignation, the NACCC Executive Committee swiftly decided to fill the post with an interim executive secretary, allowing 12 to 18 months for a deliberate search to fill the post on a long-term basis. The interim executive secretary will not be a candidate for the permanent position.

The Personnel and Administration sub-committee, headed by the Rev. Arthur Ritter, solicited names, sought applications, interviewed several well-qualified candidates, and recommended the Rev. Casey vanderBent of SouthCross Community Church, Burnsville, Minn. The full Executive Committee concurred, confirming vanderBent's appointment Jan. 30.

VanderBent received his bachelor's degree in Speech/Theatre at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in 1989 and his M.Div. in 2000 from the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, and is also a CFTS Fellow.

Coming to ministry after an early career in business and in health care, vanderBent served as interim pastor of First Congregational Church, New Richland, Minn., in 2002-2003, and then as pastor of the Burnsville church since 2003.

He will start full-time duties as executive secretary in the Oak Creek, Wis., office of the NACCC on April 8.

As an experienced volunteer in the NACCC and the Minnesota Fellowship of Congregationalists, he is well-versed in association matters and acquainted with the NA staff and key volunteer leaders.

His past service to the NA includes stints on the CFTS Board, the committee for the new hymnal, the Executive Committee, and the host committee for the 2012 Annual Meeting and Conference.

## A Message from the Interim Executive Secretary

Dear Friends,

It is with great joy and profound hope that I take on the role of Interim Executive Secretary of our Association. It has been my pleasure to participate in many parts of the life of the NACCC over the past decade and I have treasured the experiences and the exceptional people whom I have met and worked with and now call friends. Little did I know that God was preparing me, through all of those things, to take on the duties now before me.

My great joy comes from being given this chance to serve the people and Association that I love. I am filled with hope because of my absolute certainty that our Association and its churches have never been in a better place to come together in fulfillment of our mission, partnering "for mutual care and outreach to our world in the name of Jesus Christ." We have a vibrant Center for Congregational Leadership, a gifted staff and Leadership Team, and committed churches (supported by healthy state and regional associations). I believe the current Transition plan, coupled with these great assets, can and will strengthen the ties that bind us and help us to be a relevant and vital presence in our communities and in the world. I promise to do whatever I can to support that great work.

This vision for our future, grounded so strongly in where we've been and who we are today, can only be realized if we all work together. Please join me in this Spirit-led partnership.



Casey vanderBent

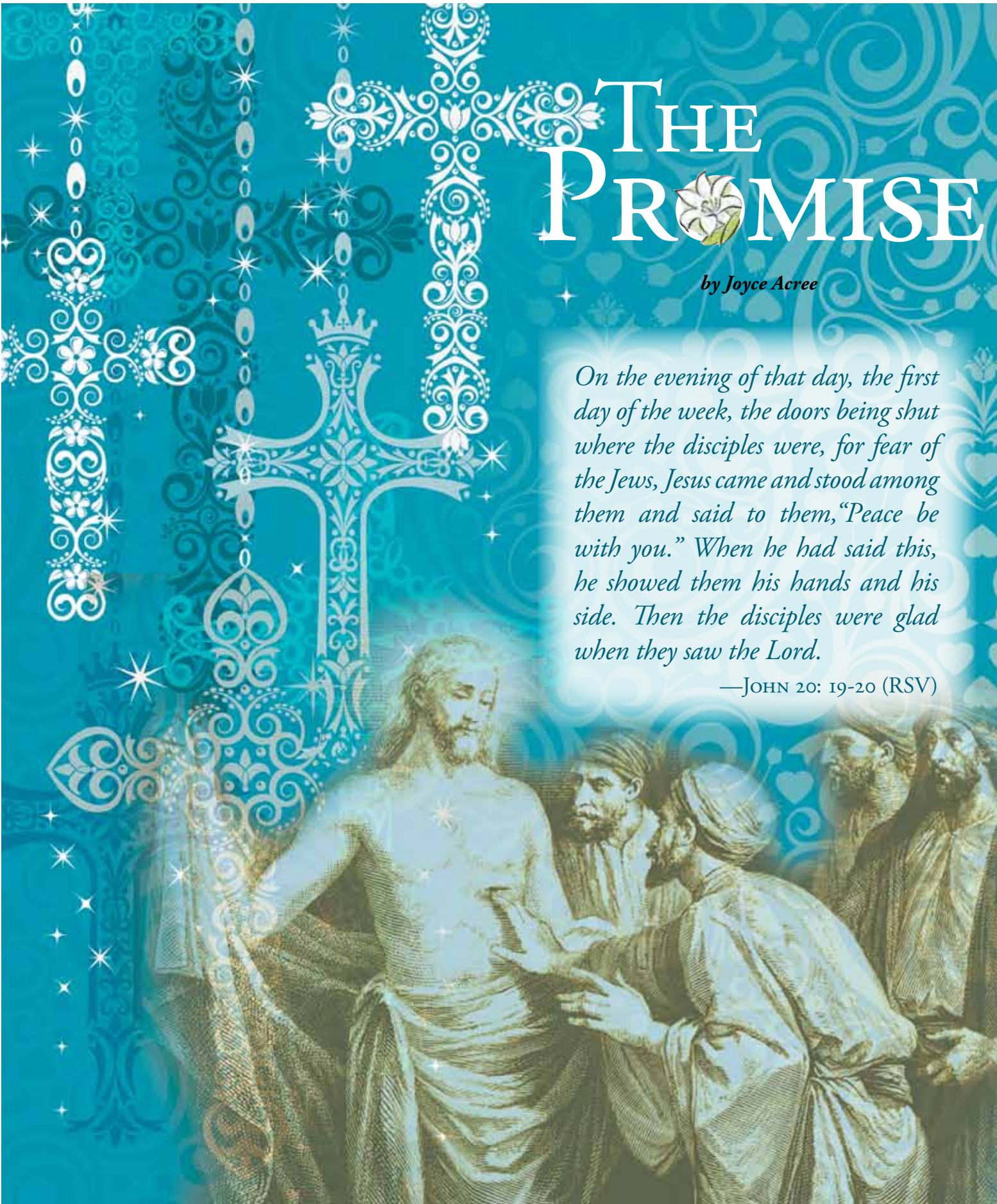
*Yours in Christ,*  
Casey vanderBent

# THE PROMISE

by Joyce Acree

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

—JOHN 20: 19-20 (RSV)



# OF EASTER

They huddled in the room, speaking in hushed tones of the happenings of the last few days. Dejected, fearful—they wondered what life would bring. They had left everything to follow Jesus. Why were they now afraid of losing their lives? They should have had it all; they should have been on top. Instead they huddled in a room talking about what might have been. “We thought he was the Messiah. We thought we would be part of a new kingdom,” they murmured.

Suddenly the air changed. There He was standing among them. How could this be? He was dead. He was buried. Well, yes, the women had said something about His being risen, but, well, they were just women—prone to histrionics.

“Peace! Shalom!” He said and the light came on. He is alive, they realized! The dream is not dead after all.

How often do we find ourselves like the disciples on that first Easter huddled in darkness, fear, and despair? We have heard of the Resurrection, perhaps even sung the anthem of Easter morning, “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” but maybe part of us is still just a little skeptical. When our

dreams are dead, our song is silenced, and our hope is gone, and we sit in the shambles of our lives clutching our cloaks of pity about us, we need not words of judgment or condemnation, but words of compassion and understanding, the words of our Lord: “Peace be with you.”

Jesus said those words with no judgment or condemnation. Certainly the disciples had fallen short. They had abandoned Him. They showed little to no faith. They did not listen to those who tried to bring hope. They were fearful and unbelieving; however, His words were filled with love and compassion, recognizing their humanity and their limitations. He who had been despised, tortured, and condemned could look with love and compassion not only on His disciples but on all of humanity. After hearing those words and receiving that compassion, the disciples were able to leave the room. Growth continued, even as they were able to move forward as Easter people.

Easter is about the Resurrection, but more than that it is about forgiveness, hope, and compassion, a chance to begin anew. It is about finding new songs for singing and new dreams for dreaming. It is about walking as Easter people. As we walk as Easter people, with all of our imperfections, may we become channels of God’s compassion, love, and peace.

As Easter people, may we sit with those in despair, darkness, and fear without trying to fix it, but being with them in compassion.

As Christ’s beloved, may we be the ones who whisper our Lord’s words: “Shalom. Peace be with you.”



**THE REV. JOYCE ACREE** is the pastor of the Methodist-Congregational Federated Church in Demorest, Ga. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (known as “The logical Seminary” when an “o” went missing from its sign). Autumn Saturdays often find her in Athens watching her beloved Bulldogs play football between the stadium’s famous hedges. She resides in Alto, Ga., with her husband, daughter, two dogs, three cats and one horse.

# CONFESSIONS OF A BAD PEW SITTER:

## The Discipline of **SHOWING UP** for Worship

by *Betsy Mauro*

**D**id God call me into ministry *because I am a bad pew sitter?* It seems far-fetched, but I suspect it is so.

My friend Martha has the gift of pew sitting. Unlike her biblical namesake, Martha yearns for worship—to sit and listen for the Word of God conveyed in liturgy, song and sermon. She shows up on Sunday morning, open to receiving, and trusting there will be something of God to be received.

But I fidget in worship. I flip through announcements in the bulletin. I fiddle with the hymnal. I incline my ear to the pre-worship chatter, and I theologically filter what comes from the lectern and pulpit.

The faith conveyed through worship that so engaged and enthralled me as a youngster has given way, with education, experience, and age, to weariness and restlessness.

### BACK TO THE PEW

It is ironic that now, after 21 years in parish ministry, I am back to being a pew sitter as a “denomination official.” I am a member of the church that is two blocks from my home but am not often in worship there. Instead, Sunday morning might find me in any one of 400 churches around the country whose fellowship I serve. It is an experience of differences in variety, ability, enthusiasm. But always, I am reminded I don’t have the gift of pew sitting. Try as I might to channel my friend, Martha, the restlessness comes, provoking a sense of guilt and a feeling of inadequacy.

Why can’t I be still before my God?

Sometimes I wonder, “Why am I there at all?” It is not a question unique to me. Many pew sitters have wondered and, finding no satisfactory answer, have dropped out. According to the 2010 FACT Survey, one-third of mainline Protestant

denominations reported a drop in worship attendance of greater than 10 percent between 2005 and 2010.\*

Was there no compelling reason for those who dropped out to attend church? Was there no attraction for others to enter?

All of this caused me to ask what was the compelling reason for me, fidgety me, to be there when it elicited such restlessness?

Researchers will point to any number of reasons why people stop going to church. I’ve never seen one report that says “because it makes them fidgety.” But they do cite things like boring sermons, conflict over music style, irrelevance of the message to their daily lives, lack of time, “too hypocritical,” “too political,” or any number of other things.

---

**“IT IS TIME TO GO CREATE  
THE BODY OF CHRIST.  
IF I DON’T, WHO WILL?”**

---

### BODY OF CHRIST

I am lucky because, unlike most people, I have the certainty of being called to this life I lead. This certainty is a powerful check on the urge to avoid the pew. It also causes me to wrestle with what it means to show up to worship when I have no gift of pew sitting and may leave wholly unsatisfied, without my spiritual thirst assuaged.

The apostle Paul writes, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ... you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (I Corinthians 12:12, 27.) In Ephesians he remarks that “... Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior” (5:23).

\* <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/2010OldLineProtestantV1.pdf>

I have never much thought on the church as the Body of Christ. Church always seemed like the place Christ showed up when two or more of the faithful gathered in his name.

But somewhere in my fidgety distress while pew sitting, it happened: It occurred to me that if I came to church expecting to be fed, to be satisfied with the music, to be warmed in prayer, to be uplifted and fortified for the week ahead, then I had made worship into being about me, not about God.

While this epiphany should have been an obvious one, it wasn't. In parish ministry, I had spent great amounts of energy counting numbers and worrying over how I might change worship to attract more people into the pews: Better sermons? Paid singers? A minister dedicated to children and youth? But now came the startling revelation that If I were to have any kind of authentic relationship with God through worship, I had to let go of *my* expectations for what I would (or wouldn't) get out of it, and *simply show up*. My Sundays now began with the affirmation: *"It is time to go create the body of Christ. If I don't, who will?"*

And if no one cares to create the body, how can Christ live and continue to draw people close to him? Do we really believe that without our churches, society will naturally know Christ and find the love, joy, and hope that he gives?

### NEW PURPOSE, CHANGED EXPECTATIONS

I go to church now with a different purpose in mind and that has changed my expectations. It isn't about what I get out of it. It is about what I can give to it, and there is always a reason for me to be there. It is offering to hold the fussy baby so Mom can go forward for communion, or listening to the elderly woman grieving the death of her only daughter, or helping a child in the pew follow the words of the hymn. These things may seem small, but because I am creating the body of Christ, I am, along with everyone else that day, part of a greater purpose. How this expands my soul! I am now able to receive Christ more fully, authentically and unselfishly.

I can't claim that I no longer fidget. I still believe that God didn't give me the gift of pew sitting. But I am working on that. When I sit down for worship, it is an act of will to calm myself before the Lord, but isn't that the definition of discipline? I give myself a conscious reminder to set aside the critiquing nature of my job and allow joy to enter instead, but isn't that the call of faithfulness? I lift up to God my assurance that there is a reason for me to be there, and I pray to God that I might be able to recognize it. Isn't that the expression of trust?


I suspect I am not alone in my challenges, and I don't have it all worked out. But I know showing up to church is more important than what I can "get out of it" while I'm there, and this is taking me into a deeper relationship with my Lord. This is good news for someone who lacks the gift of pew sitting; but I still wish I were like my friend Martha.

Maybe my next challenge is to know deep in my heart that God has graced me with gifts all my own, and that I don't need to be like Martha.

All I need to do is show up.



**THE REV. DR. D. ELIZABETH MAURO** is dean of the Center for Congregational Leadership and the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies. She lives in Olivet, Mich., with her husband, wood craftsman Paul Smith, and spends every Sunday morning sitting in a church pew somewhere.

  
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# NEEDLING THROUGH FOUR DECADES

*Faithful Women of Minneapolis  
Embroider a Masterwork*

*by Larry Sommers*

**N**ature abhors a vacuum—and so did the late Rev. Elaine Marsh, associate pastor at Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis.

“I think you should be able to go around the corner, at any spot in a church, and suddenly come upon something beautiful,” she said.

One day in 1968, she expressed frustration about the blank, house-shaped end wall of the large downtown church’s guild hall. Congregant Mary Carson, recalling fine wall hangings she had seen in Europe, thought she could raise enough volunteer “needlers” to fill the huge space with a work of crewel embroidery.

Carson contacted people at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., for advice on methods and techniques for a large wall hanging. But where would the design come from?

Marsh was vacationing in England when she got a phone call from an excited Mary Carson. In a little book by a well-known author, Mary had spied illustrations in a fluid, fanciful style that would be just right for the guild hall project. Marsh immediately paid a visit to the artist, Pauline Baynes, at her studio in Dulverton, West Somerset, and soon recruited her for the project.



*The Rev. Elaine Marsh,  
associate pastor at Plymouth  
Congregational Church,  
Minneapolis, in her study.*

## UNVEILING

More than 40 years later, on July 15, 2012, the Plymouth Needlers unveiled the last of a cycle of four seasonal wall hangings, titled *Summer of the First Amendment*. An enthusiastic crowd filled the guild hall and a new vocal work, “The Four Freedoms,” by David Evan Thomas, was performed.

Senior Minister James Gertmenian preached a sermon that day titled, “In Praise of the Needlers.” Though key instigators of the project, including Marsh, Baynes, and Mary Carson’s husband, Paul, had passed from the scene, many of the 145 women who have worked on the four embroideries were present, having brought the most recent hanging to a triumphant completion.

“These intrepid women over a space of four decades have not only created works of art without parallel but also have forged a lively and enduring community based on creativity, skill, shared work, imagination, mutual affection, and commitment,” Gertmenian said.

Along the way, they have become first-rate practitioners of an ancient art that in medieval times required long years as an apprentice and journeyman before one became a master.

The guild hall project originally envisioned only a single hanging, approximately 25 feet wide by 16½ feet high at its center peak. Titled *Churchmen in the New World*, completed with





*From left, Karen Reed, Lora Anderson, and Dawn Wanous work on different parts of the fourth Guild Hall embroidery, Summer of the First Amendment, and prepare for its first hanging and mid-July unveiling.*

*Inset: Karen Reed finishes a detail.*

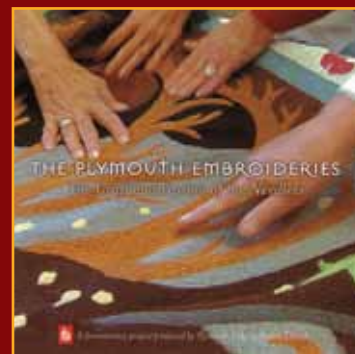
Larry Sommers



# THE PLYMOUTH EMBROIDERIES

## *The Craft and Passion of the Needlers*

Plymouth Congregational Church has produced a fascinating half-hour video essay, **THE PLYMOUTH EMBROIDERIES: The Craft and Passion of the Needlers**, showing this remarkable group of women and how they have approached and organized their large-scale, long-continuing practice of textile art. It is available by postal mail. Send your name and address and \$10 for a DVD or \$12 for VHS, plus \$3 postage and handling, to Plymouth Church, 1900 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55403-3789. Write "Video" in the memo line of your check.



amazing swiftness, and dedicated in 1974, it is a triptych in concept—its center panel showing Plymouth Colony and the fabled “first Thanksgiving” dinner, with scenes from Abolition days in the right panel and depictions of Plymouth Church itself on the left side.

The design’s borders teem with wild and domestic life forms—fish, fowl, and ever-present dogs—and a wealth of religious and secular symbols instantly recognizable to Congregational Christians.

But the people, the “churchmen” with their endeavors and struggles, occupy center stage in all three panels, telling the story of Congregationalism in a powerful way.

“We wanted it to be really lively and tell a good story,” said Mary Carson.

Pauline Baynes was a book illustrator, who had made her way in London’s art scene and won acceptance and renown



Pauline Baynes in 2007.

when J.R.R. Tolkien rejected another artist’s dull illustrations for his book *Farmer Giles of Ham* and found instead, in Baynes, an illustrator whose free and imaginative style matched his own dedication to fantasy. After her success with *Farmer Giles of Ham*—Tolkien approvingly said she had “reduced my text to a commentary on her drawings”—she went on to illustrate many of his other books.

She also became the primary illustrator for *The Chronicles of Narnia*, written by Tolkien’s friend C.S. Lewis.

Her illustrations for Tolkien’s fantasy *Smith of Wootton Major* brought her to the attention of Mary Carson and Plymouth’s Needlers.

### **A CREWEL KIND OF CHALLENGE**

In drawing the design for *Churchmen in the New World*, Baynes had to fill a large space with many interesting details and yet make the drawings simple enough to be embroidered convincingly with crewel yarn, a challenge she accepted and mastered.

She sent a small-scale colored drawing, which then had to be transferred faithfully to the vast canvas of the house-shaped (and house-sized!) wall hanging.

The transfer was accomplished by Paul Carson, Mary’s husband, a retired dentist. He painstakingly photographed every square inch of the original drawing on slide film and built an ingenious device to project each slide perpendicularly, at its enlarged size, upon the stretched Irish upholstery linen, then carefully tracing the design’s outlines on the linen.

All that remained was for many volunteer Needlers to fill in the outlines with embroidery, using many colors (“We deal with a yarn company in Connecticut that has 800 color

choices,” confided Mary Carson), and many different stitches to convincingly represent the varying textures of life.

The results were impressive.

“There is a kind of ‘oneness of hand,’ and that takes a lot of thought, because everybody has their different quality of stitching, a different amount of tension that’s pulled, a different angling of the thread,” said Lotus Stack, curator of textiles at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

“The lady at the National Cathedral said, ‘Don’t compromise with mediocrity,’” said Carson. “And I said, ‘How do I do that?’ and she said, ‘Tear it out and start over!’”

So the Needlers’ method from the start has often come down to tearing out and starting over. If an embroiderer is dissatisfied with a piece of work, she rips out the stitches and tries again. Considering that the hand work takes about an hour per square inch, achieving top quality becomes an exercise in patience and persistence.

At last *Churchmen in the New World* was complete and was hung in the guild hall, so the wall was no longer bare.

Mission accomplished.

But they soon discovered that they couldn’t simply hang it there and forget it. Unless the fabric were taken down and allowed to rest, it was likely to stretch out of shape.

“I was getting that feedback from several museums,” Mary Carson said.

So they took the hanging down to rest it, “and the people in the church would say, ‘But we want it there while we’re having our reception!’”

### ONE GOOD WORK BEGETS A SERIES

So the idea was born to do three more hangings—four in all, one for each season of the year—so they could hang in a regular rotation on the guild hall wall and rest between hangings.

The second piece, *Christmas Radianance*, was begun in 1986 and dedicated in December 1992.

The third, *Renewal of Life*, celebrating the season of spring, was begun in 1995 and dedicated in June 2002.

The final piece, *Summer of the First Amendment*, celebrating the concept of separation of church and state, was begun in 2002 and dedicated last July.

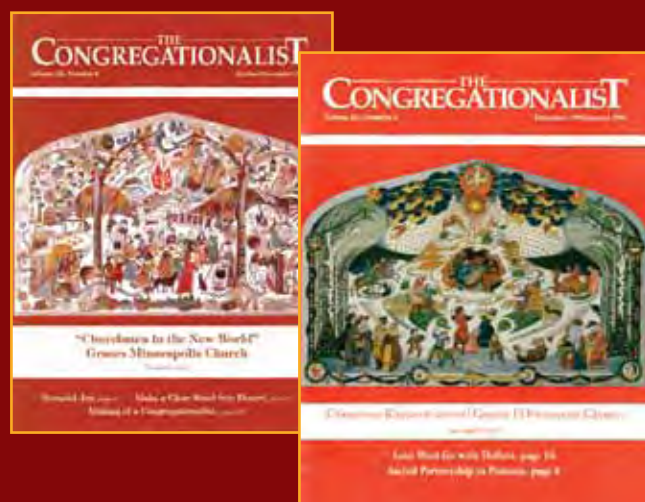
All four were designed by Baynes, and all feature the same busy, flowing style. The realization of the designs was a

departure for the artist, whose work usually appeared on the flat pages of books, not in the texture of embroidery on linen.

“I was just honored and flattered to be asked,” Baynes said in a 2004 interview. “I . . . really didn’t think that hundreds of people would be sewing for years on end. Otherwise, I think I wouldn’t have accepted the commission at all. It would be much too frightening and daunting.”

Starting about 18 years ago, there was a changing of the guard: Mary Carson invited Dawn Wanous and Marilyn Mork to lunch and asked them to take leadership in the Needlers, along with Karen Reed, who had worked in the project almost from the beginning. They accepted the challenge and at first benefited from the continued presence

## CONTINUING COVERAGE



Long-time readers of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* may recall that two of the Needlers’ earlier works graced this magazine’s covers in the 1990s. *Christmas Radianance* appeared on the cover of our Vol. 153, No. 6 (December 1993/January 1994), left; and *Churchmen in the New World* appeared on Vol. 156, No. 4 (October/November 1996), right. The former work was described on the back cover of the same issue in a reflection by Needler Alice Newman, and the latter on the back cover of the same issue in a reflection by Needler Jane Lampert.



Margit Johnson

Mary Carson works on *Summer of the First Amendment*.

of Carson. But as Mary Carson has slowed down in recent years, Wanous and Reed have soldiered on, bringing the cycle of four hangings to completion.

The new piece, *Summer of the First Amendment*, shows American political and religious thought as a river, swirling down from Independence Hall, where George Washington stands by the Liberty Bell, flowing under a “bridge of correspondence” between Jefferson and Madison, and resolving into separate streams representing church and state.

In this general theme, it manages to include a plethora of American images and personalities, ranging from Johnny Appleseed to an Amish carriage!

In a note to the Needlers, Baynes wrote: “I hope I have made it simple enough to embroider and simple enough for the basic idea to come across. It is also, hopefully, a celebration of July 4th, Independence [sic] Day—and also a celebration of the season of harvest, fruit and flowers.”

Between working on large hangings, the Needlers also executed Baynes’ designs on guild hall furniture dedicated in 1982, a Pilgrim Bench dedicated in 1985, and sanctuary furniture dedicated in 1992.

### MORE THAN A PROJECT

Through it all, they have kept an artistic discipline, a persistence, and a faithfulness to their task that has enabled a great outpouring of artistic results, of which Plymouth Church members are notably proud. But it’s been about more than art.

“As remarkable as these embroideries are,” said Gertmenian, “what is more remarkable still is the community that our



Members and friends react with delight at the July 15 unveiling of *Summer of the First Amendment*, the last of four wall hangings by the Needlers.

## DON'T TREAD ON ME

As seen in this detail from Pauline Baynes' original sketch, the design for *Summer of the First Amendment* had George Washington standing on the U.S. flag—a transgression of mythic proportion. The Needlers revised that part of the artist's design, and the Father of Our Country—in the part of the hanging shown on our cover (see inset)—now treads, more appropriately, on the Union Jack shield of the British Empire.



Needlers have built over the last 40 years. In coming together week after week, in sharing their lives with one another, in taking up a common task in which no one person is a 'star,' they have modeled for us what Christian community can be."

"It's become a support group for all of us," said Dawn Wanous.

"It's kind of like family," said Mary Carson.

Now that the final hanging of the four has been completed, what does the future hold in store for the Needlers?

Dawn Wanous and Karen Reed, the group's present-day leaders, agree that it's not time to call it quits, but they're searching for a direction.

"Since we had the best artist and technical help for 40 years, and they are no longer living," wrote Wanous in a recent e-mail, "we are reluctant to begin

a new project. The obvious need is to transcribe 40 years of lovely correspondence from Pauline Baynes into an archival history. We are currently working with a small group on Thursday mornings, and I plan to meet with the evening group in February to enlist their help as well.

"We also need to write booklets describing the four embroideries. ... That should keep us busy for the rest of our lives!"

In an interview several years before her 2010 death, Elaine Marsh, whose *horror vacui* seems to have given impetus to the whole project, summed it up:

"It's art; it's fellowship of the group; it's a sense of well-being of the church; and, for me—it covers the blank wall."



Allison Campbell/Jensen



LARRY SOMMERS, the editor of this magazine, is far from being an authority on needlework, but likes art, especially the Congregational kind.

Norm Lemburg

# Come Explore ORLANDO!

by Helen Gierke

Orlando, site of this year's Annual Meeting and Conference of the NACCC, has a whole world for you to explore! Plan to add a few days to experience the best the area has to offer:



Rum Largo

Sammy Todd Dyess



Lake Eola

Visit Orlando



Orlando  
Science Center

Orlando Science Center



Florida wildlife

Boggy Creek Airboat Rides

**Walt Disney World Resort**—The world-famous Disney theme parks include *Magic Kingdom*, *Epcot*, *Disney's Hollywood Studios*, and *Disney's Animal Kingdom*. Two water parks, *Disney's Blizzard Beach* and *Disney's Typhoon Lagoon*, tempt and tantalize. Within walking distance of our hotel is *Downtown Disney*, offering a wide variety of dining and entertainment for the whole family, including *Cirque de Soleil's* spectacular stage show.

**Universal Orlando Resort**—Enjoy two theme parks: *Universal's Islands of Adventure* featuring "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter", and *Universal Studios Florida* where you can jump into the action of your favorite movies and TV shows and see the daily interactive Superstar Parade, featuring Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Dora and Diego*; E.B. from the hit animated film, *Hop*; and Gru, Agnes, Edith, Margo and the minions from *Despicable Me*. Not to mention 100 years of movie memories at *Universal's Cinematic Spectacular*. And there's also the *Universal CityWalk* where you can catch the renowned Blue Man Group.

*Continued on p. 21 (after the Annual Meeting and Conference brochure)*

Dinosaur World



Dinosaur World



Orlando Science Center

CineDome Film



Boggy Creek Airboat Rides

Airboat Ride

Continued from p. 20

The **Orlando area** has many other attractions and pastimes—*Sea World Orlando*, *Ripley's Believe it or Not!*, *Wonderworks*, the *Orlando Science Center*, *Discovery Cove*, and the new *Legoland*. Like to shop? Drive a few minutes to Sanford and the largest flea market in the country with 1,700 booths.

Looking for something more? Orlando is less than two hours from either coast. **Head east** and explore Cape Canaveral with its *Air Force Space and Missile Museum*; and St. Augustine, the oldest continuously occupied European-settled city in the U.S. (and home to the Fountain of Youth!), with lovely beaches and the *World Golf Hall of Fame*.

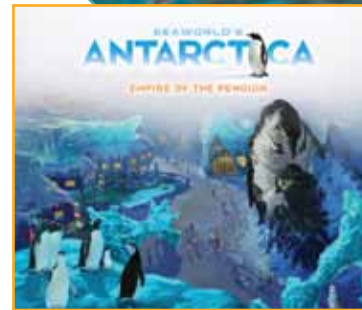
**Drive west** towards Tampa/St. Petersburg and visit the *Salvador Dali Museum*, *Busch Gardens*, *Sunken Gardens*, and some of the best beaches in the world. Thirty minutes south, in Sarasota, is the *John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, the *Mote Aquarium*, and *Marie Selby Botanical Gardens*, not to mention another top beach, Siesta Key.

**Driving south** of the Orlando area you can visit *Bok Tower Gardens*, *Weeki Wachee Springs* (home of the famous Mermaid Show), *Medieval Times*, the *Holy Land Experience*, and the unique *Solomon's Castle*.

There's so much to see and do in central Florida! Plan to come early or stay late—the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista Resort, our conference hotel, will let you book five days before or after at our special rate (Group code NCC). Explore Orlando or take road trips. Learn about these and more at [visitorlando.com](http://visitorlando.com) and [touristflorida.com](http://touristflorida.com). You'll see why Florida is the vacation and retirement destination of millions each year.



Troy House



Seaworld

**Come explore!**



Busch Gardens

Busch Gardens



Busch Gardens

# THE *Power of Love* IN RAPID CITY

by Tom Boehne

*Every year's NAPF/HOPE Youth Conference has its own program, speakers, setting, and agenda. This recent reflection by last year's featured speaker gives a glimpse of the vitality and spiritual energy that await participants at any year's gathering, including the 2013 Youth Conference in Orlando.*

I was surprised when asked to be the speaker at the 2012 HOPE/NAPF Youth Conference. It had been seven years since I had served an NACCC church, and while I had some wonderful friends among the association's pastors, speaking at the NA youth conference had never occurred to me. Since my NACCC days, I had served as a pastor of recovery and traveled the Midwest preaching at a variety of churches.

So while grateful I was quite humbled when Lynn Merkel asked me to do it. After prayerful consideration I accepted the invitation. There was an opportunity to bring along a worship leader, and I immediately nominated my friend John Lewis for that role. He's an experienced musician, part of worship teams for years, and assisted me as worship pastor in two recovery ministries.

The venue for the 2012 conference was different from the usual format. The NAPF and HOPE leadership team had learned of Mission Discovery, which finds work locations for mission projects and promised to provide supplies and an experienced construction leader if the NACCC would bring work teams. Mission Discovery directed us to Rapid City, S.D., and five work sites—four homes and a school. Each site had received the benefit of previous teams' efforts; and still other teams, after our period of service, would finish the jobs. From what I experienced, it was a superb integration of faith and energy between the NACCC and Mission Discovery.

The key verse for the conference was Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (NIV). Now that was a wonderful verse to preach! First, it speaks of



Mindy Jaster

the amazing calling and shaping of God upon believers to receive empowerment and serve in specific ways. The term "workmanship" refers to something artistic and of incredible craftsmanship. Believers are supernaturally recreated by God to do His work. Secondly, I'm very aware of the view of many that one's salvation is not won by Christ but earned by our efforts. Paul however, makes it extremely clear that is not the case in the previous verses. It is only after receiving our salvation through faith in Christ that we are then shaped by God to do his work. "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and



Jean Lewis



Cory Ward

Tom Boehne speaks, left, and John Lewis leads singing, right, at the 2012 NAPF/HOPE Youth Conference in Rapid City.

*Above, left: Kelci Henson-Forslund of Novi, Mich., and Mindy Jaster of Elkader, Iowa, shorten a board with a circular saw. Below, left: Matt Moncrief of Pomona and Rich Knight of Toledo dig a post-hole with a gas-powered auger.*

this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Making this distinction clear was God’s work for me.

I was impressed with the energy of the youth and the commitment of the adults. It was extremely hot, over 100 degrees. Mission Discovery did a wonderful job keeping the sites organized and the adult leaders did a great job keeping everyone working, even in very uncomfortable situations. Kids were building things and serving in ways they wouldn’t have imagined a few days prior. The outpouring of thanks from the receiving families and the school staff was obvious and heartfelt.

As we approached the fourth night of the week, I prayerfully readied myself. I knew the message of salvation by faith was ready to be shared. Earlier that day I had taken a ride on my mountain bike, stopping by a river to ask God what he wanted me to say so that I might open his plan of salvation to new hearts. Immediately, my mind was filled with a specific sequence of questions, each taken from one of the previous night’s messages.

As usual, John Lewis’s passion was musically contagious, and the involvement of everyone during worship was great. It was a wonderful environment to teach in.

The text I had chosen was Luke 24:45-49, when Jesus reappears after the Resurrection to frightened disciples. It begins with the phrase, “He opened their minds ... .” Jesus’ view of an open mind is far different from what our culture might say it is. But there it is, in his words: An open mind is one that knows He came so that through faith our sins might be forgiven, that we would receive the power to live changed repentant lives and a Spirit-empowered calling to share this message. These were close to Jesus’ last words, and they define the beginning of a transformed and eternal life for those willing to believe them.

At the close of the message I asked everyone to put their heads down. I began by asking them, “Do you carry guilt and anger and want God to take it away?” I was amazed to see over 20 hands thrust upward. I asked the second question, “Do you struggle to pray but have a desire to spend more time with God?” Again, dozens of hands went up. Thirdly, I asked them if they struggle with reading God’s Word and would like to spend more time listening to him. More hands went up. Finally, I asked a fourth question: “How many of you want to be open-minded enough to accept Jesus’ love for you, receive salvation and have Him change your life?” The response was overwhelming; almost half of the hands in the room were thrust into the air! Their hungry response spoke of

God’s call of love to each of us and of those humble enough to receive it.

During that night and in the remaining days various youths and adults came to speak to John and me. We were privileged to listen and pray with them. It was apparent that the love of God had powerfully moved, as people came to faith, reaffirmed their faith, made commitments of service, confessed sin, and realized the conviction that comes from meeting God through faith in His Son. Yes, the work sites showed the results of many faithful hands willing to serve. And to me, my friend John, and the leaders, it was apparent that God had done an even greater work inside the hearts of many during those hot but God-infused days in Rapid City.



**PASTOR TOM BOEHNE** currently serves at *The Compass Church of Naperville, Ill., as pastor of recovery and connections and coordinator/director of guest services.*

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# The Annual Meeting and Conference

*Can the NA do a new and better thing this year in Orlando?*

*by Helen Gierke*

**T**he National Association's Annual Meeting and Conference has two parallels in the local church: Sunday worship and the Annual Meeting of the congregation.

Sunday worship is the one hour each week when you can expect to have most of the active members of the church together in one place. If your church is like ours, the time of prayer and praise is followed by a time of fellowship (with food!), during which you renew personal connections, review activities of the past week, and anticipate the coming week.

The church's Annual Meeting, on the other hand, has a different purpose. Its emphasis is the business of the church. Following a meal (food is basic to church life!), we review the financial status of the church and plan the budget for the coming year, discuss outreach and evangelism, elect people to leadership positions, and make a "wish list" for the future.

These two functions of the local church come together at the national level in the NACCC's Annual Meeting and Conference. It is the one time of the year when "interested

Congregationalists" (as the Rev. Dr. Arvel M. Steece would say) gather together. The 1977 Wilson Report said, "The annual meeting is the focal point in the National Association structure."

Like Sunday worship in the local church, we find time for prayer and praise, celebrating both a common commitment to Jesus Christ and the diversity of Ways represented by Congregational churches from around the nation. We reiterate our covenant commitment to Christ as individuals and to each other as sister churches.

Like our churches' Annual Meetings, we as an association spend time at our Annual Meeting celebrating accomplishments over the past year, reviewing the finances past and future, welcoming new member churches and new ministers, electing leaders, sharing table fellowship (food again!) and, perhaps, envisioning the future of the association.

But—though the Roozen Report of 1998 highlighted the personal connections made by those attending NA Annual Meetings and the value placed on fellowship, information



*Business, budget, bylaws...*



*Inspiration, joy, fellowship...*

and education—over the past several years the emphasis on business, especially finances, has overshadowed celebrating, sharing, planning and fellowship.

It's time to restore the priority of the "conference" aspect over the "meeting" elements of the NACCC's annual gathering.

So this year's "Annual Meeting and Conference," while attending to necessary business, budget, and bylaws, will offer increased opportunities to enjoy one another in table fellowship, in worship, in sharing ideas and concerns, in envisioning the future together, and in strengthening the covenant relationships we share.

We are doing a new thing!

Please join us in Orlando June 22-25 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista Resort. The conference schedule will allow time each evening to explore Disney's many venues, with "in-hotel" events also for fellowship and fun. Business, budget, and bylaws will be kept to the minimum possible.

The "Resource Room" of past years gives way this year to the *NA Marketplace*—a place to buy or sell a variety of goods, including favorites from various missions, the NA calendar, and new products and services for churches across the country—and the *NAC<sup>3</sup> EXPO*, a display center where you'll learn more about the new Ministry Councils, the Center for Congregational Leadership, the Congregational Library, and a host of other topics.

*Does your church have something that might help other churches?* Here's a place to share it! The "workshops" have become the Info-Exchange, offering:

- **Information**—Practical church life: finance, personnel, property.
- **Inspiration**—Spiritual church life: worship, music, education.
- **Innovation**—Sharing church life: new outreach ideas that may work for you!

A major concern of recent meetings has been expense. Meeting and conference planner Carrie Dahm does a masterful job of booking the meeting into fine facilities at prices way below market, and registration costs have been kept down as much as possible. Meal costs have skyrocketed; and hotels require a food-and-beverage minimum while providing the meeting space at no cost, so some meals must be included in the registration fee.

## "The annual meeting is the focal point in the National Association structure."

Analysis of last year's Annual Meeting and Conference revealed that a majority of attendees were clergy and their spouses, many serving as delegates for their churches, plus NA leadership team members and spouses. Only about 25 percent of the attendees were "interested Congregationalists"—ordinary church members who spent the time, money, and effort to participate in our national version of Sunday-worship-and-annual-gathering. But year after year, post-conference evaluations confirm that those who take the trouble to attend receive inspiration, joy, and fellowship—along with occasional frustration—at the National Association's Annual Conference.

This year you can combine that great experience with a family vacation. Come a few days early, or stay a few days after (at the same great hotel rate!) and explore Epcot, Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios, Cirque de Soleil, the Magic Kingdom, and the water parks at Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach. Travel around the beautiful state of Florida and see Cape Canaveral, Miami Beach, Sea World, Busch Gardens or the Everglades or plan to enjoy one of many cruises. The beaches are beautiful, the people are friendly, the fish is fresh and in June it's not much hotter than Chicago or Detroit or Madison or Kansas City!

Make your plans, send in your registration, and encourage others from your church to join you—and hundreds of your sister and brother Congregationalists—in Orlando this June, where we will be doing a new thing at the National Association's Annual Meeting and Conference!



**HELEN GIERKE** co-chairs the Host Committee for this year's Annual Meeting and Conference. A minister of music for the last 30 years, she holds a master's degree in Sacred Music and a Doctor of Theology degree from Boston University. She has served on the Division for Ministry and the Church Services Commission and was moderator in 2006-2007. She currently serves on the Annual Meeting and Conference Team and as an ambassador for the NACCC. She lives in Cape Coral, Fla., where she and her husband, the Rev. Dr. Dewey Gierke, serve the First Congregational Church.

# A Pilgrim People

—We are on The Way

by Val Price

**B**runel University, on the edge of London, is the ideal location for ICF's quadrennial conference. It provides excellent accommodation, a compact meeting and recreation facility, good food, and easy access by air, rail, and road.

Most of all, though, ICF 2013 will offer an opportunity to share in prayer, praise, fellowship—and a lot of fun—with fellow Congregationalists from across the globe. There's a



## International Congregational Fellowship

Monday, July 29-Friday, August 2, 2013

Brunel University, London, United Kingdom

line-up of first-rate speakers and a range of study and activity sessions to choose from.

Registration will be during the afternoon on July 29, with time to settle in before the evening meal—a special barbecue on the dining room terrace. This will be followed by the ICF Family Gathering, a welcome and introductions session in the evening.



Rick Hartley

Four Bible Study sessions will be led by the **Rev. Dr. Rick Hartley**, First Congregational Church of Mukwonago, Wis., and editor of the International Congregational Journal. Rick will introduce creative methods of Bible study.

There will also be three keynote speakers who will lead the morning Theme Sessions on the three full days of the conference.

- **The Rev. Dr. Janet Wootton** is director of studies with the Congregational Federation in the UK. She is co-moderator of the International Congregational Theological Commission, a former moderator of ICF, and a former president of the Congregational Federation. The author of several books, a magazine editor, a hymn-writer and poet, she will bring her own special dynamism to her presentation as she traces the Congregational tradition back to the New Testament churches—and before.
- **The Rev. Dr. Issa Diab**, of Lebanon, is a translation consultant for United Bible Societies and professor of Semitics and Christian/Muslim Studies. He has been heading up two teams of Arabic-speaking biblical scholars to update the Van Dyck-Boustani Arabic translation of the Bible. He is also a lecturer in Old Testament Studies at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. His Wednesday theme address



Rev. Dr. Janet Wootton



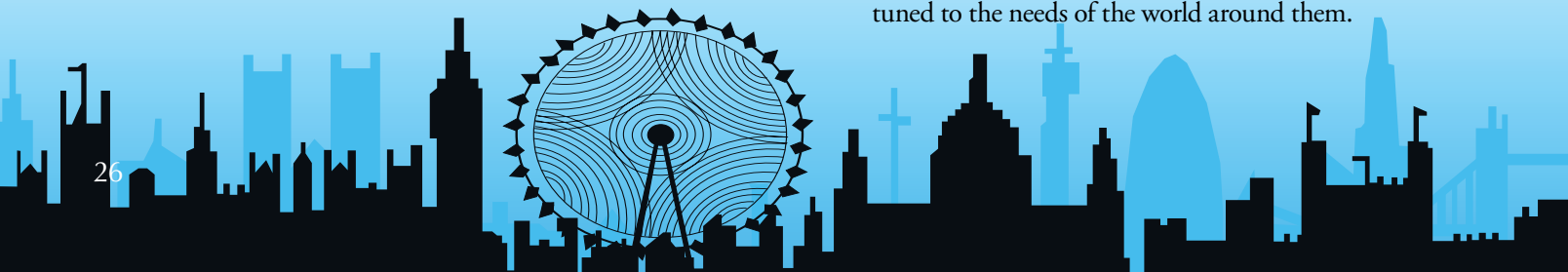
Rev. Dr. Issa Diab



Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan

will concentrate on the Middle and Near East, where he has very special first-hand knowledge. His address will be followed by Congregationalists from around the world speaking of their experience of the Congregational Way in their particular situations.

- **The Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan**, who will lead the final theme session, is general secretary of the Council for World Mission, the organization through which many Congregational bodies, including the Congregational Federation in the UK and the Union of Welsh Independents, work together as equal partners to share in the Christian mission. Dr. Cowan was formerly General Secretary of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. His emphasis will be on the future—“Where is the Lord leading us from here?” Since his appointment to CWM, Dr. Cowan has adopted as his main focus “the missional congregation.” The stated aim is to develop congregations that make a difference in their communities, to equip members to participate daily in the mission of God, with the rest of the community—which means that local congregations are communities tuned to the needs of the world around them.





# CHURCHES ENTWINNED



These sessions form just part of an exciting program which also includes workshops, focus and a range of interest groups; opportunities for relaxation and entertainment; and an outing to Bedford, including a visit to the John Bunyan Museum—to be welcomed at Bunyan Meeting, a church which is part of the Congregational Fellowship.

Plenty to do ... but time, too, to get to know and share with fellow Congregationalists.

**Be sure to book your place at the Conference now, through [intercong.org](http://intercong.org).**



*VAL PRICE is co-moderator of the International Congregational Fellowship.*

The upcoming ICF Conference in London moved David Kinchin, editor of *The Congregationalist* in the U.K.—the British counterpart of this magazine—to wonder, “Would it be nice to twin our churches with a church in the USA?” David shared this idea with your (U.S.) editor, and after a year or so of trans-Atlantic ruminations, we think there’s something to it.

David has further evolved the concept by removing a letter: It has gone from “twinning” to “twining.”

*“So ask your Church Meeting,” David suggests. “What do they think? Would they like their fellowship to be twinned with a church from [Britain]? To be ‘entwined’ together in some form of relationship?”*

*“What form will this twining take? That very much depends upon the churches. It might simply be a case of exchanging correspondence and news about church events. Perhaps you could organise some form of prayer chain across the Atlantic! For the really adventurous, it may be that you actually exchange personnel. Maybe Ministers and Pastors could make an exchange over a period of say three or six months? Maybe church members could visit as a group and then arrange a return visit the following year? ...”*

*“Remember the opportunities of such technology as Skype and Facebook when considering this. Pray about it and discuss it. ...”*

To keep things simple, this “twining” of U.K. and U.S. churches is an informal arrangement facilitated by a pair of editors. American churches interested in being paired with a U.K. church should provide, before July 1, 2013, a brief one-page description of your church, a photograph, and a contact person in the church, to:

**Larry Sommers, Editor**

438 Hilltop Drive

Madison WI 53711-1212

[larrysommers@gmail.com](mailto:larrysommers@gmail.com)

608-238-7731

*We'll try to link you up!*

## AFTER THE CONFERENCE

**Aug. 3-13, 2013**

### **Pilgrims' Progress:** A Seminar and Tour of Historic and Congregational Sites in England and Holland

*Sponsored by the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies*

Please join CFTS dean Rev. Dr. Betsey Mauro, CFTS board member Rev. Mike Fales, and some of our brightest CFTS seminary graduates for a history tour of England and the Netherlands as we follow the footsteps of our Puritan forebears. The British Seminar will begin right after the International Congregational Fellowship Meeting. If you plan to attend the ICF conference, please indicate you will be staying an additional night (August 2) at Brunel, as this tour leaves from the university early in the morning of Aug. 3.

Visit and learn about sites and events important to Congregational history:

- **Canterbury Cathedral** and the Canterbury Tales Museum
- Babworth, **Scrooby**, **Austerfield** (Wm. Bradford birthplace), Gainsborough, and Boston
- **Norwich** (Old Meeting House—Octagon Chapel), **Cambridge**
- Stonehenge, Salisbury (view the Magna Carta), **Southampton** (Mayflower Memorial)
- Dartmouth, **Plymouth** (Pilgrims Memorial at the Barbican, where they set sail for America on the *Mayflower*)
- **London** (Clink Prison Museum and the burial place of Christopher Jones, the *Mayflower's* captain)
- **Holland**, including **Leiden** (Brewster's printing press building and other Pilgrim sites), plus a free day in **Amsterdam**

Projected cost is \$3,489 per person based on double occupancy (air fare not included). Registration and payments should be made directly to our tour provider, Pilgrim Tours, [pilgrimtours.com](http://pilgrimtours.com). For more information, go to [centerforcongregationalleadership.org](http://centerforcongregationalleadership.org) or contact the Rev. Dr. Betsey Mauro, [bmauro@nacc.org](mailto:bmauro@nacc.org) or 800-262-1620, ext. 1613.

## Readers Respond to the Alabama/Georgia Statement

*In our December issue, we published “Here We Stand,” a statement of the Alabama/Georgia Association of Congregational Christian Churches objecting, on theological grounds, to our earlier publication of a statement by First Congregational Church of Oshkosh, Wis., that “FCC Oshkosh also is an ‘Open and Affirming’ congregation that welcomes the gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual community into the full life and fellowship of the church”; and also objecting to the presentation of a “Social Justice Workshop” dealing with the subject of homosexuality at the 2012 Annual Meeting and Conference in Minneapolis.*

*Our readers have expressed strong and articulate views in response to the “Here We Stand” piece. We present them here, in the order received—edited, as always, for clarity and length.*

### GAY LIFESTYLE IS SINFUL

Tortured reinterpretations of Romans 1 by some evangelicals and outright dismissal of the relevance of Romans 1 by liberal Protestants notwithstanding, the most natural and accessible reading of that crucial passage is pretty straightforward.

Cultures that turn their backs on God by mishandling the life-giving gift of sex, whether it be through heterosexual promiscuity, adultery, or homosexual acts (the example employed by Paul in the Romans passage), will eventually, as a result of those choices, be given over to them, rendering them “normal” in their own eyes.

We have arrived. The approximately 3 percent of Americans who are homosexual (polls show that most Americans think that percentage is 30, not 3), or who are going through a season of homosexual experimentation (statistics show that people are moving in and out of that lifestyle constantly), need the love and acceptance of the church. There we can all agree.

But loving them in the love of Christ is much harder than simply endorsing

their sinful lifestyle. It involves helping those who want help to be restored to the natural order supernaturally.

**REV. CHRIS BRYAN**

*Milwaukee, Wis.*

### TENTACLES OF BIBLICAL LITERALISM

As a Congregational Christian, I was greatly disturbed and embarrassed by the “Here We Stand” article from the Alabama/Georgia Association. Once again the tentacles of Biblical literalism clash with progressive thinking and scholarly Biblical interpretation.

Are we to descend back into accepting a seven-day creation story or the cruel and inhumane practices of pre-Christian cultures? Do not God’s ways evolve in sync with knowledge and scientific findings? Are we to accept modern advancements and understanding [or] stay prisoners to ancient faith understandings? To do so would invalidate all of the advancements made by black people, women, and indeed by science itself.

My wife and I, our daughters and their families have found our church lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered friends to be loving, accepting, talented, and people of faith.

We are delighted to be affirming people. What could possibly be more unchristian than condemning people simply because they love each other?

**REV. DR. DOUGLAS L. LOBB**

*Boise, Idaho*

### MY SENTIMENTS EXACTLY

I wish to commend you for the latest issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*. It was an excellent issue.

I am saving the story of the “Miracle in Maine” to share with my grandchildren on Christmas Eve, a true Christmas miracle.

I also especially commend you for publishing the report by the Alabama/Georgia Association. I am sure it took courage for you to do so, but it is an important piece. The writers express my sentiments exactly,

courteously, and precisely in the true spirit of congregationalism.

REV. GROVE ARMSTRONG  
Derry, N.H.

*While happy to bask in the reflected glory of Allen Crabtree's find Christmas article, we take exception to one statement of Rev. Armstrong's: In fact, it takes no courage*

*at all to edit THE CONGREGATIONALIST, because we are a free people; there is no fear of reprisal by "higher authorities." We admit to a kind of ink-stained perseverance, and there's the end of it.—Ed.*

#### FELT LIKE A CAGED ANIMAL

Reading the article "Here We Stand," I was prompted to respond. I am a

gay man who wishes to put a face to the homosexual issue. I have pastored Congregational Churches (NACCC) for over 20 years. For 28 years I was married and have one son by that marriage. Four years ago I came out to my wife and have since divorced.

Trying to conform to a straight life took everything I had. I tried. I tried very hard to meet the expectations

*Continued on p.30*

## The NACCC replies to the Alabama/Georgia Association

*The Alabama/Georgia Association's "Here We Stand" statement was addressed jointly to THE CONGREGATIONALIST and the National Association. THE CONGREGATIONALIST responded by publishing the statement. The Rev. Dr. Thomas M. Richard, then executive secretary of the National Association, replied to the Alabama/Georgia Association on behalf of the National Association. His reply, abridged, is here:*

### DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE ALABAMA/GEORGIA ASSOCIATION,

Grace and Peace to you.

First, I want to clear up a misconception in the letter. "The NACCC social Justice workshop," was **not** an NACCC-sponsored workshop. The Washington Gladden Society, formed in 1980 by a number of laypersons and clergy, sponsored the workshop and paid for any expenses that were incurred in providing the space or the program. The Society ... is a Society of individuals, supported by individuals. ...

At the Society's first gathering, the president, Dr. Robin Myers, spoke of the need within our voluntary fellowship for a platform upon which individuals could discuss critical issues facing Christians in the Congregational Way. There was, and still is, no intent to speak for the Association or to take a national position on any of these issues. ...

The attendance at these workshops is open, not just to Society members but any and all. ... I have copied this letter to Rev. Norman Erlendson, who is the Society's current president. I'm sure he would be happy to answer any questions you might have about the organization.

Your second concern was over the article about our member-church in Oshkosh. As you know, we are not

a national Church, we are a national **association** of churches. There is a big difference. Our churches own their facilities, they make decisions about whom they will call as their clergy, and (most importantly) **they decide, as a congregation, what forums, causes, and (in some cases) religious "positions" they will support.** The power and authority to do so, resides entirely in our churches.

We respect that our member-church in Oshkosh is engaged in ministries that for them are theologically and biblically grounded. Our Association does not, nor would we, make any judgment on that biblical interpretation. Individuals and congregations may or may not agree with theirs (or yours), but we have no authority to do so.

I hope this rather long epistle helps clarify the concerns that the Alabama/Georgia Association raised. We want to hear from our State and Regional Associations, and will do our best to respond in a timely and thoughtful manner.

Grace and Peace,

REV. DR. THOMAS M. RICHARD  
*Executive Secretary*

placed on me by the society around me. But I was living a lie, and my life came to a point where I felt like a caged animal. I was not the person God intended for me to be, nor was I being the person he created. My frustration culminated four years ago with this choice: Either I come out or I end my life.

Obviously, I came out.

The Alabama/Georgia Association referenced scripture to support their claim that homosexuality is a sin; oddly enough, they did not quote from the gospels. The reason there is nothing noted from the gospels is because Jesus never mentioned it. There is no word in Aramaic for homosexuality, because it just wasn't that important.

Anti-gay supporters reference Sodom and Gomorrah to support their claims; however, once again, people are misinterpreting scripture. Sodom and Gomorrah had nothing to do with homosexuality. Their sin was the lack of hospitality.

I have a legion of gay friends who don't consider the church because it has been made very clear to them they are not welcome. "Open and affirming" really means, "come to our church, sit in the pew and act straight." This is not a bitter opinion, it is a sad truth from experience.

Has the church been so insensitive that it is allowing millions of people to stay lost simply because it does not like the way they love? Who has the audacity to tell me that I cannot love another man? Don't look at my actions and tell me I'm wrong without also looking at your actions (sound familiar?). After studying the scriptures for over two thousand years, should we not agree with James that faith without works is dead?

I thank the Alabama/Georgia Association for their views so we may have a frank and loving conversation around this issue. I proudly sign my name to this response.

**PASTOR LARRY BERNIER**

*West Warwick, R.I.*

## DON'T BE LIKE THE UCC

Thanks for publishing "Here We Stand." I heartily agree with the thoughtful, Biblical and Christian position of the Alabama/Georgia Association. We need to hear their point of view on behalf of Christ before we succumb to the same unchristian misery foisted on UCC churches.

There are many wonderful Christian people and churches in the UCC. But the sad truth is that when a homosexual minister takes over in the UCC, especially a small church, the church turns away from the gospel of Jesus Christ and becomes preoccupied with the homosexual lifestyle. Some churches have disbanded, torn apart by the relentless pressure from "Open and Affirming" adherents.

The article "Here We Stand," hopefully, will serve, in part, as a warning and guide.

**REV. WARREN R. ANGEL**

*Laguna Woods, Calif.*

## RECONSIDER ANCIENT POSITIONS

The Spirit from time to time leads people of faith (Jesus being not least among them!) to reconsider ancient positions. A prime and pertinent example in our nation's history is

slavery. Defenders of slavery had the weight of biblical evidence on their side; yet Congregationalists took the lead in opposition. ...

It took the Church eighteen hundred years to recognize it had been wrong about slavery. Doesn't it seem possible that it has been mistaken on other matters as well?

It seems to me that homosexuality is one. In the most direct sense, the Bible (including Paul) is overwhelmingly negative; there is no getting around it. The reason seems simple. The Bible's writers had no idea about sexual orientation. It is everywhere assumed that people are innately heterosexual. If they engage in homosexual acts, they are perverting or acting contrary to what they really are.

If, however, as now seems clear, some minority of people is born attracted to the same sex in the way the majority is attracted to the opposite, then acting as if they were heterosexual is what is contrary to nature. Having known women who married men—all nice, sincere Christians—who later came out as gay, and the heartache that caused, I am perplexed that anyone, especially someone concerned for the integrity of the family, can want anyone to pretend to be something they are not.

Sexual orientation is not the only consideration, of course. Sexuality, whether gay or straight, can be used responsibly or irresponsibly, to love or to exploit, as one good gift of creation or as an idol. It is here that the Bible has wisdom to offer, no matter what one's orientation.

**REV. DR. ARLIN LARSON**

*Searsport, Maine*



## SPECIAL REPORT: HURRICANE SANDY

### VENTNOR CITY COMMUNITY CHURCH CLEAN UP

Hurricane Sandy struck the Caribbean, mid-Atlantic, and Northeast in late October 2012, with severe damage in New Jersey and New York. National Association churches in the storm's path helped out neighbors in need while coping with property damage to their own meetinghouses and members' homes and businesses.

In *Bound Brook, N.J.*, the church was mostly spared but took part in the community's recovery, reports Pastor Marisol Ferrer Malloy: "The first major problem was that 98 percent of the town lost power. The second problem was that the power outage went from hours to days and even more than a week for some. This created a food shortage. Thanks the local *ministerium*, we all funneled our donations to one location, the Salvation Army. The SA here is great at getting donations from big companies so we spent a few days with volunteers getting and distributing food."

Other NACCC churches in the region sustained damage: *Ventnor City Community Church, Ventnor City, N.J.*, had water in the basement and other storm damage. *Pilgrim Congregational Church, Warren, N.J.*, had downed trees requiring \$18,000 to cut up and remove. *Oakwood Heights Community Church, Staten Island, N.Y.*, just escaped the 15-foot storm surge, but some members lost their homes.



*Debris floats in standing water in the pantry, above, and a pump drains water from a basement tool room, left, at Ventnor City Community Church.*

Through One Great Hour of Sharing, the NACCC has collected more than \$26,000 for Hurricane Sandy relief, of which more than \$20,000 has been disbursed, going to:

Ventnor City Community Church <i>Ventnor City, N.J.</i>	\$5,791.50
Salvation Army	5,000.00
American Red Cross	5,000.00
Pilgrim Congregational Church <i>Warren, N.J.</i>	2,000.00
Oakwood Heights Community Church <i>Staten Island, N.Y.</i>	1,791.50
First Congregational Church <i>Stonington, Conn.</i>	800.00



*Hurricane Sandy toppled large trees like these at Plymouth Congregational Church, Warren, N.J.*

Continuing needs will be met with the remaining money. These funds are carefully targeted for greatest local benefit. Thank you for being so generous in response to this disaster. Please keep these areas in prayer as the relief effort continues.





## NEWS

### AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE



Visitors from around the globe learn at ECHO's Agricultural Conference.

**Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (Florida)**—ECHO held an Agricultural Conference in December, with 186 delegates from all over the world gathered to share and connect with the ECHO network. Speakers shared topics from commercial apple production in Kazakhstan to child nutrition!

### CONFIRMATION SERVICE



Revs. Teodoro, left, and Harding Stricker lead confirmands at the mission in Jardin America, Argentina.

**Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational (Argentina)**—The mission in Jardin America held a December confirmation service in the mission's chapel. Thirty-two young people were confirmed. Eight who hadn't been baptized before were baptized first. It was a joyful, crowded and very blessed celebration.

### FIRST BABIES BORN

**Mission School of Hope (Cameroon)** in December celebrated the first two babies born in their clinic. They will



Ambou Nkelong Johnson, first boy    Laurentine Obiora Manasse, first girl

soon be receiving a container of medical equipment for their clinic. It has already arrived in port. They now need to get it to their village.

### NEW IMPROVEMENTS IN KENYA

**Happy Life Children's Home (Kenya)** has a new well on the Juju Farm Campus—the mission's property outside of Nairobi. A water tower is being built to hold 10,000 liters of water for periods of electrical outage, when the pumps don't work. A multi-purpose building was completed and dedicated this past summer. It will be used for a worship space, a temporary school for the older children, an indoor play area, and staff quarters. The first of two three-bedroom homes will be completed soon. Each of these two homes will house four or five older children with a foster parent. For more information and photos, go to the Happy Life Web site, [happylifechildrenshome.com](http://happylifechildrenshome.com), or blog, [happylifekenya.blogspot.com](http://happylifekenya.blogspot.com)

### MISSION NEWS FLASH:

**Seafarer's Friend (Massachusetts)** distributed 1,152 ditty bags during the month of December to the seafarers they work with.

They also need hard hats, safety vests and safety glasses. These items are a requirement for mission workers to pass through the ship terminals to go on board the ships. A \$30 gift will purchase one item.

**Morgan Scott Project (Tennessee)** is in conversation with a doctor who wants to start a free medical clinic, one day a week in their area. They are praying that Morgan Scott Project will be chosen as its site.

**Congregational Church of Myanmar (Burma)** has seven graduates from the Bible school who are serving in their mission fields. Another seven graduates are serving in their home churches, and two of them are studying in other countries for M.Div. degrees. Rev. SaDo says, "We were blessed by our graduates as we have seen many fruits in our Mission through their dedication, skills. We thank God."

## NEEDS

### A BUS WANTED

**Fishers of Men (Mexico)** needs a 32-passenger bus for Refuge Ranch, Victor and Julie Zaragoza's adoptive home for abandoned children in central Mexico. Currently they have a 15-passenger van, and it carries 20 of them to and from church and other functions. The bus costs \$13,500, of which \$9,600 has already been raised. To see a funny video illustrating the need, go to [fishersofmenmexico.org](http://fishersofmenmexico.org).



*This 32-passenger bus is needed at Refuge Ranch.*

**Morgan Scott Project (Tennessee)** is collecting seeds for the Good Earth Project. Send seeds for spring planting.

**Indian Trails Mission (Arizona)**—Some churches are in need of repairs. Pastor Emilio is requesting help and prayers.

### TYPHOON RELIEF IN THE PHILIPPINES

**Christian Mission in the Far East (Philippines)**—Rev. Jaime Julian reports, "I have been very busy until now going around to our affected areas bringing relief goods. Sad to say that there are isolated areas that until now has not been reached for any relief. Up to this moment we don't have electricity and water supply. We need to put up manual water system to survive on this great trials. We thank all the people of NACCC in the Missionary Society who continue to support and pray for us. Despite of no celebration for Christmas as usual we want to greet you all a MERRY CHRISTMAS and A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!"

### PRAYER REQUESTS

**Indian Community Fellowship (India)**—Pray for permanent housing for ministry.

Pray for Elba Santana, wife of Rev. Julio Santana of **Bread of Life (Florida)**.

Three buses are still needed for **Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)**.

Banking issues with **Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational (Argentina)**.

**Congregational Church of Myanmar (Burma)**—SaDo's mother's sister passed away.

**Indian Trails (Arizona)**—Pastor Reno Johnson thanks you for healing prayers.

## Thank you for your support!

For more information on any of these missions, or to make a donation, contact Linda Miller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618.

The Missionary Society, NACCC  
PO Box 288, Oak Creek WI 53154

For a complete listing of NACCC Mission Projects, please go to our Web site, [www.naccc.org](http://www.naccc.org), and click on "Missions."

**First Union Congregational Church**  
Quincy, IL

is looking for a full time **SENIOR MINISTER**



Come rekindle our spirit, grow our congregation and light over 180 candles on our next birthday cake.

If you deliver relevant, thought-provoking sermons, embrace the Congregational Way and appreciate an arts-oriented community; contact us.

Send inquiries to [mikehulsen@gmail.com](mailto:mikehulsen@gmail.com)

[www.firstunionchurchquincy.com](http://www.firstunionchurchquincy.com)

We yet have a distance to go to ensure the financial impregnability of this magazine; but the building blocks Joe put in place are serving us well—especially the Editor's Round Table.

Even more are we indebted to Joe Polhemus, however, for what ranks simply as his greatest accomplishment: Establishing the pattern for an intelligent, wide-ranging, professional-quality magazine for our Congregationalist readers.

Well done, old Dutchman. Rest in peace.



LARRY SOMMERS, *Editor*

## ERRATA PRODUCIENDA

We are outraged by improper punctuation, and mortified when it is our own.

In a box on p. 13 of our December issue, the word "church's," a possessive form, appears—not just once but twice—where the plural "churches" should have been used. This is the oft-lamented "greengrocer's apostrophe"—use of the possessive for the plural form, occasionally seen on signs in the produce section, such as "Banana's 49¢/lb."

And we did it in large type.

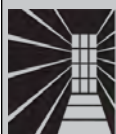
Therefore we must here recant our punctuation in two of the three examples of "church's" that appear in said box; one of the three, however, is correct as printed. We'll let you figure out which.

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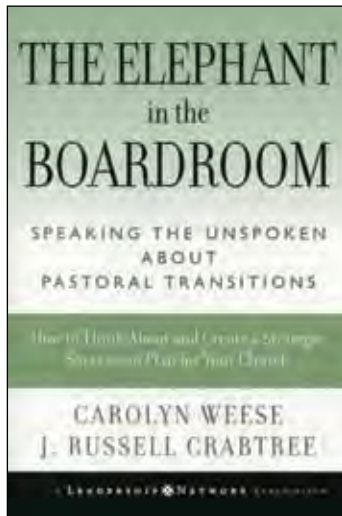
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## Planning for Change Church Cultures and Pastoral Transitions

by Barry Szymanski

Review of *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions*  
by Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree  
Jossey-Bass, 240 pages, \$24.95



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Church transitions take place whether we plan them or not. Change is inevitable, yet often painful. We do not like to let go of the past, even a painful past. And, though we may not admit it, we are terrified of the unknown that the future represents.

*The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions* addresses our fears. The authors, Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, are consultants who have researched many church transitions. Their hope is that congregations will acknowledge their discomfiting pathologies, false hopes, and disquieting anxieties. Their desire is that churches will work to plan for transitions, so that when the unavoidable occurs, the church will keep growing, and not regress.

Weese and Crabtree agree with organizational studies, and with business experts like Peter Drucker, that employees are organizational assets, not accounting liabilities; therefore they endorse quality coaching and competitive compensation packages. This approach is not just for new hires, but essential for existing staff members.

“But we are a church” cannot be an excuse for flouting the rules of basic organizational effectiveness. Jesus appointed twelve apostles to become fishers of men and women. As a church, we are not successful fishers of people’s souls unless we have a competent and as-permanent-as-can-be staff. Losing

staff is costly for every organization, whether for profit or not for profit: Training is expensive; lost relationships are damaging.

The authors promote a team approach and outline in detail the roles of team members. These members work in the culture of the church, and the authors describe four different church cultures that might prevail—each suggesting a different approach to pastoral transitions. Once a church understands its own culture clearly, it can navigate its way through a healthier process in calling a new pastor or employ other key staff members.

A *family culture* church expects its pastor to guide the church as a parental personality. An *icon church* demands that the pastor serve as its living symbolic logo. An *archival culture* expects its pastor to maintain the great historical traditions of the church and continue to render them relevant. A *replication culture* insists that its pastor generate workers. The culture of a church shapes who it calls as a pastor; it may not be served by a pastor whose culture not in accord with its self-imposed structure.

The concept of culture is essential to this book, and the authors have written entire chapters on various cultural approaches and how to work within each. A main goal in planning is to create mission and vision statements—and, for Congregationalists, clear covenantal statements. Do all members understand and accept your church’s covenant? Its mission? Its vision?

Comedians may announce that every family is dysfunctional—and that brings out laughter because it so often rings true—but there is also health in families. And so it is with churches. We are to build upon the health of the church in a transition. It is too easy to be trapped into a belief system of dysfunction.

If we are open to the Holy Spirit, then God will be present. As the authors point out, Jesus did not teach his disciples in a classroom, but took them on the road. The lessons of this book are clear: Be real. The unspoken exists in every organization, including churches; we must approach reality, not in an antiseptic atmosphere, but face-to-face in the authenticity of church life.



**THE REV. BARRY W. SZYMANSKI, J.D.**, minister of pastoral care at First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, was ordained in 2006 but continues to practice business and organizational law, as he has since 1973. He is also a dedicated photographer, whose images sometimes appear in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*.

# Along the Way

News from the fellowship of churches



Anaheim community members gather on the lawn of First Congregational Church to share a Thanksgiving feast.

**A PLAN COMES TOGETHER**—*First Congregational Church of Anaheim, Calif.*, joined with six other churches to feed 200 people a Thanksgiving meal “with all the trimmings” Nov. 17 while also providing Thanksgiving groceries to 125 grateful families, reports **Pastor Jim Schibsted**.

The plan came together quickly after the pastors of all the churches that use the Congregational church’s facilities gathered for a time of sharing and prayer. They decided to launch an effort “to reach out to the community in a practical way,” Schibsted wrote. “There are many people hurting in our own churches as well as in surrounding neighborhoods because of the economic downturn.”

The success of the Thanksgiving community feast has prompted the seven churches to put it on the calendar again for next year.

**STILL HELPING IN NEW ORLEANS**—*Olivet College* sent 16 students to New Orleans for a week in December to continue the work of rebuilding. This was the college’s ninth service trip for Hurricane Katrina relief since the storm struck in 2005. The students were accompanied by the **Rev. Mike Fales**, director of Service Learning and Campus Ministries and **Ian Peters**, the college’s community service coordinator.

**SUPPORTING HABITAT IN BROOKLYN**—*Plymouth Church*, a Congregational church located in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., was honored Jan. 29 by Habitat for Humanity for its continuing support of affordable housing in New

York City. Recipient of the Richard Wong Faith-in-Action Award, Plymouth Church supported the mission of Habitat by volunteering to build homes, participating in advocacy



Anthony Collins Photography, Inc.

*The Rev. David Fisher, senior minister of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, accepts a Habitat for Humanity Builder Award from Rabbi Andy Bachman, senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Elohim, one of Habitat’s faith partners, in recognition of the church’s support of Habitat.*

campaigns, offering financial support, and taking part in special events such as Habitat-NYC’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. build. The **Rev. David Fisher**, senior minister, accepted the award for the church.



Marilyn Danielson

**VISIONING FOR THE FUTURE**—*The Rev. Eric Britcher* leads a retreat for two dozen fellow ministers Jan. 19-20 at St. Francis Retreat Center, DeWitt, Mich. Britcher shared presentation duties with the **Rev. Steven B. Schafer**, Mt. Hope Congregational Church, Livonia, Mich. *The annual event is sponsored by the Michigan Conference Pastoral and Church Relations Committee. “We gather by the fireside to share and learn from one another. It’s priceless!” says the Rev. Marilyn Danielson*, First Congregational Church of Portland, Mich.

## RENEWING THE DREAM



Nancy Trott

On Feb. 10, 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his sermon, "The American Dream," to a full sanctuary at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, N.Y. Plymouth honored the 50th anniversary of the occasion on Feb. 9 with a presentation on the inspiring history of Abolition and civil rights (including a listening session to hear the recording of Dr. King's Plymouth address), plus a community forum on the modern-day fight against human trafficking and slavery. Guest speakers included Brooklyn district attorney **Charles J. Hynes** and executive assistant **D.A. Laura Neubauer**. Shown here, from left: The Rev. **Al Bunis**, event organizer **Lois Rosebrooks**, Hynes, Neubauer, the Rev. **David Fisher** and community liaison **Jennifer Betancourt**.

**PLAN OF UNION**—*Second Congregational Church of Beloit, Wis.*, merged with First Presbyterian of Beloit in a



Carol Taylor

A combined Congregational-Presbyterian congregation sings "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" as they worship on the first Sunday of the new United Church of Beloit, Oct. 28, 2012.

covenanting service Oct. 28, to form the new *United Church of Beloit*. The two urban congregations had been pondering the potential of merger since early 2011. The new church is affiliated with the *Wisconsin Congregational Association* and the NACCC and is a member of the Milwaukee Presbytery, Presbyterian Church USA. **Pastor Doug Gray** and licensed lay minister **Carol Taylor**, pastoral leaders of the former Congregational church, will continue to lead the combined congregation and have been accepted into the Milwaukee Presbytery. The former Presbyterian minister was a contracted interim pastor whose contract expired.



Danny Moore

**A FOND FAREWELL**—NACCC office staff members held a farewell luncheon in Oak Creek, Wis., Jan. 21 for the **Rev. Dr. Tom Richard**, outgoing executive secretary. Standing, from left: **Carrie Dahm**, **Larry Sommers**, **Rebecca Moore**, **Linda Miller**, **Marie Steele**, and **Dan Drea**. Seated, from left: **Courtney Schultz**, **Richard**, the **Rev. Dr. Betsey Mauro**, and NA treasurer **Jeff Dillon**.

### SHARE YOUR DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS!—

The editors of the NACCC Advent and Lent Devotionals are eager to publish brief devotional writings of appropriate length and style in the NA's two widely used annual publications. Contact the **Rev. Dr. Lori Wiley**, [loriwiley7@gmail.com](mailto:loriwiley7@gmail.com), or **Helen Cunningham**, [hc6645@gmail.com](mailto:hc6645@gmail.com), now for simple submission guidelines.

# ■ Necrology

## Onnalee (Lee) Ahrens

Onnalee J. Ahrens, Warren, Mich., passed away on Sept. 13, 2012. She was born in Cleveland, Ohio, Sept. 9, 1929, and was married to William (Bill) Ahrens for 63 years. She was the mother of two (sons), grandmother of eight and great-grandmother of four.



An active member of First Congregational Church of Royal Oak, Mich., Lee took part in all levels of Congregational fellowship, including the Southeastern Michigan Association of Congregational Churches; the Southeastern Women's Association, Michigan Conference of Congregational Christian Churches (Executive Committee); the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches; and the International Congregational Fellowship. She attended 40 Annual Meetings of the National Association, served on its Nominating Committee, and was the 2006 recipient of the Donna Alexander Award. She attended quadrennial conferences of the ICF in Wales, Massachusetts, the Netherlands, California, and England.

She was also a devoted member of the Order of Eastern Star and the P.E.O. Sisterhood, a philanthropic organization providing scholarships for women. She enjoyed league bowling—posting a 225 game and at least two 500 series—as well as golf, camping, travel, photography, contract bridge, reading, and (for awhile) knitting.

“Lee stayed involved,” says her husband, Bill.

## Joseph B. Polhemus

Joseph Burton Polhemus Jr., 94, died Feb. 6 in Mansfield, Ohio, after a long illness. He grew up on a farm in the Spoon River village of Fairview, Ill. With a 1940 journalism degree from the University of Illinois, he worked for United Press International in Chicago, and later in Milwaukee, where he met and married his first wife, Berenice Elizabeth (Woodward) Polhemus in 1942. He spent World War II as a military public relations officer at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. After the war he worked

as a senior writer for the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, then joined the Ohio Brass Company in 1950, retiring in 1984 as manager of communications.

Joe was an active member of First Congregational Church of Mansfield. He led the fund drive that paid for its chapel and retreat site at Hemlock Falls and the missions board that founded a medical clinic in South India.

He served the NACCC on the Missionary Society, the Executive Committee, the Financial Stewardship Committee, and the Program Committee for the 1992 Annual Meeting. But his greatest service came as editor of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, a post he held for 15 years, from 1989 to 2004. He was the recipient of an Annual Meeting Citation in 1996; his editorials were collected in a book called *From the Editor: 15 Years of Comment in THE CONGREGATIONALIST*; and the Congregational Foundation established the Polhemus Fund in his honor as an endowment for the magazine.



Joe was active in his community, leading the Richland County Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Mansfield Richland County Public Library, the Richland Community Service Center, Richland County Transit, Ranchwood PTA, Woodland Club, Kiwanis Club and Hermit Club. He was proudest of presiding over the 1976 Bicentennial Parade, and the dedication of the remodeled Mansfield Richland County Public Library in 1979.

He enjoyed reading, especially history, followed sports of all forms, and played tennis into his eighties.

He is survived by his wife, Sophie M. (Crittenden) Polhemus; his daughter, Ellen and son-in-law, Edwin Stiffler Jr., of Mansfield; three stepsons and their wives, 14 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife of 56 years, Berenice Polhemus; his son, John R. Polhemus; and his stepdaughter, Laura A. Crittenden.

Contributions may be made to the Joseph B. Polhemus Fund, c/o NACCC, 8473 S. Howell Ave., Oak Creek, WI 53154; or to Hospice of North Central Ohio, 371 Cline Avenue, Mansfield, OH 44907.

# Pastorates and Pulpits

## RECENT CALLS

Carmel Union Congregational Church of Carmel, Maine, has called the Rev. Mark Rustin as senior minister.

Pilgrim Congregational Church of Green Bay, Wis., has called the Rev. Mark McAnlis as senior minister.

First Congregational Church of Clarkston, Mich., has called the Rev. Matthew Webster as senior minister.

## IN SEARCH

### SENIOR MINISTERS

Baleville Congregational Christian Church  
*Newton, N.J.*

Berkshire Community Church  
*Pittsfield, Mass.*

Bethany Union Church  
*Chicago, Ill.*

Britton Congregational Christian Church  
*Britton, Mich.*

Community of Faith and Fellowship  
*Limerick, Maine*

Congregational Church of the Chimes  
*Sherman Oaks, Calif.*

First Church of Squantum  
*Squantum, Mass.*

First Congregational Church  
*Durand, Mich.*

First Congregational Church  
*Otsego, Mich.*

First Congregational Church of Kenosha  
*Kenosha, Wis.*

First Congregational Community Church  
*Roscoe, Ill.*

First Union Congregational Church  
*Quincy, Ill.*

Hampshire Colony Congregational Church  
*Princeton, Ill.*

Ingle Chapel Congregational Church  
*Milton-Freewater, Ore.*

Lakewood Village Community Church  
*Long Beach, Calif.*

St. Luke's Reformed Church  
*Salisbury, N.C.*

## ASSISTANT MINISTER

West Gorham Union Church  
*Gorham, Maine*

## PART-TIME MINISTERS

Congregational Christian Fellowship Church  
*Winchester, Va.*

Second Congregational Church  
*Jewett City, Conn.*

## DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

First Congregational Church  
*Kingston, N.H.*

# Calendar

April 8-11

Annual Ministers Convocation  
—Mundelein, Illinois

Contact Marie Steele, [msteele@nacc.org](mailto:msteele@nacc.org)  
or 800-262-1620, ext. 1614.

April 22

General copy deadline for  
THE CONGREGATIONALIST June 2013 issue

Contact Larry Sommers, [larrysommers@gmail.com](mailto:larrysommers@gmail.com)  
or 608-238-7731.

June 20-27

Short-term Mission Experience  
—Misión Mazahua, Mexico

Contact Jack Brown, [pilgrim\\_pastor@hotmail.com](mailto:pilgrim_pastor@hotmail.com)  
or 269-749-2631

June 22-25

NACCC 59th Annual Meeting and Conference  
—Orlando, Florida

[nacc.org/yearbook/annualmeeting\\_2013.aspx](http://nacc.org/yearbook/annualmeeting_2013.aspx)

June 22-26

NAPF/HOPE Youth Conference—Orlando, Florida  
[nacc.org/CMSUploads/1102\\_2013\\_NAPF\\_HOPE\\_Info\\_Reg\\_Schol.pdf](http://nacc.org/CMSUploads/1102_2013_NAPF_HOPE_Info_Reg_Schol.pdf)

July 29-Aug. 2

International Congregational Fellowship Conference  
—London, UK

[intercong.org/conference-information/the-2013-conference/](http://intercong.org/conference-information/the-2013-conference/)

Aug. 3-13

CFTS British Seminar  
—United Kingdom and the Netherlands

Contact Betsey Mauro, [bmauro@nacc.org](mailto:bmauro@nacc.org), or 800-262-1620, ext. 1613.