

Today and Tomorrow' stained-glass window by Richard Marks, North Congregational Church, Farmington Hills, Mich. Photo by Mary Biedron

## WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Jesus responded to the question with a powerful answer: Every one of God's children is my neighbor.

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Next June we, as Congregationalists from across the country, will meet in Detroit/Dearborn for our annual National Meeting and Conference, hosted by the Southeastern Michigan Association.

We will see a great American city rising from the ashes to be reborn and renewed. We will discover the beauty and importance of inter-faith cooperation, love, and respect. We will have the opportunity to enjoy the many attractions of Southeast Michigan like the amazing Greenfield Village, Motown Hitsville USA, First Congregational's Underground Railroad, and so much more.

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### 2016 NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference

June 25-28 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Detroit/Dearborn

**Bible Lecturer:** The Rev. Dr. Stephen Butler Murray,  
President of Detroit's Ecumenical Theological Seminary.

**The Congregational Lecturer:** The Rev. William C. Lange

# The CONGREGATIONALIST

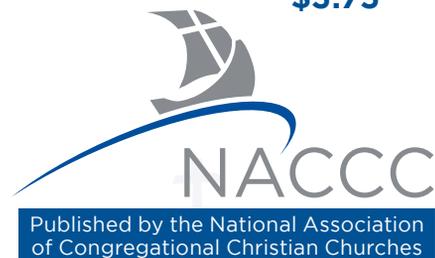
Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

VOL. 168/NO. 1

CONGREGATIONALIST.ORG

MARCH 2016

\$3.75



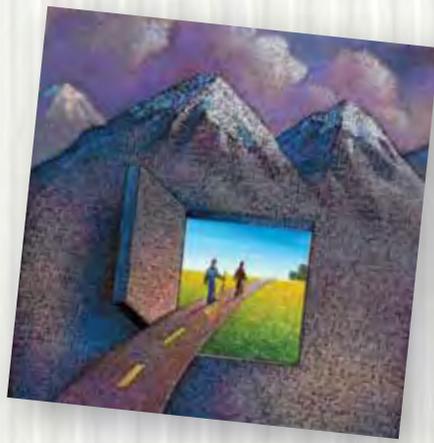
**CALVIN**  
IN OUR  
**DNA?**

**DETROIT**  
MEETING

**EASTER**  
REFLECTIONS

**ANTI-SLAVERY**  
**RALLY**

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# “I’M A PASTOR, NOT A FINANCIAL PLANNER. THANKFULLY, MY *benefits consultant understands me.*”

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## Horace Bushnell (1802-1876)

The fact that many people regard Congregationalism as a theologically liberal movement, even though it began as quite the opposite, is due largely to a few of our nineteenth-century leaders. One of these was Horace Bushnell. Professor James Sawyer calls him the “American Congregational minister recognized as the father of American theological liberalism.”<sup>1</sup> Born in 1802, Bushnell intended to be a lawyer until he was converted to faith in Jesus. (Mark Noll writes, “Bushnell was converted in part through the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s writings.”<sup>2</sup> Many of you know Coleridge as an English Romantic poet and friend of William Wordsworth. You may not know that, despite their youthful radicalism and rejection of Christianity, both Wordsworth and Coleridge became strong Christians in their later years, and Coleridge even became an ordained minister.)

Bushnell studied at Yale Divinity School, and for more than a quarter of a century he was pastor of North Church in Hartford, Connecticut. Beginning with the idea that all language at its base is metaphorical and poetic, Bushnell taught that all statements concerning Christian doctrine were relative in nature, so that no one ought to try to convince anyone else of the literal truth of any teaching through the inadequate vehicle of human language.

Apparently, Bushnell’s relativism was not all-encompassing. In 1847, he spoke about the dangers facing Congregational churches at the time, naming one of those dangers as what he called “Romanism”—in other words, Roman Catholicism. John von Rohr comments, “Burgeoning immigration was bringing new Catholic inhabitants, and the Roman Church was viewed as an autocratic power seeking domination in the New World.”<sup>3</sup> In Bushnell’s mind, this was the main reason that Americans ought to establish and support public schools, as an antidote to what was considered the harmful influence of Catholic parochial schools.

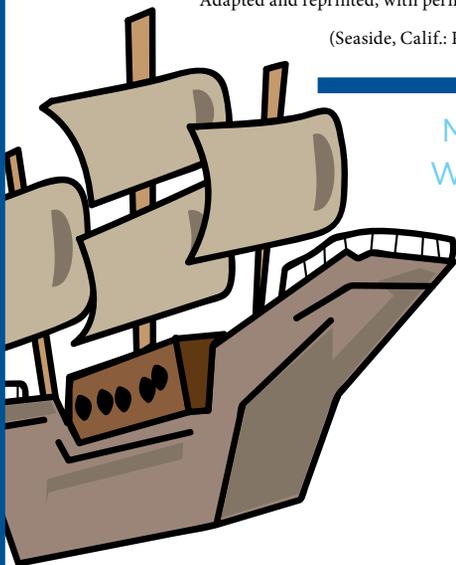
1 M. James Sawyer, *Biographies of Theologians Significant in Doctrinal Development* (San Jose: By the author, 1996), 20.

2 Mark A. Noll, “Bushnell, Horace,” in *Elwell*, 181.

3 Von Rohr, 266.

Adapted and reprinted, with permission, from *The Congregational Minute*, by Robert Hellam

(Seaside, Calif.: Robert Hellam, 2012)



My own experience is that the Bible is dull when I am dull. When I am really alive, and set in upon the text with a tidal pressure of living affinities, it opens, it multiplies discoveries, and reveals depths even faster than I can note them. The worldly spirit shuts the Bible; the Spirit of God makes it a fire, flaming out all meanings and glorious truths.

**HORACE BUSHNELL**

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CONGREGATIONALIST.ORG

MARCH 2016



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# EDITORIAL STATEMENT

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Neither *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* nor the National Association has a creed or holds positions on social or theological issues; but we recognize the authority of each local church to do so for itself, if and as it wishes, and we encourage thoughtful and respectful discussion of our agreements and differences.

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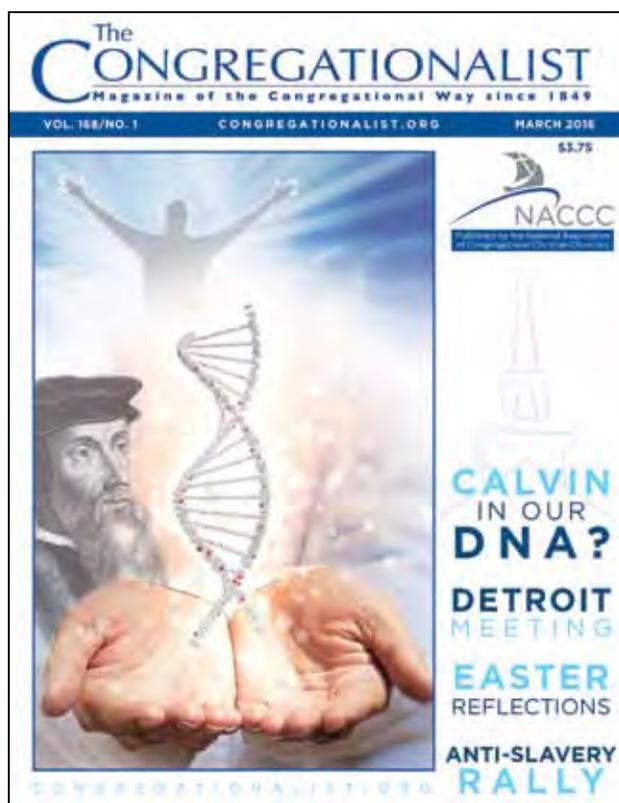
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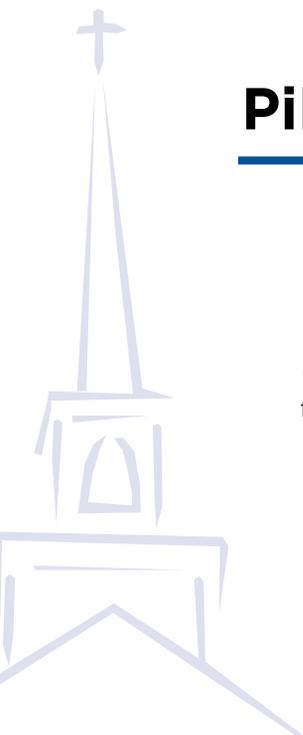
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#### ON THE COVER:

Vestiges of John Calvin can be found in the Congregational Way. See p. 8



## Pilgrims and Easter

by Michael Chittum

According to the conclusions of the website, [MayflowerHistory.com](http://MayflowerHistory.com) (as accessed on January 17, 2016), the faithful pilgrims who were our spiritual forebears, did not observe the celebration of any holy days besides the observance of a faithful keeping of the Sabbath. We can read this conclusion there:

### Holy Days and Religious Holidays.

The Pilgrims faithfully observed the Sabbath, and did not work on Sunday. Even when the Pilgrims were exploring Cape Cod, they stopped everything and stayed in camp on Sunday to keep the Sabbath. The Pilgrims did not celebrate Christmas and Easter. They believed that these holidays were invented by man to memorialize Jesus, and are not prescribed by the Bible or celebrated by the early Christian churches, and therefore cannot be considered Holy days. "It seems too much for any mortal man to appoint, or make an anniversary memorial [for Christ]," taught the Pilgrims' pastor John Robinson. The book *Perth Assembly* (Leiden, 1618)--the book that got Elder William Brewster into such hot water with the King of England and ultimately resulted in the confiscation of his printing press--was largely about the rejection of Christmas and other appointed "Holy Days."

In the words of Brewster himself, from the book referenced in the quote above, he spent over 10,000 words and 25 pages to combat those who argued such religious holidays, as Christmas or Easter, should be kept. Brewster wrote:

Socrates in his History sayeth, I am of opinion, that as many other things crept in of custome in sundry places, so the feast of Easter to have prevailed among all people of a certain private custome and observation: insomuch that not one of the Apostles hath anywhere prescribed so much as one rule of it to any man. The successe & event hath manifestly declared unto the world, that of old it was observed, not of Canon, but of custome.

That is, I conclude Brewster was arguing here: Yes, some people have observed Easter, but it was only because of private custom and not the rule of scripture. Therefore, if one is really concerned about following scripture, one will refrain from the practice.

I, for one, am glad that we, in the modern church, have turned our back on this stance of the Pilgrims. I join with you all as we proclaim, "Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!" HAPPY EASTER!

Grace and Peace, Michael



**MICHAEL CHITTUM**  
*Executive Director*

## ARVEL M. STEECE

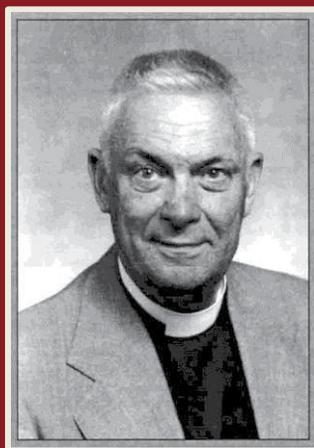
1921-2015

Arvel was...a bright light in Congregationalism and will be dearly missed.

Elizabeth Mauro

I stood in awe of him, always. He spoke with learned authority while eloquently championing the Congregational Way. I'm grateful to have lived in his time.

Jim Hopkins



Arvel M. Steece was a treasure and a great friend of the Congregational Library & Archives. He genuinely loved this place and we remember him with fondness and gratitude.

Peggy Bendroth

Dr. Steece was generous with his vast knowledge of resources....I couldn't have completed my CFTS paper without him!

Mimi Bierdron

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# JOHN CALVIN IS IN OUR DNA:

## *Five Inherited Characteristics*

*By Arlin T. Larson*



*John Calvin*

istock.com/Georgios Art

For \$99, one can order a personal DNA test that promises to reveal ethnicity, unknown relatives, and inherited characteristics. However, ordering such a test causes a certain amount of trepidation. What if disreputable ancestors or genetic abnormalities are discovered?

For some time, I have been feeling a need to examine our Congregational DNA for traces of the French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564), a progenitor now often regarded as disreputable or embarrassing. How closely related are we?

Even by his detractors, Calvin is recognized as one of two archetypal figures of the Protestant Reformation. The first English Protestants (Puritans) all learned their religion from him. They read his works, corresponded with him, studied with him in Geneva, were given sanctuary by him when they were persecuted, and published the first complete English language Bible, the aptly named Geneva Bible, under his protection, not to mention adopting distinctively Calvinistic statements of faith.

### **LEAVING CALVIN BEHIND**

Nevertheless, the story of Congregationalism that's usually told begins later with English figures of the 1580's like Robert Browne, Henry Barrow, and John



Robinson, leaders of the Separatists (our Pilgrims) rebelling against the nascent Church of England. If Calvin is mentioned at all, it is as an aside: “Oh, and by the way, they also happened to be Calvinists.”

Then, once the Mayflower has taken them to America, we hear about Congregationalists quietly divesting themselves of Calvinism as revivals spread during the Great Awakenings, and Rationalists formed the American Unitarian Association (1825). Why? For all their differences, Revivalists, such as Charles Finney, and Rationalists, such as William Ellery Channing, had a similar problem with Calvin – his idea of “double predestination.” This is the idea, and a central one to Calvin, that before a person is born, God foreordains them to love good, guaranteeing eternal blessedness, or to love evil and be destined for eternal damnation.

All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.21.5)<sup>1</sup>

Revivalists objected to the idea of predestination because if one is predestined, it does not matter whether, how often, or in what manner the Gospel is presented. One is simply not able to choose a path other than the one that is one’s fate. For that reason, the notion of human “ability” became the center of intense theological debate. Its triumph in Finney’s time represented the end of strict Calvinism in mainstream Congregationalism.

Unitarians, the liberal Congregationalists of that day, had a different emphasis. To them, Calvin’s God seemed simply immoral. How could a good and loving God, which Calvin also affirmed, relegate a large portion of humanity to eternal damnation?

It is plain, that, were a human parent to form himself on the universal Father, as described by Calvinism, that is, were he to bring his children into life totally depraved, and then to pursue them with endless punishment, we should charge him with a cruelty not surpassed in the annals of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the scientific revolution being well underway, Rationalists could not accept Calvin’s idea that God intentionally orchestrates every single event, natural and human, specifically to reward, punish, or test his human creatures. This was

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1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge. Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2012.

2 William Ellery Channing, “The Moral Argument against Calvinism,” 1820, [www.historytools.org](http://www.historytools.org)

Calvin's doctrine of "special providence," also critical in his estimation, which asserted that "all the changes which take place in the world are produced by the secret agency of the hand of God." (1.16.9)

Nevertheless, there is even more to our ambivalence towards Calvin. As modern Christians, we are, for our own reasons, reluctant to associate ourselves with anything "Puritanical." We think of *Scarlett Letters* and Witch Trials, Prudery and the Stocks, Temperance Crusaders, Church Trials and Excommunications. We reassure others and ourselves that "That's not what we Congregationalists are like anymore!" The estrangement between Congregational generations is beautifully illustrated in Marilynne Robinson's novel, *Gilead* (which, like her other novels, is permeated with Calvinistic themes & allusions).

### **BUT DID WE REALLY?**

Being of the same Puritan-leery upbringing as most, it is only recently that I asked myself, "Well, if Calvin was so backwards, intolerant, negative, and generally objectionable, what attracted people to him in the first place? How did he become the inspiration for one of the world's greatest religious revolutions?"

In this case, it is not physical DNA we need to examine but intellectual, seminal ideas that may have mutated over time but which provided a foundation for the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps they affect us more today than we usually realize. Fortunately, Calvin was a prolific writer who gathered his ideas together in his massive *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Just a warning -- in spite of Calvin's intention to make himself clear, deciphering the Calvinistic genome is definitely not for the faint of heart. It is well organized but replete with allusions to scripture and classical authors (especially Plato & Augustine), lengthy expositions of bad ideas as well as good, and self-consciously exaggerated denigrations of the human condition as "wicked, distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous." (2.5.19) Nevertheless, if one perseveres, powerful clusters of seminal thoughts begin to emerge.

### **FIVE INHERITED CALVINISTIC CHARACTERISTICS**

In my investigation, I discovered five Calvinistic traits that remain at the heart of contemporary Congregationalism.

#### **I. Faith is a Direct Relationship Between God and the Individual.**

Let us begin with the central insight that proved revolutionary. It required Calvin to re-write the book on Christian faith completely. In the inherited view, one's relationship to God depended on one's relationship, good standing, to the

institution of the Church. The Church, as represented by the papacy, was thought of as God's essential stand-in on earth, "the Reign of Christ already present in mystery."<sup>3</sup> Calvin demotes the Church to a secondary position as a "help" in facilitating a divine-human relationship that is inherent in being human.

Man excelled in . . . noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and Judgment, not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled him to rise up to God and eternal happiness. (1.15.8)

God, in accommodation to our [post-Adam's Fall] infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the Church. (4.1.1)

Faith [however] consists in the knowledge of God and Christ (John 17:3), not in reverence for the Church. (3.2.3)

This insight made it possible to think in terms of churches as local associations of believers in which all are equal in the sight of God. Special leadership positions, such as preachers, teachers, and deacons, become functional roles rather than differences in inherent spiritual worth or authority. Small gatherings, the "two or three," become as authoritative as major church councils.

The Congregational practice of privileging covenants over creeds, as well as suspicion of central authority, reflects this insistence on the freedom and independence of believers. Today, we might bemoan the current trend toward "spiritual but not religious," but the seeds of de-coupling personal faith from institutional religion were planted (unintentionally) by Calvin!

## II. A Church is Where Two or Three People Gather in Christ's Name.

The view of the Church Calvin opposed was that, as an earthly phenomenon, it was a monolithic society originating in Christ's call to the kingdom of God and continuing under the leadership of Christ's chosen successors, beginning with Peter. Local churches had validity only as subunits of the Universal Church and were in every way subject to its authority.

Calvin's idea was that a church is formed when believers gather in Christ's name, recognizing him as the only true leader through preaching and sacrament.

Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has

*This insight made it possible to think in terms of churches as local associations of believers in which all are equal in the sight of God.*

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3 Catechism of the Catholic Church, #765. Doubleday, 1995.

some existence, since his promise cannot fail, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt. 18:20) (4.1.9).

Calvin is often thought of as the father of Presbyterianism because of his Consistory, which governed Geneva’s moral and spiritual life. It was comprised of the Company of Pastors and lay Elders recommended by the civil government, which in turn enforced its decisions. In the Institutes, however, Calvin is generally indifferent to the external form a church takes and appeals several times to Matthew 18:20’s “where two or three are gathered.”

For he who promises to grant whatsoever two or three assembled in his name shall ask (Mt. 18:20), declares, that he by no means despises the prayers which are publicly offered up... (3.20.30)

If we consult Scripture on the authority of councils, there is no promise more remarkable than that which is contained in these words of our Saviour, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But this is just as applicable to any particular meeting as to a universal council. (4.9.2)

In this way [the Church Universal] comprehends single churches, which exist in different towns and villages, according to the wants of human society, so that each of them justly obtains the name and authority of the Church. . . . (4.1.9)

### III. Scripture is the Ultimate Authority.

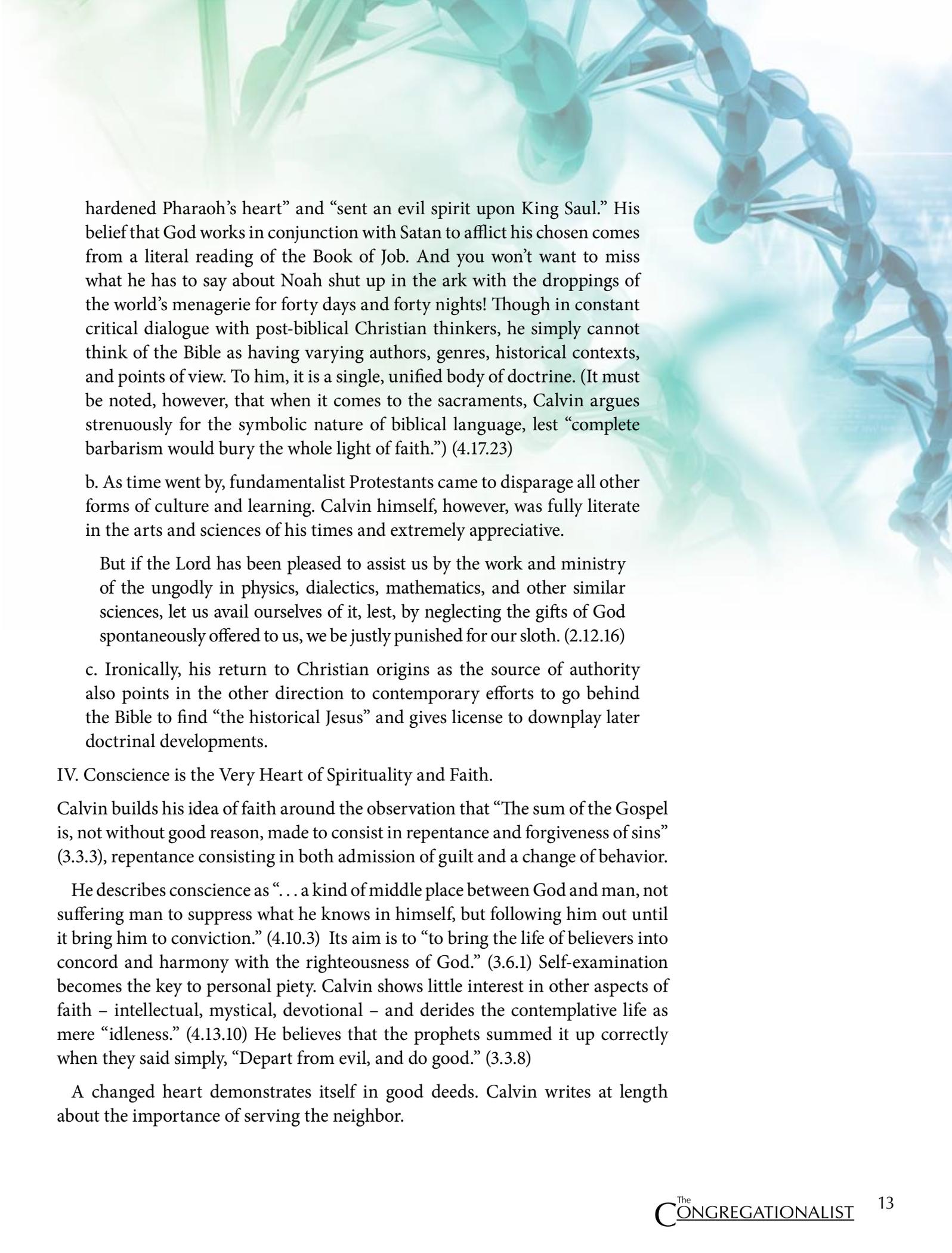
Having dethroned the Church, Calvin elevates Scripture, no longer thought of as a product of the Church (and therefore subject to emendation) but as a heaven-sent, objective, unchanging embodiment of the divine Word.

But since no daily responses are [now] given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them. (1.7.1)

Three consequences of the newly elevated position of Scripture bear mentioning.

a. It committed Calvin to a biblical literalism that is as much the source of his weaknesses as it is of his strengths. For example, his notion of “double predestination” appeals to Old Testament passages asserting that “God

*Calvin argues strenuously for the symbolic nature of biblical language, lest “complete barbarism would bury this whole light of faith.”*



hardened Pharaoh's heart" and "sent an evil spirit upon King Saul." His belief that God works in conjunction with Satan to afflict his chosen comes from a literal reading of the Book of Job. And you won't want to miss what he has to say about Noah shut up in the ark with the droppings of the world's menagerie for forty days and forty nights! Though in constant critical dialogue with post-biblical Christian thinkers, he simply cannot think of the Bible as having varying authors, genres, historical contexts, and points of view. To him, it is a single, unified body of doctrine. (It must be noted, however, that when it comes to the sacraments, Calvin argues strenuously for the symbolic nature of biblical language, lest "complete barbarism would bury the whole light of faith.") (4.17.23)

b. As time went by, fundamentalist Protestants came to disparage all other forms of culture and learning. Calvin himself, however, was fully literate in the arts and sciences of his times and extremely appreciative.

But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the work and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics, mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly punished for our sloth. (2.12.16)

c. Ironically, his return to Christian origins as the source of authority also points in the other direction to contemporary efforts to go behind the Bible to find "the historical Jesus" and gives license to downplay later doctrinal developments.

#### IV. Conscience is the Very Heart of Spirituality and Faith.

Calvin builds his idea of faith around the observation that "The sum of the Gospel is, not without good reason, made to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins" (3.3.3), repentance consisting in both admission of guilt and a change of behavior.

He describes conscience as "... a kind of middle place between God and man, not suffering man to suppress what he knows in himself, but following him out until it bring him to conviction." (4.10.3) Its aim is to "to bring the life of believers into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God." (3.6.1) Self-examination becomes the key to personal piety. Calvin shows little interest in other aspects of faith – intellectual, mystical, devotional – and derides the contemplative life as mere "idleness." (4.13.10) He believes that the prophets summed it up correctly when they said simply, "Depart from evil, and do good." (3.3.8)

A changed heart demonstrates itself in good deeds. Calvin writes at length about the importance of serving the neighbor.

But I say that the whole human race, without exception, are to be embraced with one feeling of charity: that here there is no distinction of Greek or Barbarian, worthy or unworthy, friend or foe, since all are to be viewed not in themselves, but in God. (2.8.55)

To this we may add, that the Lord, well knowing that none of our good deeds can reach him (as the Psalmist declares, Psalm 16:2), does not demand from us duties towards himself, but exercises us in good works towards our neighbour. (2.8.53)

Congregationalism was always an activistic religion. As important as reforming oneself was reforming one's neighbor and society. Beginning with attempts to establish a biblical commonwealth in New England, Congregationalists led in the formation of private charitable and reform efforts, from colleges, to schools for the deaf, to abolition, temperance and so forth. They also, now to our embarrassment, followed Calvin's dictate to "to exhort and admonish from house to house." (4.12.2)

Of the successors to New England Congregationalism, the United Church of Christ has most clearly embraced the activistic impulse. So have Unitarian/Universalists, even while setting aside their Christian identification. The National Association rejects collective social activism as conflicting with the above principle of the sanctity of conscience. Still, it remains a practical religion emphasizing the duty of fellowship among Christians over dogmatic, liturgical, pietistic, or revivalistic concerns.

#### V. Preaching is Primarily in Worship.

One of the most dramatic changes of Reformed Protestantism was the removal of the Lord's Supper, the Catholic Mass, from the center of worship. Pride of place was instead awarded to the written Word as explicated in the sermon. The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were now understood more as concessions to our earthly weakness – the one as initiation, the other as ongoing spiritual nourishment.

Sacraments, therefore, are exercises which confirm our faith in the word of God; and because we are carnal, they are exhibited under carnal objects, that thus they may train us in accommodation to our sluggish capacity, just as nurses lead children by the hand. (4.14.6)

[A] sacrament consists of the word and the external sign. By the word we ought to understand not one which, muttered without meaning and without faith, by its sound merely, as by a magical incantation, has the effect of consecrating the element, but one which, preached, makes us understand what the visible sign means. (4.14.4)

Today, Calvin's description of "pure preaching" now seems quite narrow. It is explication of Scripture, a heaven-sent text that brooks no "proof or argument." At core is the doctrine that "Christ died that he might bear our curse upon the tree, that he might expiate our sins by the sacrifice of his body, wash them in his blood, and, in short, reconcile us to God the Father." (1.11.7) Today, we recognize this doctrine as the Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement deriving from the Middle Ages. Calvin, however, took it as self-evidently biblical, as he does the underlying picture of an angry, punishing God.

For the most part, Congregationalism has parted from Calvin on those points. Yet, the priority of biblically-based preaching remains. Calvin himself affirms the ultimate unity of the unwritten word manifest to reason in nature, the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ, the moral law given in the Old Testament, and the gospel proclaimed in the New. Contemporary preachers explore the same realms, now with the greater freedom provided by recognizing the historically conditioned nature of Scripture.

## CONCLUSION

Calvin had other good ideas too. He rehabilitates Paul as being at least the equal of Peter. He is keenly attuned to the immense suffering meted out by nature, society, and human wickedness. While supportive of government in general, he speaks of a right and duty to resist when it contravenes God's will. He respects the value of Judaism as a genuine work of redemption. He celebrates the wonders of humankind's natural intellectual and moral powers (even if turning quickly to their distortions). He derives positive duties even from negative commandments – for example, the commandment not to kill implies a duty to enhance human life as well as refrain from destroying it. While morally strenuous, he recognizes the universality of human weakness and the consequent need for compassion.

The revolutionary paradigm of Protestantism was given its clearest and fullest expression by Calvin. Faith as a direct relationship to God, church as the gathering of believers, Scripture as the primary authority, conscience as the spiritual focal point, and preaching as the center of worship. We no longer call ourselves Calvinists, but in these ways, we definitely are his heirs.



*THE REV. DR. ARLIN T. LARSON is the principal author of the NACCC's **Misconduct in Ministry** handbook. During his 40-year career as a pastor, campus minister, teacher and college administrator, he has worked as a volunteer and board member for numerous social agencies, including a treatment program for victims of child sexual abuse. Rev. Larson and his wife, Sharon, live in Belfast, Maine, where he is secretary of the area interfaith clergy association.*

*by Michael Chittum*

# *An Easter Reflection*

*In the opening of Anne Lamott's book, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*, she includes a poem by Liesl Müller entitled *Monet Refuses The Operation*. The poem is a response by the artist in rejecting the advice of a doctor who wants to "correct" the problems of his faulty eyesight, his vision.*

---

Monet had a vision of glory for himself. He saw things differently than we would. If he had not translated that vision into his paintings, no one would even have an inkling of the glories of his vision. But, if, like the Doctor in the poem, you not only could not see it, but you also refused even to acknowledge its existence, then you could not fully understand Monet, his heart, his art, and his world.

When I first read the poem some years ago, I immediately thought about Easter, specifically about the women at the tomb and the other disciples after the resurrection. Those women who were the first to arrive at the empty tomb and then the disciples had a vision of the glory of the power of God and of the resurrected Jesus. This teacher whom they knew and who had died was now raised from the dead. Seeing this, the world changed for them forever.



Now, I can imagine the women at the tomb trying to tell someone else about what they saw and what they did not find in the tomb only to be dismissed as hysterical women who knew nothing. I can imagine the disciples who had talked with the risen Christ trying to share what they saw with others who could not see it and who even refused to acknowledge the existence of this new reality and failing. The empty tomb and the appearances of the resurrected Jesus altered their world. And, just like Monet, what they saw, defined a new reality for their world and existence.

And so it is for us. We have caught a glimpse of the vision of the resurrected Jesus the women and the other disciples saw. This vision of faith has changed our lives and our world. We know the world has now been transformed and looks different. Should someone attempt to alter our vision of this transformed reality, we, like Monet, would reject it.

Because we have this new vision of glory, there are things that should now be true of us. Our lives should show to the world that we are followers of this Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Thus, we should live as if the grace and mercy of God for us and for all people were true. Thus, we should “love our neighbor as ourselves” and even “love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.” Thus, we should seek to “store up for ourselves treasures in heaven” and not just on earth. Thus, we should remember that whatever we do, or do not do, “unto the least of these” we do for him.

This vision of the resurrected Jesus is meant to transform us and to change the world. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

*This teacher whom  
they knew and  
who had died  
was now raised  
from the dead.  
Seeing this, the  
world changed for  
them forever.*



**REV. DR. MICHAEL CHITTUM** is Executive Director of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. He served as senior minister of the First Congregational Church of Salt Lake City from 2008 until 2015. He received his B.S. degree from the University of Tennessee and his M.Div. and a Ph.D. from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.



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## LOOKING FOR A WAY TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONGREGATIONAL FOUNDATION?

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### HERE'S GOOD NEWS . . . .

Congress has permanently extended a tax-advantaged giving opportunity. Under this law, qualified individuals can make gifts of up to \$100,000 directly from their IRA account to one or more qualified charities WITHOUT paying federal income tax on the withdrawal. The extension was made retroactive to January 1, 2015.

Here are the specifics:

- Donors must be age 70½ or older at the time the gift is made.
- Only traditional IRAs are eligible.
- Donors must request a direct transfer of their funds from their plan administrator to a qualified public charity. It is important NOT to withdraw the funds prior to the gift.
- Gifts cannot be made to a private foundation or to a donor advised fund.
- Gifts cannot be used to fund a gift annuity or charitable remainder trust.
- Each donor may give up to \$100,000 per year. For couples, each spouse can give up to \$100,000.
- Distributions made under this law can be used to satisfy the donor's required minimum distribution (RMD). The rollover allows for a charitable gift to fulfill the RMD – WITHOUT adding to tax liability.

To make a gift to the Congregational Foundation from an IRA, first contact Dan Drea, the Foundation's CFO, at 414-764-1620, ext. 1616 for the Foundation's tax ID number and routing instructions, then contact your plan administrator and request a direct Qualified Charitable Distribution from the IRA to the Congregational Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization.

**Sample forms to be used for this and more information are available at the NACCC office in Oak Creek.**

# NAPF/HOPE

June 26th - July 1st 2016



## This year we're heading to Detroit!

The city has been hit hard in the past few years. Its population has dropped over 25% in a very short time. Poverty is at an all-time high.

There is no shortage of work that can be done.

We will help provide food and clothing for the poor, restore beauty to forgotten public areas, share God's love in parks and schools, and participate in home renovation.

**Enjoy worship, speakers, small group time, leadership and FUN!**

**REGISTER NOW!**

**Early Registration Deadline: March 1, 2016  
Cost: \$555**

**Find Registration and Scholarship Applications online at [naccc.org](http://naccc.org)**

## UNDERGROUND RAILROAD BUS TOUR



**Detroit/Canada • June 23, 2016 • 9:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Flight to Freedom Tour is a "story-telling" re-enactment of the original Underground Railroad passage that operated between 1840 and 1863.

Visitors will be "shackled" with wrist bands at the start of the tour and enter through the "Door of No Return" on Goree Island, Africa.

Then it's a Louisiana plantation, the point at which your journey to freedom begins.

Passengers hide from bounty hunters, cross the Ohio "Deep" River, and take refuge in a safe house in Indiana.

From there you will journey "Midnight," code name for Detroit, where you will find safe haven at the First Congregational Church of Detroit. Then on to freedom in Canada.

**Early bookings (by May 15): \$100 per person**

**Late bookings (May 16-June 1): \$125 per person**

**NOTE: This tour is not part of the Annual Meeting registration.  
To book and pay for the tour contact:**

Jan Lossing: Call (313) 831-4080 • Fax (313) 831-1567  
Email [ugrrproject2008@gmail.com](mailto:ugrrproject2008@gmail.com)

Or mail form and payment to:

First Congregational Church of Detroit  
33 East Forest Avenue • Detroit, Michigan 48201

**The bus will provide transportation from and back to the Doubletree Hotel.**

<b>FAX or Mail Order Form to Jan Lossing</b>	
<b>This is Separate From NACCC Registration</b>	
Early Booking Price Book by May 15, 2016	\$100 per person
Late Booking Price: May 16 - June 1, 2016	\$125 per person
Number of Persons for this Order:	
Total Order Price:	
Note: A minimum of 30 people are required for this UGRR Bus Tour. If less than 30 persons have booked the tour by June 1, 2016, your money will be refunded by July 31, 2016	
Name:	
Address:	
City / State / Zip:	
Phone No:	
E-Mail:	
Note: All Tour guests must have a valid US Passport, Enhanced US Driver's License or NEXUS Card to enter Canada and re-enter USA	
Special Ambulatory Requirements:	
Food Allergies	



## To Market, To Market

by Dawn Carlson

**W**e've heard it all before. "We're a church. We don't market ourselves." Okay. You can believe that all you want. The fact is we do market ourselves. We just call it outreach.

There's lots of hype in the world about content marketing, social media and mobile apps. For small businesses (and that's us!), good old-fashioned emails in an inbox are still one of the most effective ways to reach people. Studies say that 91% of email users check their email at least once a day.

There are lots of tools out there to help churches in their outreach. Some of the most helpful and useful are the email marketing tools we use for newsletters and announcements. The top two are MailChimp and Constant Contact. Maybe you're already using one of those. If so, great. Keep up the good work. If you're not using one, then maybe it's time to hop on board and check them out. It certainly makes my weekly church newsletter easier to put together and send.

So, which one do you try? You'll have to look them over and decide. Or you may find yourself part of that crowd that tries them both and identifies the price point and feature selection that works best for you.

MailChimp offers a "forever free" version for up to 2,000 email subscribers and 12,000 emails per month. (If your church is that big, your media specialist probably already knows all this stuff.) MailChimp's paid service starts at \$10 per month for unlimited emails up to

500 subscribers, with a \$5 per month increase for an additional 500 subscribers. Nonprofits (that's us!) get a 15% discount on paid accounts.

Constant Contact offers a 60-day free trial, with an unlimited number of emails you can send to a maximum 100 contacts. After the free trial, email marketing begins at \$20 per month for up to 500 contacts. That will serve most of our churches quite well. There is 30% discount for nonprofits who prepay for an annual subscription. Our church spends \$168 annually for our regular subscription and an additional fee to have a larger graphics library. That averages to just \$14 per month. I could only send 35 snail mail newsletters a month for that. Using Constant Contact, I can easily send my usual 360+ each month. I print out 6 newsletters each week for the 6 people who don't have / use email in our church.

Finding the right tool is always a matter of trial and error, but the savings in time and postage are significant and can boost your church's profile while keeping a nice eye on the budget.



**THE REV. DAWN CARLSON** pastors *First Congregational Church of Terre Haute, Ind.* Like many in ministry today, she finds herself having to grasp as much tech stuff as possible. If you have technology questions, you can e-mail her, [dawncarl@aol.com](mailto:dawncarl@aol.com), or write to Dawn Carlson, 630 Ohio, Terre Haute IN 47807.



By Mary E. Biedron

## WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

This question has special significance in Southeastern Michigan and Detroit, where a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and religious groups are learning to live and work together for the sake of all people. Our area has recently made the news for its redevelopment and, at the same time, for several severe ongoing issues. The Detroit bankruptcy, the water crisis in Flint, and unsafe buildings in the Detroit Public Schools raise important challenges...and remarkable opportunities for the church to be part of the rebirth and restoration of a region as we seek to care for these, our neighbors!

Our theme for the 2016 Annual Meeting is designed to lift up some of the ways to consider and respond to the needs of our neighbors, inviting participants to think about this question in their own contexts. The brochure in this issue gives highlights of the workshops and introduces our speakers, but there's much more to learn and do around this gathering!

# Meet in the Motor City this June

**Workshops** - Several workshops in our great lineup relate to our theme. "Being Christian in a Pluralistic Society" will be a panel discussion on how to stand with integrity in the presence of those from other faiths. A docent-led tour of the American Islamic Center will spotlight one of the most prominent mosques in the U.S. located just down the road from the hotel. A presentation from the Washington Gladden Society will focus on how a church formed a partnership with a community to provide needed assistance.

**Sunday Worship In and Around Detroit** - On Sunday morning, worship and lunch will take place at several of the 12 churches of the Southeastern Michigan Association. Meeting participants will have an opportunity at registration to select a church. Round-trip transportation and lunch will be provided by the host churches. Sunday afternoon will take us to downtown Detroit for a narrated bus tour, beginning with the Fort Shelby Hotel where the NACCC was founded, and including highlights of Detroit's history and rebirth. The tour will conclude at First Congregational Church of Detroit for communion worship and a shared meal in this historic and active church. Details are found in the registration brochure.

**Tuesday Meeting with Young People** - The Annual Meeting and Conference will conclude with a dinner at



the hotel where we will welcome our HOPE (Heritage of Pilgrim Endeavor) young adults and hear about their meeting, including their hands-on mission in Detroit. This will be a wonderful opportunity to build friendships with these young people who are our “neighbors” within Congregationalism.

**Other Opportunities!** - Information, maps, and more offering a wealth of activities in the area will be available throughout the meeting at the Host Committee’s welcome table.

## PRE-MEETING SPECIAL EVENTS

**Thursday Underground Railroad Tour** – Bring your passport and prepare for a day exploring the Underground Railroad activity in Detroit on June 23. Consider how First Congregational Church of Detroit and others in the abolitionist movement understood neighborliness by becoming an important stop along the slaves’ route to freedom in Canada. Preregistration is required. See the UGRR tour flyer on the NACCC website for times, costs, and registration information.



**Attend a Detroit Tigers’ Game** – Travel by bus to the heart of downtown Detroit on Friday, June 24, to enjoy a ball game and witness a city reimagining itself. Preregistration and payment for bus and tickets are required. See the Annual Meeting & Conference registration form.

## POST MEETING POSSIBILITIES:

**Visit Youth Work Projects** – Our NAPF and HOPE students will be working on a variety of projects in Detroit. Site visit opportunities will be announced during the Tuesday evening program.

**Greenfield Village & Henry Ford Museum** ([thehenryford.org](http://thehenryford.org)) - Just a short distance from the

hotel, this is an all-day adventure. Greenfield Village presents 300 years of American history in a family-friendly setting. The Henry Ford Museum celebrates American innovation, and people and ideas that have changed the world.

**The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History** ([thewright.org](http://thewright.org)), **The Detroit Institute of Arts** ([dia.org](http://dia.org)) and **The Michigan Science Center** ([mi-sci.org](http://mi-sci.org)) - Three leading Detroit institutions are all located near the Wayne State University Campus in Detroit, with parking, restaurants, and shopping nearby.

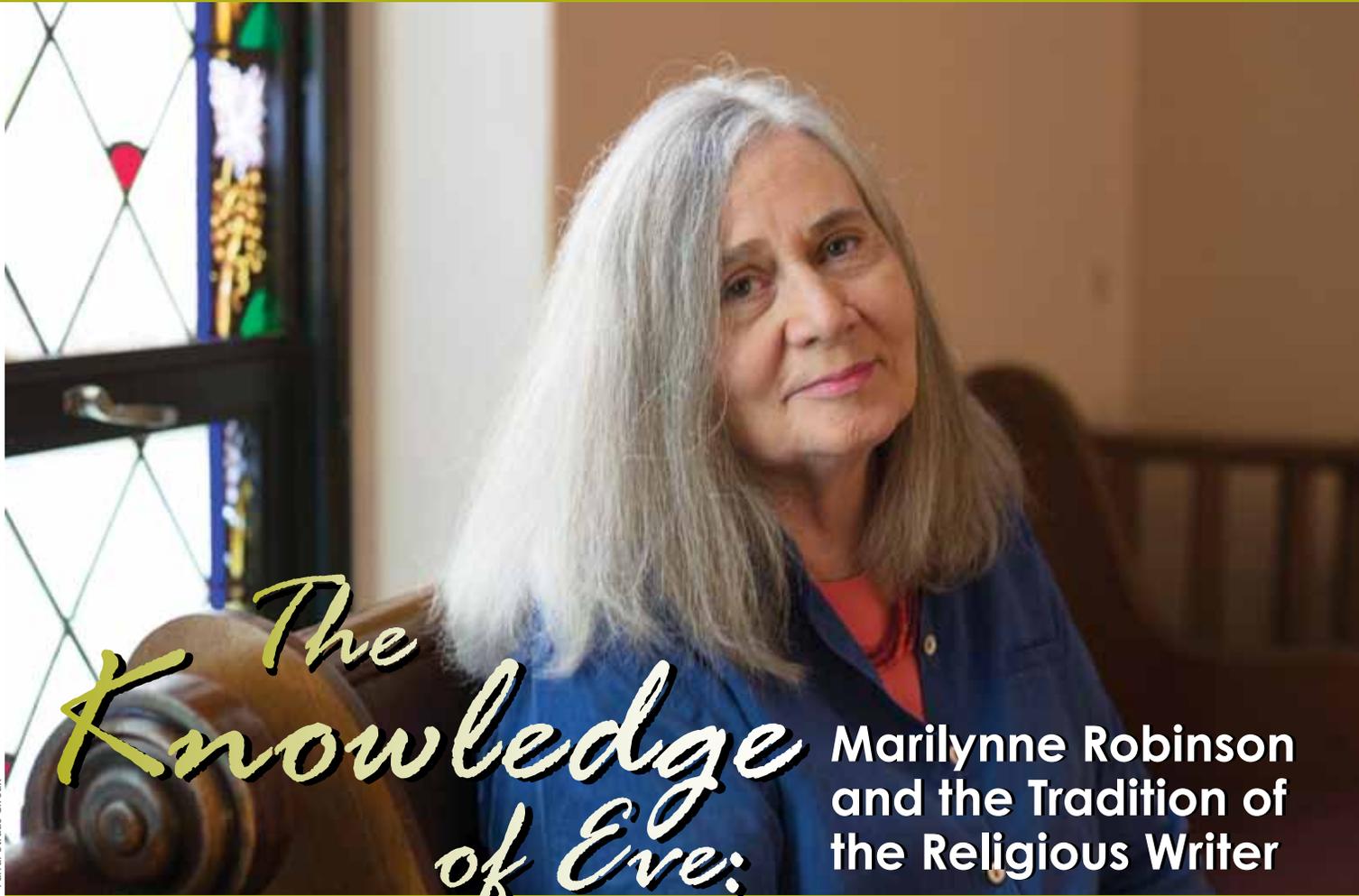
**The Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills** ([holocaustcenter.org](http://holocaustcenter.org)) - The center presents not only the history of evil, but also of great courage, strength and righteousness. This nationally-recognized institution highlights Jewish life around the time of the Holocaust, as well as providing information and opportunities to combat racial and religious hatred in our own times.

**The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn** ([arabamericanmuseum.org](http://arabamericanmuseum.org)) – Michigan’s vibrant Arab American community includes many Middle Eastern Christian groups, as well as a diverse Muslim community. Their backgrounds and cultures are documented in this unique museum. Nearby Michigan and Warren avenues offer a wealth of Middle Eastern restaurants and shops. The Host Committee’s welcome table will have suggestions for those who’d like to explore.

The Southeastern Michigan Association is eager to welcome YOU to our part of the world! See you at the 2016 Annual Meeting and Conference in June!



**REV. DR. MARY E. BIEDRON** is senior minister at North Congregational Church in Farmington Hills, Mich. She moved from First Congregational Church of Toledo to become Associate Minister of North Church in 1998. Mary and her husband, Glenn, have three daughters. A graduate of the University of Michigan and Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Mary has long served churches addressing religious education concerns. She recently served as president of the Southeast Michigan Congregation Clergy and was president of the Farmington Area Interfaith Association. She is a co-chair of the 2016 Annual Meeting & Conference Host Committee.



Farrar Straus Giroux

# The Knowledge of Eve:

Marilynne Robinson and the Tradition of the Religious Writer

Marilynne Robinson.

Somewhere between the late 1800s and now, religious tradition gave way to skepticism and increasing secularity. However, Pulitzer-prize winning novelist Marilynne Robinson compellingly suggests how contemporary fiction is compatible with religious tradition. Her trilogy, *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*, engages in rigorous and resonant philosophical scrutiny of its Christian roots. The novels' compelling characters and clever postmodern ideas build on historical foundations and time's passage, distinguishing her as belonging to a rich literary tradition of characters informed by an overt mode of morality, often predicated on Christian tenets.

## A Shared Christianity

While current fiction writers have attempted to depict Christian characters—Jeffrey Eugenides and Michel Faber come to mind—their use of religion lacks power. In Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot*, budding scholar Mitchell lacks true commitment to the foundations of a Christian life, making his

By Eric Farwell

...Robinson  
is clearly  
thinking about  
the larger  
implications  
of faith and its  
impact on both  
the individual  
and family.

obsession with it seem awkward. A more earnest investigation of theology can be found in Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things*, but its sci-fi take on missionary work still simplifies and distances the reader from religious experience. By contrast, Robinson doesn't adapt Christianity as a plot device, but fully integrates it into the foundation of Gilead, Iowa.

Critics often laud Robinson's texts for their use of Protestantism and how the religion is ingrained into the DNA of her world, but argue she's writing with blinders on. For example, *The Boston Review's* Jess Row criticizes Robinson's mostly Caucasian population of Gilead, claiming she ignores decades of racial integration. While this objection is valid, Gilead is presented not as factual reality but as a truthful representation of how Robinson perceives it. Robinson likely chose Tabor for its population homogeneity, which suggests a shared religious tradition that wouldn't be the case in a more diverse community."

Robinson's trilogy weaves religious and philosophical themes into its fabric and finds its power in the ways spirituality tethers families and generations. In *Gilead*, Congregationalist minister John Ames has his struggles elevated by references to Feuerbach. The Bible anchors *Home*, serving as its generational touchstone. *Lila's* break speed momentum owes much to Robinson's close readings of Calvin. Her lifetime of rigorous study gives dimension to her novels, imbuing both Gilead and its citizens with complex religiosity.

### Religion Propels and Restrains

The religious practice of her characters elevates and buoys them as they progress through their narrative arcs. Far from her peers' hand-wringing uncertainty, by embracing Calvinism, Robinson plots each connective strand expertly, giving the series a massive scope not just in terms of overarching plot, but in the way each novel speaks to the higher goals of Robinson's creation. In *Gilead*, for example, she writes:

*The sun had come up brilliantly after a heavy rain, and the trees were glistening and very wet. On some impulse, plain exuberance, I suppose, the fellow jumped up and caught hold of a branch, and a storm of luminous water came pouring down on the two of them, and they laughed and took off running, the girl sweeping water off her hair and her dress as if she were a little bit disgusted, but she wasn't. It was a beautiful thing to see, like something from a myth.*

Here, the "myth" simile derives power from subtly accumulated references to light and the divine—brilliantly, glistening, luminous—to baptism, and to exuberance. Such connection to the divine via nature injects joy into her characters, who are alive with the fervor of a spiritual awakening.

Robinson's slow, sumptuous work harkens back to a time when readers and writers alike fell in step with the religious and social conventions of the time, giving her career a rare quality. In *Lila*, Robinson expresses what she's looking to explore in her novels, saying:

*I feel it would be presumptuous of me to describe the ways of God. Those that are all we know of Him, when there is so much we don't know. Though we are told to call Him Father. And I know it would be presumptuous to speak as if the suffering that people feel as they pass through the world were not grave enough to make your question much more powerful than any answer I could offer. My faith tells me that God shared poverty, suffering, and death with human beings, which can only mean that such things are full of dignity and meaning, even though to believe this makes a great demand on one's faith, and to act as if this were true in any way we understand is to be ridiculous. It is ridiculous also to act as if it were not absolutely and essentially true all the same. Even though we are to do everything we can to put an end to poverty and suffering.*

Though he claims not to know the ways of God, Robinson's Rev. Ames (and by extension, Robinson) still speaks from that position. From this vantage, Robinson attempts to clarify the socially obtuse and understand how bygone eras inform Christianity in America today. Like George Eliot and Flannery O'Connor, Robinson illuminates different social aspects of a religious community in order to understand how each individual constitutes his/her spiritual identity.

*Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila* explore how individual characters conform to social roles that isolate, alienate, and challenge them to accept that religious devotion may be only a coping mechanism. In her novel *Middlemarch*, George Eliot found a place for similar ambitions. An astute observer of the political and human condition, Eliot's novel brims with spiritual investment and complex takes on family and history influenced by her Calvinist leanings. Much like Robinson, Eliot was influenced by thinkers like Strauss and Feuerbach, who looked to scrutinize the truth of biblical accuracy. Both writers set their works in invented towns, and in doing so, were able to investigate the implications of Protestantism on families with a legacy of religious work.

As in-step as Eliot may be with the legacy Robinson joined, no writer better illuminates her work than does Flannery O'Connor. Catholicism gave rise to O'Connor's writing, serving as the engine that drove her to explore characters that existed on the outskirts of polite society. Her interest in race relations smacks of the same curiosity found about the ways faith informs societal values in *Lila* and *Home*. Where Robinson uses gentle touches of

existentialism to explore the interior lives of her characters, O'Connor's potent mix of Southern Catholic darkness and subtle grotesquery led to complex character studies that hurdled past ethical barriers. While the coalescing of religion and fiction was more common at the time, her way of doing so was unique.

Both writers use setting as a way to explore the notion of societal fringes. For O'Connor, the religious and racial ugliness of Julian's mother, Mrs. Greenleaf, or the characters in *Wise Blood* were intertwined with the soul of southern America. The Misfit, an eerily realized mass-murderer, couldn't have existed were it not for O'Connor's intimate understanding of how southern Catholic niceties attempt to mask the implicit darkness within. The need for salvation runs through the blood of her creations, creations that struggle with navigating the rules of their complex region.

### A Community with Calvinist Roots

In contrast, Robinson's characters struggle not with navigating society, but emptiness. In field-laden Gilead, Rev. John Ames goes through most of his life feeling a vast loneliness, one his second wife, Lila, seems to share. Their sadness stems not from neurological imbalances, but the cementing of life roles. Gilead is a Calvinist town, and both Ames and Lila are viewed as higher ranking members, the leader of worship and his chosen beloved. Locked into these roles, both become fringe figures, living as popular residents physically, and as outsiders internally. The plain setting allows each to find the limits of transcendence, and for Robinson to scrutinize the immanence of God within these characters.

Though she shies away from the "religious writer" label, Robinson is clearly thinking about the larger implications of faith and its impact on both the individual and family. Her obsessions give each story grit and yield powerful sentiments from the reflections of her characters. Gloom, infidelity, and the weight of American ideals consume many novels today, but few lack the resonance of Robinson's work.



**ERIC FARWELL** is a writer, with work appearing in places like *The Rumps*, *PAPERdigital*, *Past online*, *Pleiades online* (forthcoming), and *The Writer's Chronicle* (forthcoming). He's an adjunct professor of English in New Jersey, and recently completed doctoral applications for the fall 2016 semester. He's additionally applying to tenure-track positions at two-year universities and plans to relocate to the West Coast this summer.

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# HOLY HUMOR

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## Celebrating Joy at Easter

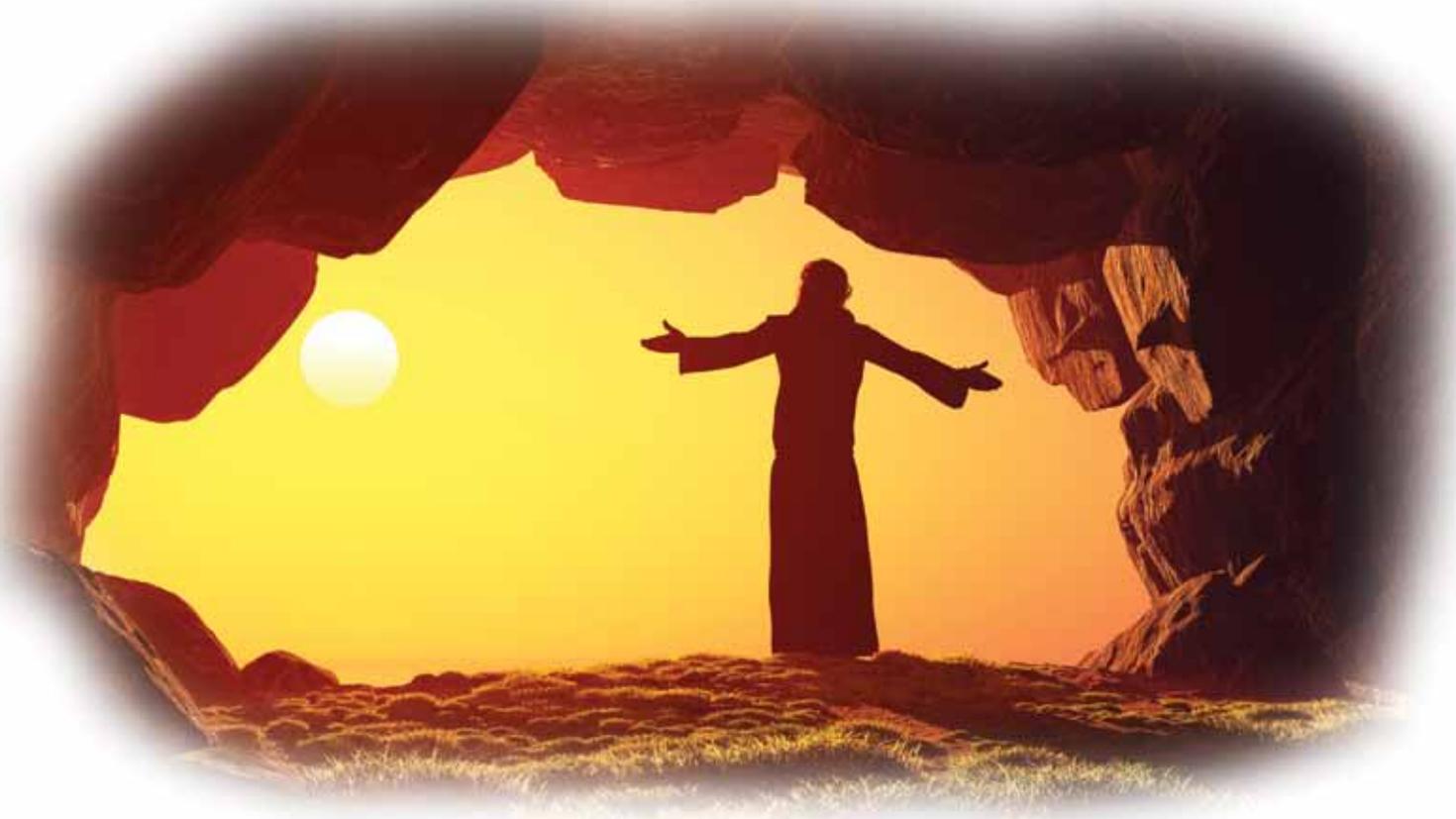
*By Ed Backell*

**T**he concept of repentance is crucial to Christianity. It is repeatedly emphasized in much of the New Testament. In Matthew 9:13, Jesus said, "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

In fact, Jesus put so much emphasis on repentance, He made it part of the process of salvation itself. He said, "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3)

Repentance, also referred to as metanoia, basically means "to think differently." John Calvin, Protestant theologian, taught that metanoia was a change of mind, recognizing that our old way of self needed to be relinquished, and a new way of Christ in us needed to be realized.

Learning to think differently about ourselves and about our relation to God is absolutely crucial to our salvation and to growth in our faith.



# A Bit of Pulpit Humor

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An old dollar bill and an even older \$20 arrive at a Federal Reserve Bank to be retired.

"I've had a pretty good life," the \$20 says.

"I've been to Vegas, the finest restaurants in New York, and even on a Caribbean cruise."

"You did have an exciting life!" the dollar says.

"Where have you been?" the \$20 asks.

"Oh, I've been to the Methodist church, the Baptist church, spent some time with the Lutherans..."

"Wait," the \$20 interrupts. "What's a church?"



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I suggest that learning to laugh on Sundays can contribute to metanoia by celebrating the joy of God's salvation.

Many American churches are resurrecting Holy Humor Sunday, an old Easter custom begun by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity. This celebration of Jesus' resurrection is commonly practiced on the Sunday after Easter.

For centuries in Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant countries, the week following Easter Sunday, including Bright Sunday (the Sunday after Easter), was observed by the faithful as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

The custom was rooted in the musings of early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. '*Risus paschalis* - the Easter laugh,' the early theologians called it. (*The Joyful Noiseletter: "Holy Humor Sunday"*)

The practice is often traced back to Bavaria in the middle ages, when priests celebrated *Risus paschalis* or the "Easter laugh" with jokes and funny stories.

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Today, the concept of Jesus' resurrection as God's prank on the devil is contrary to our understanding of the Gospels. So why are modern churches adopting Holy Humor Sunday?

When we recognize that God is the giver of laughter as well as salvation, we gain insight into the Lord's heart. Psalms 126:2-3 tells us: "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

John Morreall, an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary, wrote in his paper *The Rejection of Humor in Western Thought*:

There is nothing essentially irresponsible about creating and enjoying humor... in some cases it is just what the situation calls for. ...both humor and philosophy foster imagination and mental flexibility. The best humor gets us to see familiar things in unfamiliar ways, and so does the best philosophy. Consider the following bits of humor:

- Even paranoids have enemies.
- Everything tastes more or less like chicken.
- You can get anywhere in ten minutes if you go fast enough.
- Eat a live toad first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

These statements are all TRUE, and yet, not often contemplated. When considered, these odd statements can certainly bring a smile to the face. Odd situations do that.

In Genesis 21:6, Sarah, recognizing the sheer ridiculousness of her situation (a 90-year-old woman with a 100-year-old husband AND a newborn) said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears

about this will laugh with me." Sometimes, you just can't help but laugh - to keep from being overwhelmed!

*The Los Angeles Times*, in its February 17, 1996, issue, ran this quote from Liz Curtis Higgs, a Christian comic and motivational speaker from Louisville, Kentucky. She said, "...there is a place for humor alongside more serious worship practices and biblical reflection. We also desperately need to laugh. Our pews are filled with people in pain."

I believe our ability to respond in laughter is another aspect of the Imago Dei in us, the very image of God writ on our souls. When we recognize the incongruous, the unexpected, our laughter does not necessarily come from a place of derision or superiority; rather, laughter can be a sign of wonder, the joy of discovery of a new way of looking at something.

And that is the very essence of *metanoia*, our change of mind that is such a crucial part of our faith.

Humour is, in fact, a prelude to faith; and laughter is the beginning of prayer ... Laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humour is fulfilled by faith." (Reinhold Niebuhr, *Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*)

*Keep Following Jesus, Pastor Ed*



**REV. ED BACKELL**, a Washington state native, has taught for 25 years in churches in Oregon, Washington and Nebraska, most recently in Snohomish, Wash. He has traveled extensively throughout the United States and Canada with various musical groups.

As a youth minister, he specialized in creating teen performance groups that helped students use their gifts and talents to explore and share their own faith. He holds a Masters of Divinity from Bethel Seminary in St Paul, Minn., as well as Masters in Ministry.

Backell has been pastor of Warden Community Church since 2010. He and wife, Jami, have three daughters.

*by Ronald R. Johnson*

# An Infectious Courage



“**T**hese are bewildering days, when the whole world is holding its breath in apprehension of a threatened cataclysm, and the guaranteed reliances have become insecure.”

No, these words weren't uttered in 2016; they were published in 1947 by Lloyd C. Douglas, a Congregationalist minister. (He also happened to be a bestselling novelist.) The Cold War had begun, and it seemed as though World War III would soon follow. All across America, people prepared themselves for Armageddon.

During his own lifetime, Douglas had already seen the human race approach the brink of disaster more than once, by way of the First World War, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and now the Cold War. In such stressful times, he believed that the local congregation had an important contribution to make to the surrounding community. The church should be a place of refuge—an environment in which people could find rest unto their souls, at least for an hour each week.

He said, “There is a certain sedative quality in Christianity which our churches decline to recognize, much less administer. They are ashamed to admit that they have it. They lack the faith to abandon their frail and ludicrous attempts to out-yell the theatres, the

department stores, the automobile manufacturers, and the realtors, and quietly offer to this harassed, jaded, noise-pummeled public a sanctuary...”

In each of the congregations where he served as pastor, Douglas collaborated with the music director to create powerful worship experiences. From the first note of the prelude, he wanted the music to draw worshippers into God's presence. Announcements about upcoming rummage sales or men's breakfasts were not allowed to break the spell. The organ prelude was keyed to lead naturally into the first hymn without verbal introduction, eliciting an automatic response from the people in the pews as they rose instinctively to lend their voices in praise. Responsive readings and scripture lessons were chosen carefully, and readers rehearsed in order to avoid fumbling over the words. Instead of offering filler comments like, “Please turn to hymn 325,” Douglas trusted the printed program to communicate such messages. Occasional moments of silence were used effectively to create a sense of awe.

His sermons built upon this mood, expressing a deep faith in God's providence. It was easy to get caught up in the crisis of the moment and lose hope,

he thought, but worship was an invitation to glimpse the Big Picture. Christ offered steady nerves.

“For Eternity deals with the long haul! They who are Eternity-minded are stabilized.... If you are Eternity-conscious, you are not only insured against being kited into transient ecstasies—loaded with the makings of disappointment—but protected against buckling under the strain of some apparent catastrophe. The Eternity-minded do not believe in catastrophes. There is no place in their vocabulary for such a word as ‘crisis.’ In their opinion, what the day-by-day and hand-to-mouth opportunists would call a ‘crisis’ is but a phase of the irresistible onward drive.”

Douglas thought that history was headed in a definite direction—that we were called to become more Christlike, both as individuals and as a people. This exalted destiny was working itself out through all the ups and downs of our daily life together. He believed in human progress, although he insisted we were “not driven from Behind, but lured from Before. Not pushed, but pulled. Magnetized from Beyond!” This was the message that he sought to communicate through his sermons and, eventually, through his novels. He had his

### *...worship was an invitation to glimpse the Big Picture.*

share of critics, of course. They called him a Pollyanna. They accused him of wearing rose-colored glasses. But he firmly believed in Divine Providence and staked his life and reputation on that belief. “There is a plan,” he said, “be confident of its integrity.”

In these days when there are so many dangers lurking, so many things to worry about both at home and abroad, are we “magnetized from Beyond?” Are we living “the stabilized life” that Christ offers, and are we doing all we can to help steady the nerves of those around us? What do you think? Do our congregations have a responsibility to their surrounding communities, as Douglas thought? He believed that Christianity has “a certain sedative quality” that the world needs. Are we aware of it, and are we sharing it?

Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying that we should lull ourselves into a drowsy indolence. I’m



*Lloyd C. Douglas*

saying we should portray our Savior as someone who has weathered these storms before and will surely pilot us through many more in years to come. Through our music, liturgy, preaching, and fellowship, we should invite one another to discover the peace of Christ—not to become complacent, but to stop worrying and work together to make the world a better place.

Partly it’s a matter of details. Like Douglas, we can probably find many points at which our typical Sunday service could be made more impressive. If, in any way, we can make it easier to hear the Voice of the Spirit rather than the rustling of bulletins or fumbling of a scripture reading, that would be a good thing. But it’s also very much a question of what we ourselves have to offer. Times like these prompt us to ask: Are we truly people of faith? Have we found some measure of the peace and power that Christ gives? If so, how can we share those gifts with one another as we gather in worship? How can we make courage so infectious within our local congregations that it spreads throughout our surrounding communities? These are the questions Lloyd Douglas would ask us to consider if he here today. What answers would you give?



**RONALD R. JOHNSON** is author of *What Does God Do from 9 to 5?* He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Saint Louis University and teaches extension courses for Spring Arbor University in Michigan. He is writing a biography of Lloyd C. Douglas.

## NEWS



L-R: Amanda, Michelle, Ann, Kim, Marria, Linda, Doug, Patti, and Greg

### MOMC HEADS WEST

This past November, the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council visited **Indian Trails Mission (Payson, Arizona)** for their Fall Budget Retreat. The work of Indian Trails is continuing with a fantastic team of people—Kim Murphy (daughter of Sharon and Tom Gossett) and her daughter Amanda, Ann and Grant Leonard, and Arturo Panama. Kim’s sister Michelle Gossett D’Addabbo helps out when she can. Kenny Murphy, Kim’s husband, is also a huge help in making repairs on the church buildings and many other things as well.

The Mission Council was able to visit four churches on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation in Whiteriver, Ariz.: Grace of God East Fork Church - Pastor June Bush, Canyon Day Light House Family Church - Pastor Mariela Joe, Work of God Church - Pastor Hazard Walker, and East Fork Riverside Church - Pastor Valentina Begay.

The Indian Trails team is working on getting a new facility for Rev. Hazard Walker, who built his original church with his own two hands.

### PILGRIM’S PRESENCE

Geoffrey Lipale from **Pilgrim’s Presence (Kenya)** will be our invited International Missionary for the Annual Meeting and Conference in Dearborn,



Geoffrey

Mich., this June. He will be itinerating churches in the Midwest, starting and ending in Michigan. If you are interested in having Geoffrey visit your church, please be in touch with Linda at the NACCC Office: [lmiller@nacc.org](mailto:lmiller@nacc.org).

### LOVE WORTH SHARING

Rev, Jim Owens, **Love Worth Sharing (Haiti)**, reports, “The children’s ministry in Coq Chante, Haiti, continues to grow. Many of the children walk



The Children’s Ministry

up to two hours to come to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. The food budget has increased as the prices continue to rise in Haiti, but God is Good and continues to provide.”

### NEW PROGRAMS FOR MISSION MAZAHUA

**Mission Mazahua (Mexico)**, started a physical therapy and rehab clinic this past May. They also continue with equine therapy, which is now two days each week, and hope to offer water therapy in their pool.

### READY, SET, LEARN

Many of the NACCC churches in Florida donated supplies to the Back to School Backpacks and Supplies Program for the **Bread of Life Mission (Florida)**. The Mission was able to give out 75 backpacks, as well as all the supplies needed to prepare children for the start of the school year last September.



Children model their backpacks

The After School Tutoring Program is no longer being held at the Methodist church, but has returned to the original Mission building.

Bread of Life is planning to expand the thrift shop to include antique and boutique sections to generate additional income. This past Christmas the Mission had the Adopt a Family Program.

### READY TO ROLL



Right: Matthew Odadele and Tinuola Susan Barmidele check out the new bus. Left: School children prepare to board.



Thanks to George Haines of California and The Ellis Family Charitable Foundation, **Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)** was able to purchase a refurbished bus from the Nigerian government. Much needed, the bus allows the mission to continue busing children to their schools.

### SEAFARER'S FRIEND SHARE CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Volunteers and staff of **Seafarer's Friend (Boston, Massachusetts)** have the privilege of ministering to crew on vessels that come to port in Boston, Mass., Portsmouth, N.H. and Portland, Maine.



The crew from the Curia showing off their ditty bags

Recently, Chaplain Tim Owen and Rev. Michael Glidden of Sebago Lake Congregational Church, Standish, Maine, delivered

ditty bags to the crew of the Curia just in time for Christmas. The all-Filipino crew was overjoyed to receive these gifts. They wanted to wait until Christmas Day to open these bags while they were at sea. The crew members were thankful for this tremendous act of kindness.

### MEMORIAL

Rev. Julio Hernandez, **Ministerio Vida Hospital (Honduras)**, passed away on December 1, 2015, due to complications from surgery. He was the director of the Honduran Congregational Mission from the 1990's until the Hernandez family moved to the new mission, Ministerio Vida Hospital. Julio was the pastor of the largest church of the mission. He was respected and loved by his fellow pastors and the people and children of the villages he served.



Rev. Julio Hernandez

### NEEDS

#### STAFFING NEEDS

**Seafarer's Friend (Massachusetts)** is looking for a new Executive Director. Meredith Connell left to pursue other goals.

**Morgan Scott Project (Tennessee)** is looking for an assistant.

**Cook Native American Ministries (Arizona)** seeks a new Executive Director.

### Thank you for your support!

For more information on any of these missions, or to make a donation to any of the above projects, please contact Linda Milller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618 or [lmiller@nacc.org](mailto:lmiller@nacc.org).

**The Mission and Outreach Ministry Council, NACCC**  
PO Box 288, Oak Creek WI 53154

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



## REV. DR. ARVEL M. STEECE (1921 - 2015)

The Rev. Dr. Arvel M. Steece passed away peacefully at his home in Shelburne, Mass. on November 28, 2015, one day short of his 94th birthday. Arvel was actively involved in the formation of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches in 1955 and a founder of the Congregational Press. He was a lifelong advocate of civil rights, civil liberties, separation of church and state, and non-violence.

Arvel was ordained as a Congregational Minister in 1947. He served churches in Illinois, Minnesota, Connecticut, Michigan, Vermont and Massachusetts. He was President of the American Congregational Association from 1975-1999; Director of the Congregational Christian Historical Society; and a Member of the Boston Seaman's Friend Society for more than 20 years.

Arvel was Director Emeritus of the Congregational Library & Archives, faithfully serving the board for over 40 years. The Arvel M. & Kathleen D. Steece Memorial Library was established from his donation of more than 4,000 books.

Arvel graduated from Carleton College, Northfield, Minn. with a bachelor's degree in English, earned a Bachelor of Divinity at the University of Chicago, as well as a Master of Sacred Theology and Doctor of Philosophy from Harvard.

Arvel was preceded in death by Kathleen, his wife of 63 years. He is survived by sons David (Pamela), Daniel (Debbi), Jonathan (Melissa), plus eight grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.

Donations may be made to the Congregational Library for the Arvel M. Steece Fund, 14 Beacon St, Boston MA 02108.



## REV. ROBERTA A. HEATH (1948 - 2015)

The Rev. Roberta A. Heath, 67, died October 17, 2015, in Lenox, Mass. A minister for over 25 years, Roberta was the founding pastor of Berkshire Community Church in Richmond.

Born in Great Barrington, Mass., Roberta was educated in Sheffield schools and graduated from Mt. Everett Regional High School in 1966. She went on to earn an associate's degree from Berkshire Community College, a Bachelor of Theology degree from Berkshire Christian College, a master's degree in public administration from Russell Sage College, and her Master of Divinity degree from Andover Newton Theological Seminary.

Roberta served as executive director of the Berkshire County American Red Cross and executive director of Action for Opportunity.

Roberta enjoyed hiking, traveling and skiing. She was an avid reader, loved debating theology and politics, and ardently supported the arts and the New England Patriots. She was always surrounded by friends and family, and her greatest joy was her grandchildren. She leaves her partner of 42 years, Janet D’Arcangelo of Pittsfield, Mass., three children, a brother, two sisters, six grandchildren, and many beloved nieces and nephews.

Donations may be made to the American Cancer Society/Berkshire County Relay for Life, in memory of Rev. Roberta Heath at [www.relayforlife.org/berkshirecountycentralsouthma](http://www.relayforlife.org/berkshirecountycentralsouthma).

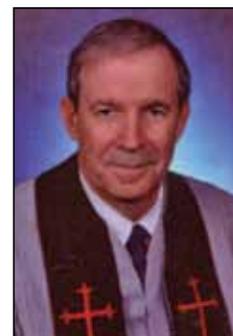
### REV. THOMAS F. WITZEL (1939 - 2015)

Rev. Thomas F. Witzel, 76, of Marshfield and formerly of Dodgeville and Spring Green, Wis., died on November 6, 2015, at Ministry St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield of myelofibrosis.

After graduating from UW Madison, he received a three-year degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and then served Congregational Christian churches in Spring Green and Lone Rock, Wis., Bowling Green, Ohio, Chester and Randolph, N.J. and Sun City, Ariz.

After retiring to Marshfield, Thomas served as a volunteer teacher, preacher and vestryman at St. Albans Episcopal Church and, later, St. Paul's UCC. He is the author of three books on the Trinity.

Thomas was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by Sara, his wife of 58 years; daughters Stephanie and Andrea, and five grandchildren. He is survived, also, by his brother Richard (Carolyn) Witzel and their three children, grandnephews and grandnieces.



## Dear Editor:

This past week, I have been giving my sixteen-year-old son proposed research topics for school. One of them was to link his USA citizenship with his south African upbringing and home in South Africa, specifically at Inanda Seminary, a mission boarding school. We decided to look at mission education in North America to Native Americans.

The topic interested my son. We Googled some reading and learned of some amazing recent scholarship. Further research on my own sobered me enormously.

'Cultural genocide' was the term appropriately given to this time in history when Christians almost forcibly removed Native American children from their families, culture, languages, and homes, and put them in boarding schools in order to 'civilise' them. The history of this activity is gut-wrenching to read.

My son, who I say with love and understanding, is a typical self-absorbed teen, was also greatly impacted by our exposure to this practice of boarding schools 'for the heathen.' In North America, Native American children died in droves alone and depressed.

I related to my son about my father's involvement in the commemoration of and apology for death of a Hawaiian convert who died in a boarding school in Massachusetts. His body was repatriated to Hawaii in the 1990s, and the United Church of Christ made an understandably large deal out of it. My father was in the Royal Hawaiian Band that played at the event. He always talked about the history he learned and the emotion of the service.

So, it was a blessing from you to receive *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* and see the opening article

on Henry Opukaha'ia. How wonderful! I found the read beautiful and inspiring. While I have no doubt that all of it is true, both in fact and spirit, you know, theologically, we all have great potential for the divine and the demonic within us. There is a very dark side to the story you tell on page three, if not this specific story about Henry, then the more general story about cultural (and very arguably, actual) genocide Christians in North America committed against Native Americans (in which Hawaii, now a state, can be included).

Likewise, there is a very dark side to Pilgrim history in the theft of native land by divine right by many of the colonists.

While my language may be emotive, I would encourage you to follow-up the Henry Opukaha'ia story with the not so romanticised, sentimentalized and sanitised version of mission history. Believe me, I am not a secular revisionist historian with an axe to grind against the faith. I am a faithful missionary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, God calls me to be honest. Cultural genocide, if not actual genocide, was the other side of the coin which accompanied good intentions and a love for Jesus Christ. Ironically, because of the Fall, neither side of the coin is mutually exclusive.

If we are true to our history - and more importantly, if we are true to Calvinist theology which rightfully explains human relationship with God through the Fall and its accompanying doctrine of sin, we must acknowledge the other sinful side of the 'mission' coin. I pray your awesome, fantastic publication will take this task on no matter the criticism it will engender.

*Love always in Christ, Scott Couper*

*Editor's note: Rev. Dr. Scott Couper is Development Manager at Inanda Seminary near Durban, South Africa.*

## News from the fellowship of churches

### PLYMOUTH CHURCH LEADS ANTI-SLAVERY RALLY



*The Underground Thrift volunteers, Far left: Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson*

Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., noted for its 19th Century abolitionist roots, hosted a community event to raise awareness of the issue of human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, on January 31.

Sponsored by the church's anti-trafficking ministry — We Are the New Abolitionists — the event drew more than 250 people to the church to hear from some of New York's anti-trafficking leaders, including Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson.

“We focus on ending modern-day slavery — trafficking in all its guises — in our own community, here in Brooklyn and New York City,” said Beth Fleisher, Plymouth's anti-trafficking ministry chair. Fleisher became an advocate for survivors and victims when she attended a similar event at the church several years ago and was horrified to learn that traffickers profit from the captivity, torture and coercion of people, forcing them perform labor and sex work--not just overseas but in New York City.

On Fleisher's prompting, the church adopted the cause, aiming to raise awareness among its members and the community. Plymouth Church also operates Underground Thrift, a second-hand clothing and housewares store that benefits trafficking survivors.

Senior Interim Minister Tom Lenhart said that it was very fitting for Plymouth to sponsor an event that seeks to bring an end to human trafficking because its forefathers and foremothers spoke out and acted to support abolition and end slavery.

The church's first pastor was the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, noted abolitionist and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The church was also part of the Underground Railroad.

Participants also included Sanctuary for Families, ECPAT-USA (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), and Restore. Their representatives discussed ways to take action, such as volunteering, writing letters to legislators, signing supporting notes to survivors, and making a donation. They also identified the warning signs of trafficking and how to report it.

District Attorney Thompson said, “It's humbling to stand in a church that opened its doors to Abraham Lincoln, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, women and men who lived and died so others could be free; men and women of uncommon courage.”

For more information, visit [www.plymouthchurch.org](http://www.plymouthchurch.org)

# CALENDAR

**APRIL 18** - General copy deadline for *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* June 2016 issue - Contact Marianne King, [editor@naccc.org](mailto:editor@naccc.org) or 800-262-1620, ext. 1610.

## SAVE THE DATE

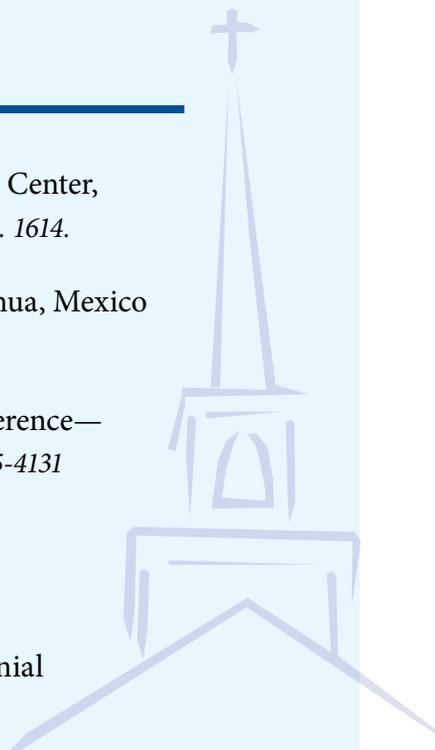
**APRIL 4-7, 2016** - 47th Annual NACCC Ministers' Convocation—Weber Center, Adrian, Michigan. Contact Marie Steele, [msteele@naccc.org](mailto:msteele@naccc.org) or 800-262-1620, ext. 1614.

**JUNE 23-30, 2016** - Missionary Assistance Corps trip to Misión Mazahua, Mexico  
Contact Jack Brown, [pilgrim\\_pastor@hotmail.com](mailto:pilgrim_pastor@hotmail.com) or 269-749-2631.

**JUNE 24, 2016** - Quiet Day Retreat preceding Annual Meeting and Conference—  
Time and place TBD - Contact Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Chaplain-Director, 734-755-4131

**JUNE 25-28, 2016** - NACCC 62nd Annual Meeting and Conference—  
DoubleTree by Hilton, Detroit/Dearborn, Michigan

**JULY 6-11, 2017** - International Congregational Fellowship 11th Quadrennial Conference—*Stellenbosch University, Capetown, South Africa*



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*Copy deadline for each issue is noted in the previous issue's "Calendar" section.*

**Letters to the Editor** are welcome. All letters may be edited for clarity and length. We regret we cannot publish or respond to all letters.

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*THE CONGREGATIONALIST* | ISSN 0010-5856 | Postage paid at Madison, WI 53714-9998. Published quarterly by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 8473 S. Howell Ave., Oak Creek, WI 53201-0288. Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI and additional mailings offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Congregationalist* 8473 S. Howell Ave., Oak Creek, WI 53201-0288.

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With the exceptions stated above, the subscription price for *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* is \$15 per year, or \$75 for six bundled copies sent to one address.

Single copies may be purchased from the National Association office for \$3.75 plus \$3.20 to cover shipping and handling.

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**The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches**  
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## ORDINATIONS

Newfield Congregational Church, Newfield, Maine, ordained the Rev. Dr. Peter Stickney with the concurrence of a vicinage council, January 3, 2016.

## RECENT CALLS

Glenolden Congregational Church, Glenolden, Penn., has called the Rev. William E. Bounds as pastor.

## IN SEARCH

### SENIOR MINISTERS

Arbor Grove Congregational Church,  
*Jackson, Mich.*

Ashby Congregational Church and Hyannis  
Congregational Church (share pastor),  
*Ashby and Hyannis, Neb.*

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

Craig Memorial Congregational Church,  
*Paradise, Calif.*

First Church of Christ,  
*Lynn, Mass.*

First Congregational Church,  
*Ashland, Neb.*

First Congregational Church,  
*Interlachen, Fla.*

First Congregational Church,  
*Peterson, Iowa*

First Congregational Church,  
*Porterville, Calif.*

First Congregational Church,  
*Roscommon, Mich.*

First Congregational Church,  
*Salt Lake City, Utah*

Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church,  
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Gomer Congregational Church,  
*Gomer, Ohio*

Hampshire Colony Congregational Church,  
*Princeton, Ill.*

Little Stone Church,  
*Mackinac Island, Mich.*

Orthodox Congregational Church,  
*Petersham, Mass.*

Rockwood First Congregational Church,  
*Rockwood, Mich.*

Plymouth Church,  
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Plymouth Congregational Church,  
*Racine, Wisc.*

Second Congregational Church,  
*Jewett City, Conn.*

Union Congregational Christian Church,  
*Marbury, Ala.*

United Congregational Church,  
*Norwich, Conn.*

## Tour Turkey and Greece This October

With Mt. Hope Congregational Church



**- The Journeys of Paul and John -  
Departure from Detroit**

**October 10-20**

Email Rev. Steve Schafer for full details  
[sbschafer@gmail.com](mailto:sbschafer@gmail.com)