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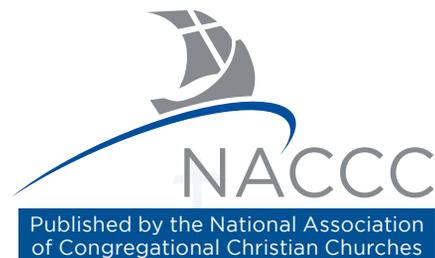
The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

VOL. 169/NO. 1

CONGREGATIONALIST.ORG

MARCH 2017



APPALACHIAN
SPRING
MEET AT PIEDMONT

KEEPING
IN TOUCH

RELIGION &
PHILOSOPHY

BARRIERS
INSIDE CHURCH

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THE PROMISE OF SPRING - THE HOPE OF EASTER

by Michael Chittum

The Spring Equinox is Monday, March 20, 2017. Easter is April 17, 2017. It does not require any special brilliance to link these days to the promise of new life.

Certainly, the change of season from winter to spring makes me mindful of the renewal of the world. Trees that had been barren and gray begin to take on new leaves. Flowers begin to bloom. The animal world awakens from its slumber.

In his 1912 volume of poetry, *Ultima Veritas, And Other Verses*, Washington Gladden gave voice to this aspect of spring and the praise of God that should follow in his poem Spring Song.

SPRING SONG

O HOPE of the world that rise this again
New-born from the clod,
O life that brightens on meadow and fen
With the breath of God,
O daffodils brave whose banners fly
At the snow's retreat,
O sweet warm winds of the South that sigh
O'er the springing wheat,
O birds that tell in the branches bare
Of the leaf-clad sprays –
Read me your lesson; teach me your prayer,
Fill my soul with your praise.

Thinking about the hope of Easter leads me to the writings of Tom Wright. In his 2011 book, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*, Wright asserts: “When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter morning, he rose as the beginning of the new world that Israel’s God had always intended to make. That is the first and perhaps the most important thing to know about the meaning of Easter.”¹ Because of Easter then, we celebrate the newness of life given to us as well the creation of a new world crafted by God.

As you look at the first day of Spring and at Easter, I pray that you may experience the joy of the renewal of life on earth and the hope of the renewal of your life with God.

Grace and Peace

MICHAEL CHITTUM
Executive Director



¹ Wright, N.T. *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters*. (Kindle location. 3267 of 4209). Harper One. 2011. EPUB.

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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

All content in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* appears by the authority of the editor. We reserve freedom of expression to our authors and freedom of opinion to our readers.

Except for service information clearly sponsored by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches or its component parts, content does not necessarily reflect policies and opinions of the National Association.

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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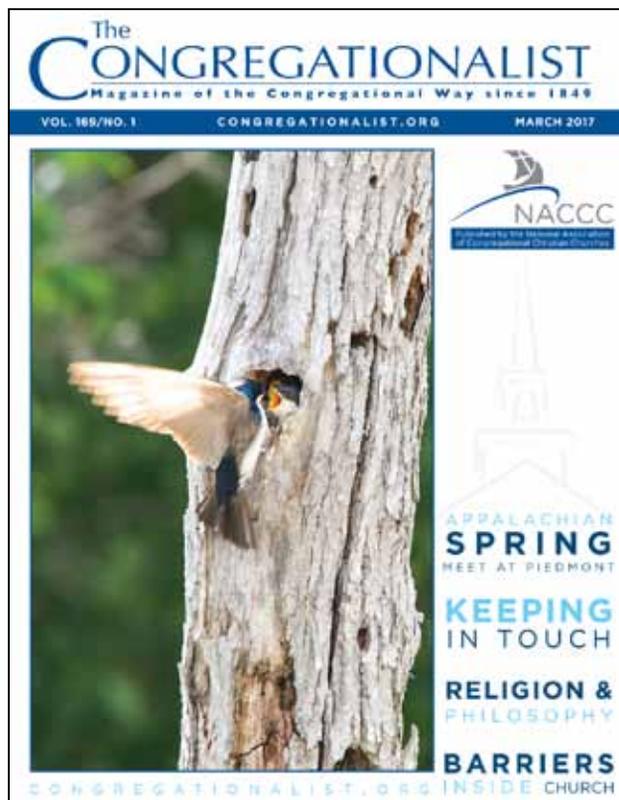


Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

ON THE COVER:

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FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND MORE, VISIT THE CONGREGATIONALIST FACEBOOK PAGE.

HENRY MARTYN DEXTER (1821-1890)

Henry Martyn Dexter was one of the most prominent Congregational pastors of his time. Not only was he a recognized expert on early Congregationalists like Robert Browne, but he was also in the forefront of efforts to organize Congregational churches on a national scale and to put out statements explaining what basic beliefs most Congregationalists held in common.

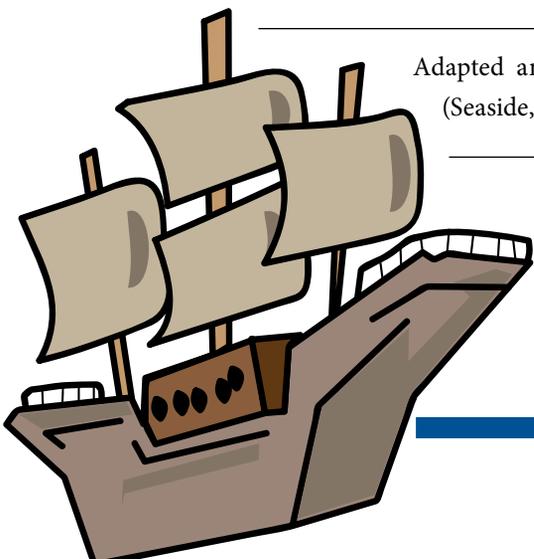
Dexter wrote many books explaining and defending the Congregational Way. One of his titles was *Congregationalism, What It Is, Whence It Is, How It Works, Why It Is Better Than Any Other Form of Church Government, and Its Consequent Demands*. He wrote:

Congregationalism is the democratic form of church order and government. It derives its name from the prominence which it gives to the congregation of Christian believers. It vests all ecclesiastical power (under Christ) in the associated brotherhood of each local church, as an independent body. At the same time, it recognizes a fraternal and equal fellowship between these independent churches, which invests each with the right and duty of advice and reproof, and even of the public withdrawal of that fellowship in case the course pursued by another of the sisterhood should demand such action for the preservation of its own purity and consistency.²¹⁴

In another book called *Handbook of Congregationalism*, Dexter distinguished between two opposing tendencies in Congregationalism, which he called Brownism (after Robert Browne) and Barrowism (after Henry Barrow, another early Congregationalist pastor). Barrowism put authority in the local church into the hands of presiding elders, whom the people of the church chose once and only once; after that, they never had any more authority over them. Brownism, Dexter believed, properly put all authority in the local church into the hands of the people, as long as they recognized the superior authority of Jesus and allowed themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Adapted and reprinted with permission from *The Congregational Minute* by Robert Hellam. (Seaside, Calif.: Robert Hellam, 2012.)

²¹⁴ Henry M. Dexter, *Congregationalism, What It Is, Whence It Is, How It Works, Why It Is Better Than Any Other Form of Church Government, and Its Consequent Demands* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes, 1865), 1-2 «<http://books.google.com>» (accessed 29 Apr 2012).



REGISTER NOW

FOR THE 48TH MINISTER'S CONVOCATION

The 48th Annual Minister's Convocation will feature speaker, George Hunsberger, recently retired from Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan. This year's event is May 8 through May 11 (two weeks later than usual), at the Weber Retreat and Conference Center in Adrian Michigan.

Dr. Hunsberger received his bachelor of arts degree from Belhaven College and his masters of divinity degree from Reformed Theological Seminary. His doctorate degree is from Princeton Theological Seminary in the field of Ecumenics, Missiology, and the History of Religion. His doctoral work focused on Lesslie Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality.

Beginning in 1989, Dr. Hunsberger was Professor of Missiology and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Western Theological Seminary. An ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), he has served as a university campus minister in Florida, pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Mississippi, team leader for Africa Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya, and a member of the faculty of Belhaven College.

Dr. Hunsberger is a member of the American Society of Missiology, serving as Secretary-Treasurer, 1988-1997, and President, 2004-2005. Since its inception in 1987, he has coordinated the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America (GOCN). He is author of *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit* and co-author of *Missional Church* and *Treasure in Clay Jars*. He also is co-editor of *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, *A Scandalous Prophet*, and *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context*.



THE WEBER CENTER

The Weber Center is fully handicap accessible, with elevator access to all floors. Sleeping rooms, meeting rooms, cafeteria, and chapel are all in one, smoke-free building. The campus offers walking trails, a nature path through a wetlands area, and a labyrinth.

All rooms at the Weber Center have private baths. Housing is limited, with 40 rooms reserved for the convocation. If you select a double room you are responsible for arranging for and identifying a roommate when you register. Because housing is limited, rooms cannot be offered for fewer than three nights.

EVENING SOCIALS

The traditional social time will take place in the evenings. The Weber Center will provide soft drinks, juice, beer, and wine. To keep costs down, attendees are encouraged to bring snacks to share.

TRANSPORTATION

The Weber Center is served by the Detroit Metro Airport in Romulus, Michigan. The Weber Center will provide a shuttle for the hour drive from the airport to its facility. Cost is \$20.00. Please make arrangements in advance with the Weber Center by calling 517.266.4000. For more information about the Weber Center visit weber.adriandominicans.org.

REGISTRATION

Registration deadline for the 48th Annual Minister's Convocation is April 25. To access the registration form, please visit the National Association for Congregational Christian Churches website, <http://www.naccc.org>. A link to the registration forms is on the website's home page.

Turf Battles:

Boundaries within the Church

By Arlin T. Larson

Churches are not strangers to splits, power struggles, jealousies, and betrayals. In this final article on boundaries, we turn to boundary conflicts within churches, also known as turf battles. In the bigger picture, the stakes are often small – someone takes it upon himself to change the plants in the memorial garden – but may loom large to the groups and individuals concerned, affecting even the entire congregation.

In one scenario, a church was in the midst of a prolonged search for a new pastor. In the meantime, the board of deacons had taken a fancy to a frequent supply pastor, whom they made the de facto interim minister. Soon they were promoting her as an alternative to whatever candidate the search committee might recommend. The church council could not adjudicate the issue, because it had no authority beyond serving as an information sharing body. The church had recently experienced a bitter and divisive parting with its previous minister. Now

it was just as bitterly divided over the “interim” and the search process. Clearly, boundaries needed to be established, enforced, clarified, or something!

The search committee ultimately prevailed, but the bitterness persisted many months. Things did not settle down until the congregation became accustomed to the new pastor, and new by-laws were written. The new by-laws established the office of moderator and a church council to which all other church organizations were responsible. The roles and responsibilities of the several committees and church officers were carefully delineated. Subsequent experience with the interim and pastoral search process has proceeded uneventfully. The congregation had grown tired of the infighting, but clearer boundaries helped, too.

Church turf battles involve complex mixes of groups and individuals. For example, it isn't unusual for a church to have a music director, choir, minister, music committee, and board of deacons, all of whom believe

they have authority over the music program. It needn't take much to upset the apple cart. To attract a younger crowd, a new member starts a youth band with electric guitars, drums, and keyboards. Soon the church has essentially two congregations meeting separately. A church in our area lost its long-time music director when the new minister wanted to pick some of the hymns.

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

Emotions often run high when change is brewing at church. Any change generates some anxiety, differences of opinion, unbalances, upsets, and often conflict. The level of anxiety aroused varies from person to person, but there will always be some. One reason, both a strength and weakness, is that people have very strong emotional investments in their church membership. Consider that we speak of “church family” or “faith community.” We have a strong need for belonging, accompanied by an equally strong need for recognition as an individual. Perceived threats to one's place in the family are extremely distressing.

Because of the close parallels between biological family and church family dynamics, the “family system theory” worked out by Murray Bowen¹ has proved highly useful in understanding church conflicts and turf wars.² Many of its concepts apply in any inter-personal situation, but both biological families and church families have an emotional intensity that sets them apart.

BAGGAGE CHECKED AND UNCHECKED

Change at church or elsewhere involves some reconfiguration of boundaries, be they formal or informal: who is included or excluded, what are the

rules, what is each person's place in the larger system. Reconfiguration is inevitably threatening, and the resultant anxiety causes people to react in unexpected ways. What seems small to one person is huge to another. Emotional reactions from people's pasts manifest themselves in ways that others can't fathom.

Family systems theory maintains that every person brings their history along with them. New situations are inevitably responded to based on past experiences, which may or, just as likely, may not be realistically relevant to the issue at hand. The goal for dealing creatively with changing boundaries is to gain insight into one's emotional baggage and check it at the door.

TRIANGLES, RECTANGLES AND MORE

Since anxiety-producing situations are difficult to face, it often seems safer to approach them roundabout. Consider two examples. A former minister doesn't approve of something in the new minister's order of worship. Instead of discussing it directly, he initiates side conversations with church members that insinuate wrong-doing by the new minister. A choir director's spouse commiserates with a choir member about her marital unhappiness, which is similar to her own.

These indirect approaches seldom lead to creative solutions but often create new conflicts that only compound the anxiety. Recognizing these indirect and inappropriate responses and refusing to encourage them is key to responding to change creatively and effectively.

Pastors are often asked to triangulate like this in counseling situations. As empathetic and prone to commiseration as we tend to be, it is much better to assist someone in facing the underlying problem.

1 Bowen, Murray. 1978 *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson, Inc

2 See, for example,

Edwin H. Friedman and Gary Emanuel. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Guilford Press, 1985.

Ronald W. Richardson. *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*. Augsburg Fortress, 1996.

Peter L. Steinke. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Alban Institute, 1993, 2006.

LONERS AND GROUP-THINKERS

Anxiety-producing change poses two polarly opposite dangers to a person's sense of self. Fear of change causes some people to band together more tightly and demand adherence to "the party line." The result is that individuality is lost. The other danger is "isolation," in which one become so outspoken advocating for or against the changes that they becomes alienated from others, thereby losing the comfort and security of belonging. Change agents need to be on guard against both. The goal is for all to feel safe and welcome during change while at the same time being valued for their uniqueness as individuals.

CLEAR HEADS: MATURE, WISE "DIFFERENTIATED"

As boundaries shift, configurations change, and many are acting emotionally and inappropriately, how can leaders make change creative, enhancing and uplifting? Family systems therapists like to speak of "differentiation," the process by which people can separate their thinking from their emotions, recognizing the emotions but checking them for the moment to focus on the task at hand. Such leaders provide a calming presence which is essential for lowering the level of anxiety. These leaders might also be described as mature or, to use a more biblical term, wise.³ They have confidence in themselves and a strong focus on the common good.

Becoming a wise, mature, and calming leader is something all would ideally aspire to. It is not easy, however, given the emotional intensity of biological family or church family life and the personal stake church leaders have in the situation. If a situation is particularly tense, family therapists can sometimes provide that calming presence as consultants. However, no consultant can ultimately substitute for the wise

leadership ultimately necessary to guide change from within. And we will see below that clear boundaries are important if clear heads are to function well.

YOU'RE FIRED...NOT

Regarding what we can learn from family systems theory, I would like to add two additional stress-producing factors. One is that, like family members, church members cannot be fired. Behavior considered totally unacceptable in a work situation must commonly be accepted in church. Thus, disruptive, abusive, and aggressive people are often cut a great deal of slack. The same applies to procrastination or general non-performance.

Case in point: A church went through agonizing discussions about revoking the church membership of a convicted, unrepentant child-abuser. Despite a clause in the by-laws allowing revocation for "immoral or unchristian conduct," some were adamant that "Christians must forgive" and not cut anyone off. The issue was only resolved when the offender resigned.

Churches could probably conduct their business more efficiently if troublesome and ineffective people could be removed, but, again, a church truly is more like a family than a work place. Modeling God's love for humankind, churches rightly err on the side of toleration and forgiveness.

THE DECLINE OF THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

A second common, nay universal, anxiety-producing factor for today's churches is that most congregations and American Christianity as a whole are in long-term, relentless, institutional decline. Membership is down; funding is down. From a clergy perspective, this means that their ministries may seem like a losing

³ Richardson, (Kindle Locations 1026-1027). Kindle Edition.

proposition in the eyes of many in the congregation. In the face of declining memberships and budgets, finger-pointing inevitably begins.

A church can still be vital even if small or shrinking. Even so, the minister is likely to be judged on the statistics, and blaming will be a constant and unhelpful undercurrent in congregational life.

BOUNDARIES, BY-LAWS & MISSION

Richardson notes, “The clearer members and leaders can be about who is responsible for what, the better the congregation as a whole will function.”⁴ A congregation’s health is, in other words, more a matter of the inter-workings of its parts than of the functioning of any individual or individuals. Major contributors to congregational dysfunction include “poorly defined boundaries (responsibility, expectation, policy, decision making)” and lack of “clear vision,” in addition to intense and widespread emotionality. Clear, public, and widely understood definitions of the purpose, responsibilities, and relatedness of all constituent parts are essential. This is the function of a church’s by-laws, which are written by each Congregational church individually.

All entities or offices described in the by-laws should include a mission or charge – “what good is this unit intended to do and for whom?” A mission or statement of purpose should also be included for the church itself to give perspective on the sub-missions of constituent parts. The core of the NACCC’s mission statement, for instance, is “to walk together in the ways which God anciently revealed to our fathers, and in such further ways as He may yet reveal to us.”⁵ Biblical mission statements include the great commission to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Mathew 28.19) and Jesus’ inaugural affirmation of a

Major contributors to congregational dysfunction include "poorly defined boundaries" and "lack of a clear vision"...

⁴ (Kindle Locations 1624-1625). Kindle Edition.

⁵ By-laws of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. www.naccc.org

*The goal is for all to
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being valued for their
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call “to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4.18). Church offices and organizations are designed to facilitate these greater missions.

Churches and church leaders who have clear boundaries and keep sight of them, even in emotional circumstances, will find change easier to manage and turf wars less frequent.

POSTSCRIPT: THE GOSPEL AS BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT

A question remains. Does the concept of boundaries have any theological relevance? Does it help us understand the essentials of being a church or being a Christian? Does it give insight into the gospel call: ‘The time has arrived; the kingdom of God is upon you. Repent, and believe the good news.’ (Mark 1.15)?

If one thinks about it awhile, the Gospel could be said to be all about boundaries. The Good News is the realization that we now live within the sphere of God’s love, not outside as aliens. It is the realization that we must turn from (repent of) the assumptions, roles, rules, habits of the life-space we formerly inhabited and embrace (believe in) the new ways of God’s rule.

“For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.” (2 Cor 5.17)

A primary component of this new order is reconfiguring the boundaries between ourselves and God and between ourselves and our neighbor.

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘That is the right answer,’ said Jesus; ‘do that and you will have life.’ Luke 10.27-28)

In the old kingdom of the world, one’s boundaries (sense of self), overlapped with God’s boundaries only tangentially. In the new world, one understands

oneself as existing entirely within God's sphere, being one of God's countless beloved.

In the old kingdom of the world, one's boundaries (sense of caring and identification), overlapped with those of other people's only marginally. In the new world, one's concern for the stranger is as strong as it is for kin and for oneself. If one cannot muster sufficient concern for the stranger, one must repent and recognize that the stranger exists within the sphere of God's love nonetheless.

Finally, adjusting one's boundaries to harmonize with God's kingdom requires one to adopt an attitude of servanthood.

Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all'. (Mark 10.41-44)

In the old kingdom of the world, one's relationship to others is primarily competitive and one's status depends on one-upmanship. The new world, however, is defined by God's love which is ever-giving.

The Gospel really does reconfigure the boundaries of our existence and should be the final word.



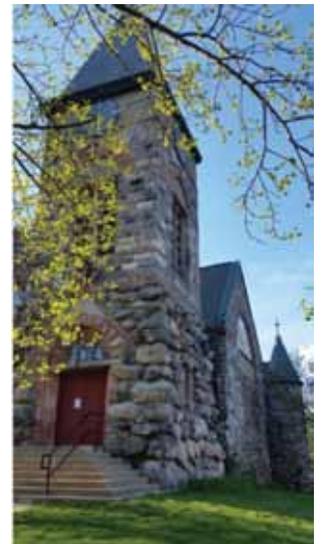
THE REV. DR. ARLIN T. LARON is the principal author of the NACCC's *Misconduct in Ministry* handbook. During his 40-year career as a pastor, campus minister teacher, and college administrator, he has worked as a volunteer and board member for numerous social agencies, including a treatment program for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

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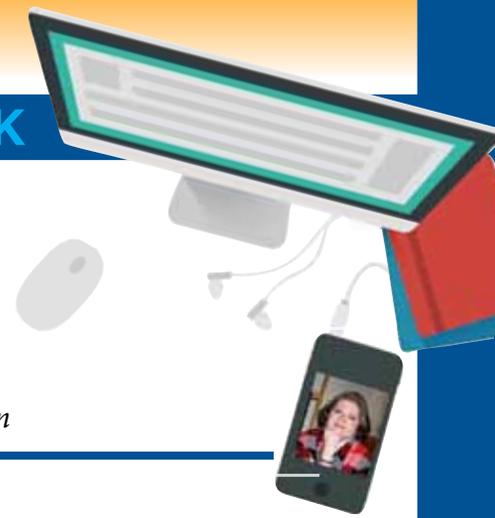
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Hack my Life

by Dawn Carlson

Over the last weeks, we've heard more about 'hacking' than we ever cared to know. 'Hack' has become a word we never want to hear again, but the truth is 'hacking' can also be a good thing when referring to the definition you find pretty far down the list in a modern dictionary. 'To hack' can also mean to deal with or tolerate; to streamline. When we look at some current uses of the phrase 'to hack', outside of anything that has to do with breaking into someone's computer, we find shortcuts and time-saving tools that make life and work easier and more effective.

Here are just a few computer tools that can 'hack' your life, making work easier and free up time for more important things.

Google Calendar has become one of my best friends. In a world where I can be found working on my Chromebook, my laptop, my phone, even my Kindle, I need to be able to access my calendar on any device and know that wherever I make an entry, it will sync across all my devices. Google calendar does that for me. It will also allow me to set alarms that notify me of upcoming events well before they happen. Need to set a deadline to get something accomplished? Google calendar will nag you just enough to get it done. See google.com for more information.

Google Keep, a handy list manager, has the same capability to sync across my devices and



lets me take quick and easy notes that I can refer to later. Keep is pretty simple, though they're upgrading it all the time. It has become my 'go to' list maker and idea catcher app, coming in handy when I want to capture ideas for Lent, writing projects and even to hold the occasional photo I'll want to categorize and save elsewhere at a later date.

PicFont has become my new favorite tool, allowing me to add text to photographs for newsletter graphics, bulletin covers and a whole host of other projects, including the creation of that Facebook meme one probably shouldn't make in the first place. The work is done online, so there's no software to purchase or download. It's quick, easy, and free - three of my favorite words. More information is found at picfont.com.

There are lots of tools out there and you probably have your favorites. Drop me a line at email (dawncarl@aol.com) and let me know what your go to 'hack' just might be.



THE REV. DAWN CARLSON is a member of North Manchester Congregational Church and pastors The Phoenix Congregational Fellowship - a church without walls. Like many in ministry, she finds herself wanting to make technology a useful tool and not a painful trouble. If you have technology questions, you can email her at dawncarl@aol.com or write to Dawn Carlson, 20 McKinley Blvd, Terre Haute, IN, 47807.



by Jim Waechter

WORKING the Workshops

2017 Annual Meeting Workshops Are Designed to Help Churches

Nearly every church, no matter the size, location, or denomination, is today facing a series of difficult issues. Members of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) are no different. Research shows the four most important problems facing American churches are:

- 1) Aging congregations
- 2) Declining membership
- 3) Conflict
- 4) Financial health

The leadership of the NACCC has organized workshops for the Annual Meeting at Piedmont College, June 24-27, 2017, to help our congregations address these specific issues.

Workshop: Small, Medium or Large. Thriving Congregational churches come in all sizes.

A panel of three ministers from NACCC churches will talk about programs that are working successfully in their churches. Come hear ideas that may be adapted for use in your own church. Presenters include:

- Rev. Sarah Gladstone, First Congregational Church, Saugatuck, Michigan, represents a small-size church.
- Rev. Les Wicker, First Congregational Church, Naples, Florida, represents a medium-size church.

- Rev. Bill Trump, First Congregational Church Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, represents a large-size church.

Workshop: What are young parents looking for in a church?

Karen Massey, a professional in Christian Education, will help answer questions that are so important to church growth: What do young parents want from a church? What does Sunday school look like in this new century? Karen is the Associate Professor of Christian Education and Faith Development at the McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, Atlanta, Georgia. She teaches Faith Development, Worship, Church Administration, Christian Education, and Women's Studies. Karen is a founding member and past president of the Christian Educators' Network, a professional ecumenical organization for ministers in the field of Christian education. Her publications include Vacation Bible School curriculum series, *Under Construction*, and *Christian Education Developments in the 20th Century*.

Workshop: Transforming Conflict in the Church.

Every social system (whether a family, a congregation, a community, or a country) experiences conflict, but such conflict does not have to be destructive of relationships. Leaders can together create a "culture of conflict" that transforms disagreement into opportunities for respectful cooperation. This workshop will focus on the importance of leaders "setting the tone" for healthy



Being a Christian in a Pluralistic Society was the topic of the Rev. Mary Biedron's 2016 workshop in Detroit.

CIT Oversight Committee. Mr. Salzer will lead the discussion, answer questions, and explain how index investing helps the CIT achieve its goals.

NACCC leadership believes workshops for our ministers are important and is offering a workshop specifically for our clergy.

Workshop: *Preaching with Imagination: Preaching that Keeps the Preacher's Soul Alive.*

Rev. Brett Younger, Senior Minister, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York, will conduct a workshop for ministers that will answer questions, such as: How does a preacher keep offering a fresh and lively word? Can the preparation and delivery of sermons be a source of spiritual renewal week in and week out? Learn ways preachers can engage their own journey, the Scripture, the church, and the world. Before coming to Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, Brett served for eight years as a preaching professor at the McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, Atlanta, Georgia.

There are many reasons to attend the NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference, and this year's workshops are no exception. We are confident that what you learn in the workshops will work in your church. Come to Piedmont College this summer and work the workshops.

JAMES (JIM) WAECHTER, Vice Moderator and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, has been a member of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York, for 30 years. He has served the church on the Plymouth Council, including four years as president. Jim has served the NACCC on Congregational Church Development and the Executive Committee, and chaired the Strategic Planning Task Force that restructured the National Association.

conflict management as well as how to change systemic dysfunctions that produce destructive conflict. David Brubacker, a nationally respected expert in church conflict resolution, will conduct the workshop. David, a member of Congregational Consulting Group, was formerly with the Alban Institute. He wrote the Alban book, *Promise and Peril: Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations* and co-authored *The Little Book of Healthy Organizations* (Good Books). David has been consulting with congregations for over 25 years and is a highly-regarded professor at Eastern Mennonite University.

Workshop: *Learn about indexing your church's investment portfolio.*

Indexing seeks to give your church the most of what the markets have to offer, without the additional manager risk associated with active management. Learn how Vanguard uses index investing in the Congregational Investment Trust (CIT), available to all NACCC member churches, and how indexing can play a key role in any portfolio. Eric Salzer is a Senior Investment Consultant from Vanguard Institutional Advisory Services and manages the CIT portfolio with the

News from the fellowship of churches

MOBILIZING FAITH AGAINST HATE

How can individuals overcome division and build bridges across race, religion and even political disagreements? This question informed a post-election, interfaith roundtable meeting at The White House. The Rev. Julie Johnson Staples was among 23 participants who traveled to Washington, D.C. for a briefing on racial and religious intolerance.

“For all the imperfections of our democracy, the ability to reach across our differences defines...the United States,” said Chanan Weissman, the White House Liaison to the Jewish Community.

Roundtable discussions addressed the disturbing uptick in hatred toward Muslims, African-Americans, Jews, Latinos, and immigrants in the United States. The meeting, which drew clergy and lay leaders representing diverse faith traditions from across the country, explored ways in which faith leaders can promote dialogue and diminish intolerance in a diverse society.

Of the 5,818 “hate crime” or bias incidents reported in 2015 – the most recent year for which

U.S. Justice Department statistics are available – 56.9 percent were motivated by race or ethnic bias. An estimated 21.4 percent were motivated by religious hatred, reflecting a nearly three percent increase over previous years.

“We’re seeing the highest incidence of these types of crimes since the period just post-9/11,” said Zaki Barzinji, the White House Liaison to the Muslim Community. However, U.S. officials acknowledge shortcomings in the statistics. Of the 18,000 federal, state, county and local law enforcement agencies in the United States, only 1,742 agencies reported hate crime incidents in the 2015 Uniform Crime Reporting statistical survey quoted. Additionally, the picture is compromised by the fact that crime victims themselves often are afraid to report incidents or face socio-cultural stigma for doing so, officials said.

“The bottom line number I can give you is that we have too many hate crimes,” said Roy Austin, Deputy Assistant to the President for Urban Affairs, Justice and Opportunity in the Obama Administration’s Domestic Policy



Julie Johnson Staples

Council. “It’s going to take people of faith and people who listen to people of faith,” Austin said, both to make real inroads in improving the accuracy of reporting as well as to stem the tide of such crimes. Among a range of topics, White House and U.S. State Department staff presented background on neighborhood partnerships and faith-based initiatives, domestic hate crimes in the U.S., and global anti-Semitism.

Rabbi Perry Berkowitz and Rabbi Leah Berkowitz of the American

Continues on Page 18

MOBILIZING - *Continued*

Jewish Heritage Organization, who initiated the event, had this to say: "Each of us may not be prophets, but we are the children of prophets. We hear in our heads the voices of the great prophets as they look at our times. What would Isaiah or Jeremiah or Amos or Micah say looking at America? What would Jesus say looking at America and those who bear his name remaining silent in the face of hate and evil?"

The event was a homecoming of sorts for Rev. Johnson Staples. Prior to her ordination in the Congregational and American Baptist churches, she was White House correspondent during the Reagan Administration for The Baltimore Sun and The New York Times. More recently, Rev. Johnson Staples served as interim Senior Pastor at the Flatbush-Tompkins

Congregational Church and interim Minister of Education at the Riverside Church in the City of New York. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) and the American Congregational Association, which operates the Congregational Library and Archives in Boston, Mass.

"I was especially struck by how long this issue has been on the national stage," Rev. Johnson Staples said. In 1790, just three years after the adoption of the new U.S. Constitution and after the country elected its first president, Jewish community leaders in Rhode Island mobilized against hate, and called upon President George Washington to remove barriers to religious liberty. Washington's reply has been

frequently reprinted and quoted ever since:

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens.

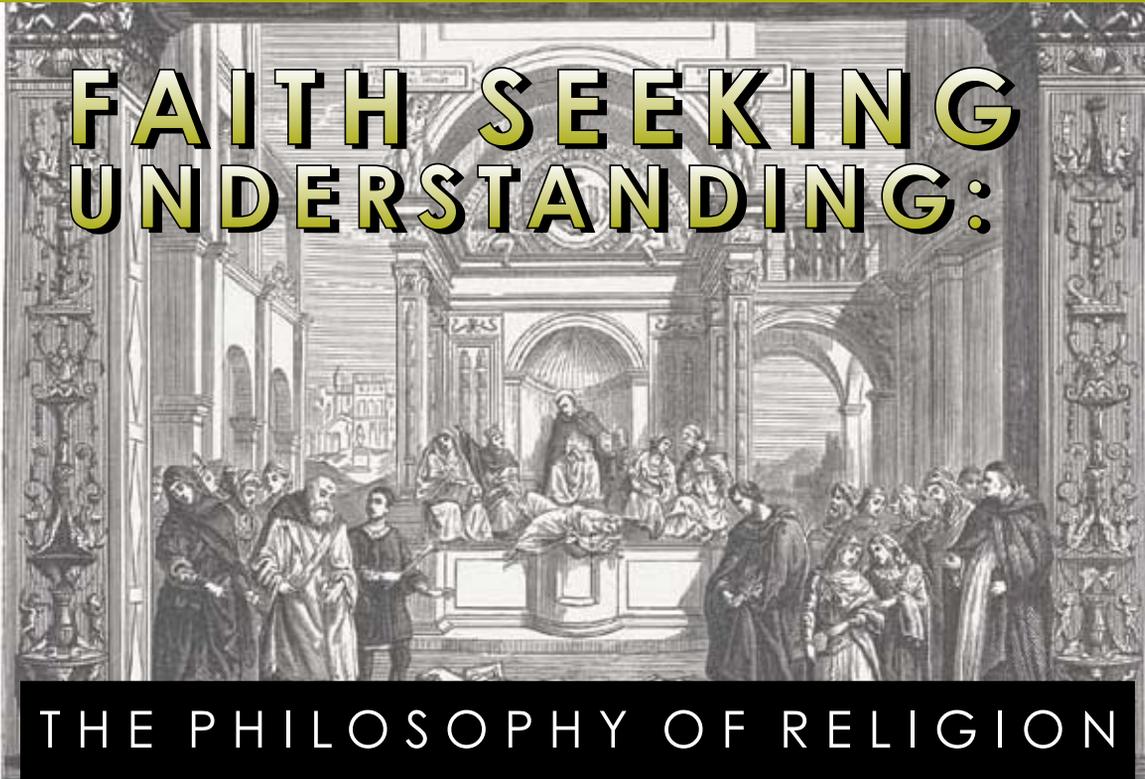
LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP RELOCATES -

Lighthouse Congregational Fellowship has moved from its previous location in Bonita Springs, Florida, to its new home at the American House Senior Living Campus at Coconut Point. They are "very excited and privileged to be accepted as the Sunday morning worship church for this new Independent and Assisted Living Center that will eventually house nearly 300 people."

According to Rev. Dennis Wilson, Pastor, and Rev. Larry Krewson, Associate Pastor, "We have prayed for God to show us His ministry for us, and every

door that we thought was about to open, has closed. When we finally gave up, God performed a miracle... and He did it so quickly. Instead of sending people to us, He has sent us to people...people who are often forgotten. Over the next years we will see people going from playing tennis and golf and driving their cars, to losing their independence."

The newly opened American House Senior Living Campus has about 30 in residence. The American House administration is helping build awareness of Lighthouse Fellowship among residents and the community.



I

The Congregational Way always stressed that ministers be pastor-scholars. Even in terms of whom congregations may call to pastorates, autonomous polity notwithstanding, churches embrace a learned clergy. In discussing the process of being called to a pulpit, Arthur A. Rouner, Jr. reminds us,

There is yet another way...that a man comes to be a minister in the churches of our Way: He is *educated*. This is not always true in every denomination. In some churches the call is enough. Not so in the Congregational Way. The call is important — yea, it is the very touch of the divine upon any man's work. But education is needed.¹

This is not to elevate clergy above the laity. It is, however, to emphasize the need for critical reflection when it comes to the *kerygmatic* office and the task of constructive theology. This is one area where the sister disciplines of philosophy and theology conjoin.

The Philosophy of Religion is typically offered as an elective to liberal arts undergraduates and through colleges of arts and science for graduate students. Rarely, and unfortunately, is it seen in the seminary curriculum. Skeptics in both fields see them as mutually exclusive disciplines. Philosophy is humanistic, rational, and, in some cases, atheistic (i.e. modern French existentialism). Religion focuses on the divine, that which cannot be proven, and, in most cases, includes a leap of faith. But the two do inform one another. In what follows, I will discuss the role of philosophy in theological reflection.

By John Tamilio
III, Ph.D.

1. Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., *The Congregational Way of Life* (Mt. Morris: Hammond Publishing Co., 1972), 153.

II

There are sundry ways to approach the Philosophy of Religion — too many to catalogue in a brief article. Aside from delineating the classic attributes of God (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence), and discussing issues such as theodicy, revelation, and experience, most texts on the subject cover topics such as cosmology, teleology, and ontology, among others. Each topic posits a different argument.

Based in large part on the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the cosmological argument delves into questions of causation and contingency. Everything that exists was created. Take yourself, for example. You have parents, your parents have parents, and their parents have parents, *ad infinitum*. There must be a first cause that is the genesis of all life. That first cause is God: the uncaused first cause. This first cause must be something upon which all existence is contingent although it is self-sufficient.

The Greek word *telos* signifies the goal or result for which something is created. A chair has a specific purpose. It was created to be sat upon. Knives were made to cut. Watches were crafted for us to tell time. Each created object, designed for a specific purpose, is the result of an intelligent mind. Teleology (from the word *telos*) looks at the complexity and purposefulness of humankind and maintains that we must also be the result of an intelligent being — an omniscient deity.

Ontology is far more difficult due, in part, to the fact that “There is no such thing as ‘the’ ontological argument. Rather there is a family of related arguments which may be thought of as ‘ontological’ since, as we may put it, they take their stand on a concept rather than on the fact that the world exists or that the world has a certain nature.”² At the heart of all ontological arguments is the notion that God *must* exist, because the very *idea* of God proves the validity of the argument. Critics feel that this and similar claims, such as those proffered by Saint Anselm, are based on little more than circular reasoning that seeks to define God into existence. Isn’t existence a given when we begin to delineate any being’s characteristics?

And of course, there are numerous other sub-disciplines that fall within the purview of the philosophy of religion. In what follows, I will present my own understanding of the necessity of this subject when it comes to theological reflection.

III

Faith is just that: believing in what cannot be proven. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”³ If faith could be validated using the scientific method, for example, it would lose its mysterious, sacred essence. As the resurrected Christ told Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”⁴

But neither Jesus nor the writer of Hebrews was encouraging blind faith. To read that into such passages is gross eisegesis. Even those within evangelical circles, who are

2. Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 304.

3. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV).

4. John 20:29 (NIV).

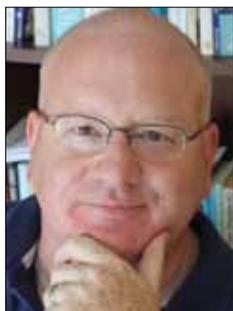
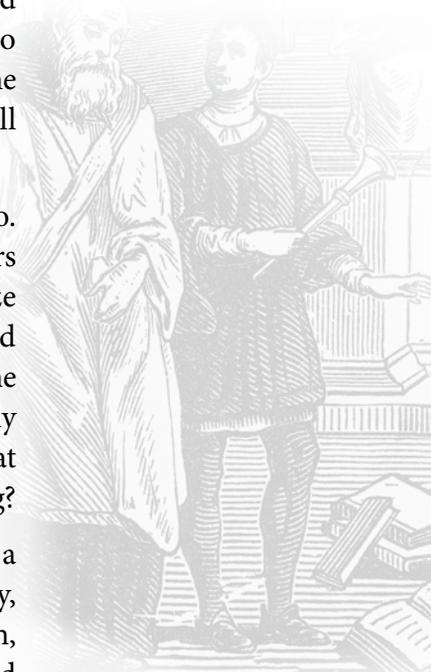
often accused of encouraging unquestioning adherence to Christ, are known for their work in apologetics, which seeks to prove the truth of religious doctrine using, among other tools, logical reasoning.

People, religious or not, have an innate desire to make sense of existence. *Why are we here? What is our purpose?* These questions continue to vex philosophers and theologians alike. In his text, *Simply Christian*, N.T. Wright asserts that our spiritual yearning is the result of our hearing the echo of an ancient voice. Religious people, and Wright claims that this is “the great majority of people who have ever lived,” long to hear this voice more clearly.⁵ My contention is that the philosophical search for the answers to these queries supports the existence of God more than it denies it. I will touch upon two examples, in particular.

According to scientists, the universe exploded into orbit some 13.7 billion years ago. The earth is a mere 4.54 billion years old. The first *hominids* arrived 4.4 million years ago and homo sapiens have only been around for 100,000 years. Trying to conceptualize these figures is mind-boggling, but it is clear how short a time we have been around in comparison to the age of the universe. Also, there is so little we know about the universe, but what we do know suggests a perfect order — one that seems highly unlikely to be the result of a random accident. And even if the order is aleatory, what caused something out of nothing? Why isn't there just nothing rather than something?

This, of course, is a variation of the cosmological argument. Combining this with a bit of the teleological argument, I present my second example: humankind. Clearly, we are intelligent: we can communicate, solve complex problems, create, laugh, and love. Every aspect of us as a species is purposeful. Our level of complexity and purposefulness increases exponentially if you study human anatomy and physiology. It seems absurd to claim that we are the result of a mere accident. Mind you, this does not dismiss evolution. It may be, as I have argued elsewhere, that evolution is the way God's creative design unfolds. Evolution and creationism are not mutually exclusive.

But we also have the ability to *believe* — a desire to know God. At the start of his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” Such a universal longing, throughout time and place, suggests that this desire may be the very gift of faith that we understand only in part. The Philosophy of Religion drives us to know this faith, and the One who instilled it in us, more fully.



JOHN TAMILIO III, PH.D., is the pastor of the Congregational Church in Canton (Massachusetts), a church that currently holds provisional membership in the NACCC. Dr. John (as his parishioners call him) is also a Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Salem State University.

5. N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 24.

From, Within, Beyond: *Wombs to Tombs*

QUIET DAY BRINGS US TO KNOW OUR SPIRITUAL BOUNDARIES

Sometimes being “hemmed in” can be a good thing and other times it can prevent us from moving forward in life or ministry. The Quiet Day Retreat, planned for Friday, June 23, at the Lillian E. Smith Center at Piedmont College, will help us to locate ourselves in relationship to the various boundaries that offer definition to us.

According to the Rev. Wendy G. Van Tassell, Retreat Guide, “This quiet day will open up a Sabbath place for you to rest a while and consider the many boundaries which provide various functions in your life. Some are essential. They protect you and keep you safe, creating a space where you can grow. Others may be stifling, functioning more like prisons, holding you back. Individual quiet times will include an opportunity to explore multiple learning centers for peaceful contemplation designed to help you enter more fully into the theme.”

The Rev. Wendy Van Tassell co-pastors the First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, with her husband, the Rev. Tom Van Tassell. She has served the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches in many capacities, including

Chair of the Executive Committee, member of the Annual Meeting and Conference Team, and HOPE (Heritage of Pilgrim Endeavor) Co-Director. She is currently Member-at-Large with the Iowa-Nebraska Association of Congregational Christian Churches and a Co-Director of the International Congregational Fellowship Youth.

Used as an education center and artist retreat, the retreat facility is named for Lillian E. Smith, social justice activist and renowned author of *Strange Fruit* and *Killers of the Dream*. The 150-acre site is on the northwest side of Screamer Mountain in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The area features hilly terrain, lush forests, waterfalls, and lakes. The Center is 33 miles north-northeast of Piedmont College and about one mile from the Highway 76/441 intersection in Clayton.

This retreat is open to any who want to become more in touch with their spiritual boundaries. Registration begins at 8:30 am, followed by worship at 9:00 am, and concludes at 3:30 pm. Cost is \$15 and includes lunch.

Pre-register no later than Friday, June 9 by contacting the Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Chaplain-Director of the Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides, at (734) 755-4131 or drcapacker@gmail.com.



The Rev. Wendy Van Tassell



RECOGNITION IS DUE

The recognition of one's peers is the highest form of praise, so the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) is especially pleased to provide its members opportunities for recognizing ministers who have made special contributions to Congregationalism.

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY AWARDS

Annual Excellence in Ministry Awards are given at the discretion of the Vitality Ministry Council (VMC).

Award nominees should exemplify personal commitment to the Congregational principles of faith, freedom, and fellowship. Churches or individuals may make nominations. Supporting documentation, such as letters of support and/or articles about the nominee, may also be submitted to assist the VMC in its selection process.

The Marian Bradshaw Award is given to an ordained minister who demonstrates a personal commitment to congregationalism. Preference is given, but not limited, to a minister from the state of Maine. The \$500 award is to be used for continuing education other than a professional degree program.

The Harry R. Butman Award is given to an ordained minister who has served at least 10 years in an NACCC church. The nominee must have demonstrated a commitment to the principles of Congregationalism. The \$500 award is intended to provide ministerial assistance to life and encourage a minister.

The Jennette Butman Award goes to the spouse of a Congregational minister who has served an NACCC

church for at least 10 years and has assisted his or her spouse in ministry. The \$500 award is based on need, merit, or outstanding achievement.

J. J. RUSSELL SERMON AWARD

The J.J. Russell Sermon Award recognizes pastoral excellence in preaching related to Congregationalism. Submitted sermons must focus on some aspect of classical Congregationalism and its relevance for today. An applicant must be an ordained pastor who is serving an NACCC active member church of under 400 congregants.

SUBMISSIONS MUST INCLUDE

1) a copy of the Sunday Worship Bulletin at which the sermon was preached, and 2) an audio of the sermon (DVD, podcast, YouTube, etc.), and 3) a manuscript or true transcript of the sermon. The sermon must have been preached following the 2016 Annual Meeting and Conference but prior to April 30 of this year. NACCC reserves the right to publish the awarded sermon.

Winner of the award will receive \$350, full registration to the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference, and a 50 percent discount on the room rate at the meeting.

Deadline for all award nominations is April 30, 2017. To obtain a nomination form, go online to www.naccc.org. The links to Excellence in Ministry and J. J. Russell Sermon awards are on the home page.

By Bob Smith

Wandering in the Wilderness

Entering another phase of one's life is nearly always accompanied with apprehension. Whether it is going to a new school, going away to college, entering the military, taking the first job (and then changing jobs), entering the unknown is full of fear and intangible foreboding. Doubt prevails, and all the research done and all the skills attained cannot offset the uncertainty of your choice and what lies ahead. That pretty much describes how we have faced the various phases of our lives. But you do it. And in most cases, life not only goes on, but it becomes more fulfilling.

After all our life experiences, one would think that my wife and I would meet our new life phase, retirement, the same way. Not so! We had lived most of our adult lives in various locations away from family. Our long-time dream was to live closer to family and take part in family activities and celebrations. We were looking forward to watching our grandsons grow and becoming a part of their lives. We were blessed with the resources to make it happen. We de-cluttered, made our home ready to sell, sold it, found our new home, packed up and moved from the Midwest to the East. Dream fulfilled! No problems! NO WAY!

What we had failed to take into account was how hard it was to leave a church and friends we love. We had moved more than a few times during



our careers and were always able to take advantage of what the new location had to offer, joined a church, became active in its fellowship, and fit in. What was so different this time? What's the big deal? Upon reflection and prayer, I believe the finality of the move and the totality of the break from the day-to-day NACCC faith experience made this move so different.

The finality of the move is simple to explain. During a career that was characterized by its mobility and its diversity of locations, there was always the knowledge that there was something and somewhere else down the road.

This time, there was joy at moving closer to family, as well as the uncertainty of moving away from my church family to an area not served by a NACCC church.

I had been a long-time member of Meadowbrook Congregational Church in Novi, Michigan. I had fallen into the life of an over-active member. However, the faith-based fellowship and cooperative nature of church members and friends eased the rough times when we felt our contributions were in danger of becoming a job rather than a ministry. We faced many challenges as a young church, and together we grew in maturity and faith. It was a blessing to be a part of this community of faith as we looked beyond the walls of our beautiful building and meeting house to minister to the community and share our resources with others. I grew to love my church family. The extent of that love didn't really register until I had moved. I miss my church family very much.

Dealing with that emptiness is akin to wandering in the wilderness. However, I have found three things that have helped.

Stay connected

I continue to stay connected with my church family. I receive a list of weekly activities from the Sunday bulletin and the monthly newsletter via email, which allows me to keep in touch with the day to day church life in Michigan. The current church directory, which also includes my contact information, makes it easy for me to stay in contact with my friends.

In addition, Meadowbrook continues to be an active participant in the Southeastern Michigan Association annual mission trip to New Orleans. We all take different routes in our journey, but we all end up in New Orleans. Not only can we continue helping in the revitalization of Katrina-wracked New Orleans, but we can join in fellowship with good friends, enjoying the unique sounds and tastes of a wonderful city.

I have also traveled to Cleveland and Cincinnati to join the annual Meadowbrook pilgrimage to see the Detroit Tigers on the road. Even this die-hard Boston fan can root for the Tigers (sort of) for two days (as long as we don't go to Boston!)

Taking advantage of these opportunities to stay connected may require some effort. The results are worth it!

Visit NA Churches

I knew upfront that I was going to an area with no NA church. In fact, the closest one is two hours away– a long commute. However, I contacted people from that church during the Orlando Annual Meeting and arranged a visit. IT WAS WONDERFUL! The folks at the First Congregational Church of Frostburg, Maryland, outdid themselves in hospitality and fellowship. It was truly a day to remember. I could not adequately express to these wonderful folks how much it meant to worship with them. Frostburg remains in my prayers, and my visit is one of my fondest memories.

NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference

I have attended as many NACCC Annual Meetings as possible. My spiritual batteries get recharged when I am able to participate. The Congregational Lecture and the Bible Lecture always provide new ways of looking at familiar passages and dealing with our faith. It is wonderful to hear how Olivet and Piedmont colleges are using their resources to provide quality education in supportive environments. The Worship Service and the Hymn Sings provide wonderful pauses in our deliberations and remind us why we are gathered together and why we do what we do. The workshops present new ideas of how our churches can be God's hands and feet in dealing with local challenges. And the fellowship – it is always wonderful to greet old friends and make new friends. All these opportunities offered by the Annual Meeting and Conference were vital to my well-being and spiritual growth when I was immersed in the day-to-day activities of my church. They may be even more important to me now that I witness from afar.

Oh, and by the way, I have joined in fellowship with a Presbyterian Church. After studying the websites for churches in my new hometown, it quickly became apparent that, despite the number of churches and denominations, only two options made sense to me. After visiting both, I made my choice and decided it was time to get serious. In choosing a church, it is always good for both perspective partners to know what each is getting into, so I met the senior pastor for lunch. I said that I felt very comfortable and would like to join in fellowship. However, I made it clear that I was a Congregationalist, loved my church, and, knowing the responsibilities of membership, would retain my membership in Meadowbrook. The pastor understood, and said I could join as an affiliate member, which is the same as regular membership

except that I would not have a vote and could not hold a leadership position. After years of active involvement in Michigan, I thought, “WOW! I would pay for a deal like that!” But I actually replied, “Well, okay.”

(Hint: church websites are accessed and used to narrow choices. The more complete and current your website, the more information a prospective visitor has to make your church a must-visit option!)

So far, everything is working out satisfactorily. I am staying in touch with Meadowbrook, and was able to greet old friends and meet new friends at the NA Annual Meetings in Orlando, Omaha, Salt Lake City, and back home in Detroit. I am getting involved with the Presbyterian Church up to my comfort level and am grateful that my membership restricts me from becoming even more involved. The hymns are different, and the congregation recites a creed once a month, but that is nothing I can't handle after attending Mass with my wife for over 45 years. I am grateful for the experiences I have had with the church I love, and treasure the relationship I continue to have now and into the future.



BOB SMITH is a long-time member of Meadowbrook Congregational Church in Novi, Michigan, which he served in many capacities, including several terms as Moderator. He served the Southeastern Michigan Association of Congregational Churches (SEMACC) for 10 years, the last two as Moderator. Since his move to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, he has been a mediator and officer of Mediation Services as Adams County, an overnight volunteer for the local homeless shelter and continues to volunteer for the Boy Scouts of America. Bob recently was asked to fill a vacancy on the Board of Governors for the Congregational Foundation.

CORRECTION

The Christmas tree decorating photo on Page 4 of the December 2016 issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* is of Rev. Tom Van Tassell and his daughter, Laura Van Tassell, not of Tom and his wife, Rev. Wendy Van Tassell, as previously identified. We regret the error and apologize to the Van Tassell family for the mistake.



A New Voice

By Matthew Shand

Matthew's talk was given in May of 2016, for a Mother's Day service put on by the Pilgrim Fellowship youth group of our church. The thematic scripture was Galatians 5:22-23, and, other than discussing his ideas with me, this was entirely his composition.

Rev. Dr. Mary E. Biedron, Senior Minister

I'd like to start off this sermon with a spiritual checkup. We all go to the doctor's office regularly and answer a series of questions to make sure that our health and physical status is in good condition. But how often do we get our spirituality checked up and monitored? The title of the message today is "Fruits of the Spirit," and we know that from today's scripture reading they are Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. Now these are all words that we have heard before, but do we truly know what they all mean? I did some research and put serious thinking into this, and I'll tell you what I believe each of these terms means to me. Also, after I give my interpretation of each word, I am going to ask a question that I want you all to think about and give yourself a spiritual examination.

Love. This is not referring to a great liking of something, but rather an attitude of goodwill and intention toward others. Am I motivated to love others as Christ has done for me, or do I only love those who please me and do what I want?

Joy. Unlike unhappiness, joy is the gladness that is completely independent of the ups and downs during everyday life. This involves focusing on God's purposes for the events in your life rather than on the circumstances of those events. Am I experiencing a joy of life on a regular basis, or is my happiness dependent on things going smoothly in my day?

Peace. This is not just having a lack of conflict, but also having a sense of tranquility even in the midst of chaos. Do I find myself bombarded with chaos and turmoil in my life, or am I capable of recognizing the problem of these dilemmas and resolving them calmly?

Patience. The ability to endure ill treatment from life at the hands of others without resorting to anger or lashing out. Am I easily set off when things go wrong or people irritate me, or am I able to alter my perspective and put myself in someone else's shoes when faced with an obstacle.

Kindness. This is more than just not being mean to people. It also has to do with adapting oneself to meet the needs of others. Is it my goal to serve others with kindness, or am I too focused on my own personal wants and desires to prevent God's goodness from overflowing to others?

Generosity. Having the strength to share what we own with those that are less fortunate is not easy. Do I regularly offer not just my money, but my time and effort to the poor; or am I concerned with acquiring as many material possessions as possible and keeping them all for myself?

Faithfulness. To be faithful means to be fully and wholeheartedly committed to something, whether it be religious or not. Are there areas of hypocrisy and indifference toward others in my life, or is my life characterized by faith in Christ and faithfulness to those around me?

Gentleness. Meekness is not weakness. To be gentle does not mean to be without power. It is how we choose to portray ourselves to others and to God. Do I come across to others as brash and headstrong, or am I allowing the grace of God to flow through me to others?

Self-control. Scripture has told us that our human desires are always going against God's rules and always want to be in charge. Self-control is literally releasing our grip on the earthly desires and choosing instead to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Are my fleshly aspirations constantly dominating my life, or am I freely enabling my spirit to direct me to the things that please God and serve others?

Today is Mother's Day. Mothers are the best. A topic that was recently brought up during one of my all-school Masses is influential and powerful women of all time. Here were some of the answers that really stood out: Oprah Winfrey, Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, Angela Merkel, Beyoncé

Knowles, Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sonia Sotomayor, JK Rowling, Barbara Walters, Taylor Swift, Nancy Pelosi, Queen Elizabeth II, and many more. All these women have accomplished incredible feats. But, what I found shocking is that there's one particular person that wasn't included in this list. And that person is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who I believe deserves to be number one on that list. She is the perfect embodiment of sacredness and holiness. She lived a perfect life, free of Original Sin. And to top it all off, she was a mother. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she did something that would be impossible for any other person to do in that situation. She freely said yes and put her trust and faith in God after being told that she would be the Mother of God. Now I'm going to tell you what I think being a mother is all about, or at least some things that I tend to associate with motherhood:

Caring. A mother never stops loving her child. She always knows what to do in every situation.

Supportive. A mother dedicates herself to making sure that her children succeed in all aspects of life. And when the child struggles or falls short of a goal, the mother will be there to lift up his or her spirits and encourage the child to try again.

Protective. There is nothing more sacred and welcoming than the warmth of a mother's arms. They wipe away tears, they congratulate a student graduating from high school or college, they shield us from the evils in our world, and most of all, they say, "I love you child."

Sacrificing. Being a mother always comes at a price. It means waking up at three in the morning when a baby is crying. It means going to the nearest pharmacy to pick up some medicine when the child has a cold, upset stomach, or the flu. It means buying supplies for that big science project that is due the next day and making sure that is perfect. No matter what the scenario is, a mother is almost always willing to sacrifice herself for her children.

Having stated all these qualities, I'm going to take a quick moment to say what my mom means to me. My mom is intelligent, funny, creative, persistent, great to get along with, motivated, hardworking, loyal, generous, and, most of all, one of a kind. **Happy Mother's Day, Mom.**



MATTHEW SHAND is a freshman at University of Detroit/Mercy. He is an Eagle Scout and, as a college student, continues his involvement on the usher and lay reader teams as a member of North Congregational Church, Farmington Hills, Mich.

KARL SCHIMPF 1942 - 2016

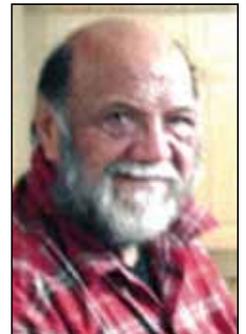
The Rev. Karl D. Schimpf of Mequon, Wisconsin, passed away on November 30, 2016, at the age of 74. Karl was deeply rooted in the National Association of Congregational Churches and received the first ever scholarship from the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies in 1964. Throughout his ministry, he served as a keynote speaker, prayer service leader, executive board member and, in 1993, he was the moderator for NACCC Annual Meeting in Portland, Maine. He attended Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia, and Earlham School of Religion in Indiana. Karl served three churches over 48 years of ministry: Mayfair Plymouth Church in Toledo, Ohio, from 1967-1974; First Congregational Church in Salt Lake City, Utah, from 1974-1983; and North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point, Wisconsin, from 1983-2015.



Karl was also involved with Kiwanis International and the Masons. He is survived by his wife Dorothy; sons David, Mark, and Chris; and eight grandchildren. Karl loved Easter, bird watching, reading, and travel with his wife. He took great pride in supporting his grandchildren's events. Services were held December 6. The family asks memorials to be contributed to North Shore Congregational Church, the Children's Dyslexia Center-Milwaukee, or Hosanna Industries Inc., Rochester, Pennsylvania.

REV. DR. RICHARD P. DON 1942-2016

The Rev. Dr. Richard P. Don of Mount Dora, Florida, died on December 26, 2016, at the age of 74 years, following a traffic accident. He was on his way to minister to patients at Leesburg Regional Medical Center when it happened. "He was serving God right up until his last breath," said Robin Miller, head deacon at the Congregational Church of Mount Dora. Pastor Don was born in the Bronx, New York. He moved to Florida from northern Illinois in 2010 to serve as pastor of the historic Congregational Church of Mount Dora. His wife, Veronica, is also a Congregational minister. Pastor Don was struggling with several health problems, but never allowed these challenges to slow him down. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge, 32 Degree in the Scottish Rite, and was a Tall Cedar. He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Veronica; daughters, Katherine and Jillian; sister Judy; eight grandchildren, his niece and three nephews.



NEWS

VISITING MISSIONARIES

The Rev. Jaime Julian, *Christian Mission in the Far East*, and the Rev. Symphony John Castillo, *NACC Philippines*, both from the Philippines, have been invited to attend the NACCC Annual Meeting in Piedmont Georgia, June 24 - 27. As usual, they will be visiting churches a month before. If you are interested in hosting them and/or having them at your church, please call the NACCC office.



Jaime and Linda Julian



Rev. Symphony John Castillo

The Rev. Charles Sagay, *Mission School of Hope, Cameroon*, also will be visiting churches in the spring. There may be other missionaries arriving in the United States before the Annual Meeting as well. Stay tuned.



Rev. Charles Sagay



Rev. Symphony John Castillo

Peter and Faith Ndungu, *Happy Life Children's Home, Kenya*, will be in Delaware, May 20, for the 15th Anniversary Banquet of the mission. They will have time to visit churches before or after that date.

Contact the NACCC Office for more information.

ANSWERS TO PRAYERS



Rev. Jaime Julian, *Christian Mission in the Far East*, received money to buy a new van for his ministry.



Geoffrey Lipale, *Pilgrim's Presence, Kenya*, received money for a well.

Ella Smith, *Morgan Scott Project, Tenn.*, reports that many amazing things happened in 2016.



Box truck for Morgan Scott Project House donated to Morgan Scott

They were given a 1999, mint condition Buick with only 66,000 miles on it; a box truck in wonderful condition with a lift on the back; a house and two acres of land, along with two 53-foot tractor trailers. (The house is not in the greatest condition, but it is structurally sound ... just needs some work). Morgan Scott also received the royalties from an oil well, which amounts to around \$5,000 a year. Possibly most exciting is the \$101,000 home repair grant for seniors that they were chosen to receive. The grant must be spent by June 1, 2017. Morgan Scott can use contract labor.

NEWS FROM YOUR MISSIONS

Panamerican Institute had much needed repairs done to their building during the Christmas break. One of their former students, Guillermo Diaz Rios, returned on January 4 to teach three classes. He has received his Bachelor's degree in Education. The staff is always happy to see their graduates succeed in life and return to Panamerican Institute to give back what they received when they were teenagers.

Bread of Life Mission, Fla., distributed Christmas gifts to 50 kids. About 20 families were adopted!

IMPROVEMENTS



A new brick wall was part of the renovation project.

Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina, has refurbished the backyard of the mission ground, which was in poor condition. This included rebuilding a brick wall, and dismantling the old, partially cracked and crumbled kitchen, along with the adjacent dining room, to build new ones.



Jesse Kay Pediatric Medical Center

In November, **Happy Life Children's Home, Nairobi, Kenya**, held a groundbreaking ceremony for Jesse Kay Pediatric Medical Center, which is scheduled to be open in Fall 2017.

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 Miller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618 or lmiller@naccc.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.naccc.org, and click on "Missions."

NEEDS

Indian Trails Mission, Arizona and Mexico, needs a new or used van for their ministry in Mexico.

Happy Life Children's Home, Kenya, wants any good condition musical instruments. A group from NACCC is traveling to Happy Life after the Annual Meeting and may be able to take these instruments to Kenya. Please contact Linda Miller at the NACCC Office if you can help.

Happy Life Children's Home, Kenya, needs donations for hospital equipment.

Panamerican Institute, Mexico, needs six more computers to completely upgrade its computer room. They also need a new refrigerator (\$1500).

One Great Hour of Sharing Recap for 2016

The Mission and Outreach Ministry Council, with the help of many NACCC churches and friends, donated to the following relief work in 2016.

Syrian refugees	\$6,126
Louisiana flooding	\$5,791
Louisiana flooding - work group	\$4,500
West Virginia flooding	\$2,027
Myanmar fire victims	\$2,000
Churches in India damaged by flooding	\$1,500
Portland, Michigan tornado	\$1,498
Hurricane Matthew Relief	\$1,393
Nepal earthquake	\$160
Panamerican Institute school repairs	\$500
Sponsorship shortfall	\$600
Total help for 2016	\$26,095

PASTORATES AND PULPITS

RECENT CALLS

Plymouth Congregational Church, Racine, Wis., has called the Rev. Evens Paul as Pastor.

Ingle Chapel Congregational Church, Milton-Freewater, Ore., has called the Rev. Stan Hughes as Pastor.

Enterprise Community Congregational Church, Enterprise, Ore., has called the Rev. Archie Hook as Pastor.

Craig Memorial Congregational Church, Paradise, Cal., has called the Rev. Andrew McHenry as Pastor.

Hampshire Colony Congregational Church, Princeton, Ill., has called the Rev. David Barnes as Pastor.

First Congregational Church, Allegan, Mich., has called the Rev. Cory Klein as Pastor.

Berwick Congregational Church, Berwick, Iowa, has called the Rev. Kathrine Miller-Todd as Minister.

Community Congregational Church, Citrus Springs, Fla., has called the Rev. Shawn Stapleton as Minister.

The Shandon Congregational Church, Shandon, Ohio, has called the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meister as Pastor.

Horton Congregational Church, Horton, Mich., has called Christine Murphy as Pastor.

First Congregational Church, Salida, Calif., has called the Rev. James Frost as Minister.

Church in the Cove, Beverly, Mass., has called the Rev. Dr. Greg Carmer as Pastor.

First Congregational Church of Ashby, Neb., and First Congregational Church of Hyannis, Neb., have called the Rev. Debra Johndreau as Pastor.

IN SEARCH

Senior Minister

Chiltonville Congregational Church, Plymouth, Mass.

Duluth Congregational Church, Duluth, Minn.

First Church of Christ, Lynn, Mass.

First Congregational Church, Anchorage, Alaska

First Congregational Church, Ashland, Neb.

First Congregational Church, Clarkston, Mich.

First Congregational Church, Interlachen, Fla.

First congregational Church, Marshfield, Mass.

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

Olivet Congregational Church, Olivet, Mich.

Orthodox Congregational Church, Petersham, Mass.

Plain Congregational Church, Bowling Green, Ohio

Rockwood First Congregational Church, Rockwood, Mich.

Second Congregational Church, Jewett City, Conn.

St. Johns Church, Idalia, Colo.

Associate/Assistant Minister

United Church of Marco Island, Marco Island, Fla.

Non-NACCC Churches

First Community Church of Joplin, Mo.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ms. King, editor,

Thank you for the article on Peter Taylor Forsyth in the most recent issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*.

I have had a copy of his brief essay, *The Preacher and Prayer*, on my desk or in my Bible for probably 40 years for constant reference. I was thrilled when I read that he was a Congregational pastor. It is still relevant and I pass it on.

"A preacher whose chief power is not in studious prayer is, to that extent, a man who does not know his business. Prayer is the minister's business. He cannot be a sound preacher unless he is

a priest. Prayer of the serious, evangelical, unceasing sort is to faith what original research is to science: it is the grand means of contact with reality. . . . We need the humiliation in which we forget about religion, the faith in which we forget about either faith or works, the sanctity that has no knowledge of its own holiness. We need an experience of Christ in which we think everything about the Christ and nothing about the experience. We need preachers who will not keep demanding either a faith or a love that we cannot rise to, but will preach a Christ who produces and compels both." P.T.Forsyth.

Grove Armstrong, Minister Emeritus
Central Congregational Church, Derry, NH.

APRIL 17 – General copy deadline for *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* June 2017 issue.

Contact Marianne King, editor@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1624.

APRIL 30 – Deadline for the NACCC Excellence in Ministry Awards nominations.

For information go to www.nacc.org and click on Now Trending.

MAY 8 – NACCC Minister's Convocation, Weber Center, Adrian, MI.

SAVE THE DATE

JUNE 24-27 – 63rd NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference,

Piedmont College, Demorest, GA

JULY 6-11 – International Congregational Fellowship (ICF),

Cape Town, 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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Bringing together Congregational Christian Churches for mutual care and outreach to our world in the name of Jesus Christ.