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The
CONGREGATIONALIST
Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

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Toward a
*Congregational
Missiology*

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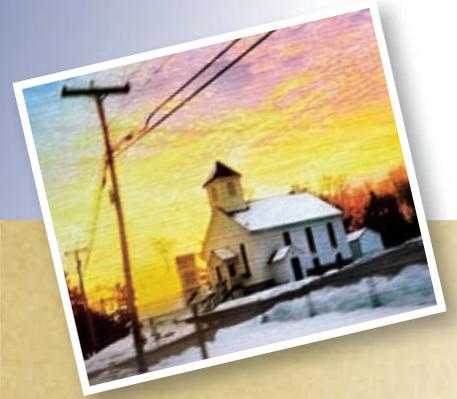
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*Newfield Community Church, Winter 2018.
Photo by Tayt Dame*

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Neither *The Congregationalist* nor the NACCC 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.





OUR *Voyage*
TOGETHER

By Michael Chittum,
Executive Director
National Association of
Congregational
Christian Churches



CHRIST IS RISEN! Christ is Risen, indeed!

Many years ago, as I was serving as the pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas, I experienced what was, for me, one of the most meaningful services on Easter Sunday morning.

We had had the usual services during Holy Week. On Thursday evening, we did a Maundy Thursday service. On Friday, we observed a Good Friday service. Howard Webb, our choir director, and I knew though, as meaningful as those services were, only a fraction of the people attended them as compared to Palm Sunday worship with its emphasis on the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and as compared to the crowd for Easter

morning worship with its emphasis on the Resurrection. So, we decided to add to the usual elements of an Easter Sunday morning worship service to help communicate the full range of events and emotions of Holy Week.

Our Easter morning worship was packed with families all dressed in their Easter best. The service began with me reading the ending part of the account of the crucifixion narrative from Luke's gospel. Then, one of our sopranos stood at the front of the sanctuary and sang "Were you There." I then read the opening of the resurrection narrative from Luke's gospel (24:1-5). When I finished reading the words, "He is not here, but he has risen," the organ began

playing "Up From the Grave He Arose" as the choir processed in, singing that hymn with all of the congregation joining in song.

That Easter service helped me remember the power and the hope of God at work in our world. even in the most hopeless situations. In this Easter season, may you also be strengthened and comforted by that reality.

*Christ is Risen!
Christ is Risen, indeed!*

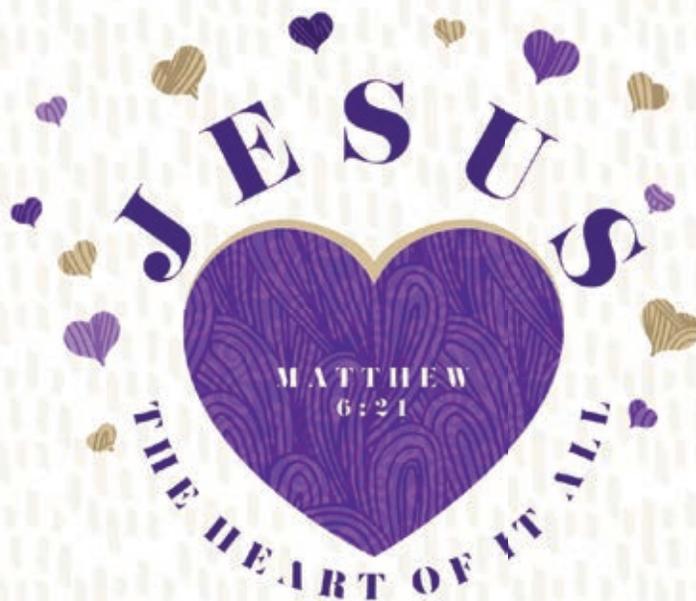
Blessings,
Michael

HE IS NOT HERE, BUT

He Has Risen



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Gaius Glenn Atkins

Toward a Congregational

Faith

A Our way is an incarnational way. Our way is an adaptable way. Our way is a lived way. The Congregational Way is nothing if not the “life on life” incarnate visible demonstration of the truth, the way, and the life of Jesus in the world and among us. I’m convinced that our way has deeper insights into Christian missiology than others credit and perhaps even than we know of ourselves. Faith, Freedom, Fellowship undergirds my philosophy and practice of mission.

My wife and I founded a vibrant and growing ministry in Haiti called “Supply and Multiply” which is inherently Congregational. It is rooted in cross-cultural relationships. It is essentially indigenous. It couldn’t be less denominational. I’ve been a decidedly Congregational and decidedly outreach oriented pastor for several years at the same time. Supply and Multiply is the outgrowth of a life following Jesus simply and reaching out relationally. I am a missiologist in the most practical sense of the word. I really do this stuff, and The Congregational Way not only informs, but frames my missiology.

On December 19, 1909, at First Congregational Church of Detroit, Pastor Gaius Glenn Atkins proclaimed, “We want our truth made incarnate, not only because life is the best demonstration and passion is the best logic, but because truth once made incarnate is stated in terms which are forever intelligible.”¹ We are the present tense passionate living breathing incarnation of Jesus in the world. The Congregational Way is inherently missiological.

Who better than followers of Jesus who do so as pilgrim followers of The Congregational Way to carry the message of Christ to the nations and our neighbors? Why has the missional aspect of our way been obscured when we carry it so simply and have the capacity to offer it in such straightforward terms? Followers of our ways championed bringing the Gospel message to bear in the real affairs of the world when champions of social justice like Washington Gladden worked to promote and spoke to proclaim:

*The relation of Social Science to Christianity is, in fact, the relation of an offspring to its parent. Social Science is the child of Christianity. The national and international associations that are so diligently studying the things that make for human welfare in sociality are as distinctly the products of Christianity as is the American Board of Missions.*²

For any missiology to be properly oriented in the direction of biblical inspiration, historic Christianity, and godly adherence, Christ and His Gospel must be at the center. “The Christian approach is, of course, the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus Christ.”³ Our way is a way consistent with those earliest Christians who followed Christ, who suffered martyrdom in His name, and believed in the efficacy of the suffering of Christ so deeply so as to warrant their own collective and personal suffering to further His name.

Our way speaks as directly to a

missional way in the world as it did in Gladden’s day. We continue to be a people deeply concerned with applying Christianity in direct terms to the world around us. The Congregational Way has informed our missionary work in Haiti in ways directly. Matthew 28 is our aim and Matthew 25 is our method. We proclaim Christ in our acts of compassion, kindness, and bringing godly justice to bear in the lives of the poor and forgotten. We proclaim Christ in our words on the platform of an applied Christianity.

Brothers and Sisters, a plain vocal proclamation of the Gospel – that Jesus died for sinners – and a spoken invitation to receive the redemption offered in Jesus by faith compliments a desire to act justly and live like Jesus in the world because, “We are never really renewed until we are renewed in ours.”⁴ What’s more, it is inherent to our way.

~~~~~  
*The work of Christ on our behalf was potent beyond all other because His love was the most sincere, His self-renunciation the most complete, His sympathetic participation in the world’s pain and shame the most acute. In his desire for our redemption He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross – it was the completeness of His devotion to our interests and to the will of the Heavenly Father which brought Him to Calvary.*<sup>5</sup>  
~~~~~

Our historic understanding of an applied faith informs a missiology which is replete with reasons to receive our Gospel. In Haiti, I’m all the time telling mission team members that the only way to find the endurance for long-term work



Missiology

By Chris Surber

in the desperate details of Haiti is to accept that the world really is this broken and that we – as the living passionate incarnation of Christ to world – must wade through the brokenness in deep relationship with people. We aren't here to check project list boxes or to parachute drop ministry and run back to the comforts of America. No! Christ is most well and perhaps only authentically expressed in covenant community.

And that is as true at Mt. Hope in Livonia as it is in the dirt street alleys of Montrouis, Haiti. Our handling of the Gospel when it is a valid expression of The Congregational Way is demonstrated and therefore intelligible! It is inherently a "life on life" expression of divinely inspired healing interaction which is burning with the compassion of Christ.

Freedom

Woven right into the fabric of our identity is adaptability. No family of churches has rolled with the punches of shifting culture, societal and theological trends more than followers of Jesus living out The Congregational Way. When I first came into Congregational churches I wondered if our diversity was our detriment. We put up such a big tent that I wondered if our broadness would necessarily crowd out the Gospel. In the years since then, I've discovered the opposite to be true, though I remain concerned that our greatest strength has the capacity to become our greatest weakness. When freedom in Christ becomes license to abandon the simplest commands of Christ, our ideals

can lull us to sleep when it comes to intentionality in missions.

Making room for various views of the Kingdom can never become license to ignore what is perhaps the clearest command regarding the Kingdom – to declare it's King to the world! Lecturing on missions in the nave of Westminster Abby on the evening of December 3, 1873, Professor Max Muller stated the following with clarity.

Let missionaries preach the Gospel again as it was preached when it began the conquest of the Roman Empire and the Gothic nations; when it had to struggle with powers and principalities, with time-honored religions and triumphant philosophies, with pride of civilizations and savagery of life – and yet came out victorious. At that time conversion was not a question to be settled by the acceptance or rejection of certain formulas or articles; a simple prayer was often enough: "God be merciful to me a sinner." ⁶

Who proclaims unity in diversity more loudly than adherents of The Congregational Way? So long as we cling to the simplest, purest, historical and biblical truths, our diversity is the very thing that secures a well-considered and properly articulated Congregational Missiology a head chair at the table of any discussion of Christian missions. Our way is inherently undenominational and, as such, we ought to be more free than any other movement to cling to the simplicity of the biblical Gospel alone!

I'm a practical missiologist. I'm a missionary. I've found there to be a great

deal of rigidity found among a broad range of missionaries. It's to be expected. God's call to missionary work is usually heard most clearly by people of strong convictions. "Wishy-washy" people don't tend toward bold and courageous actions. It takes conviction to personally interact with victims of homelessness on the streets of Detroit or to lock eyes with orphans in Port Au Prince.

Missionaries are often formed in Christian traditions which promote a heavily rigid way of thinking doctrinally. Life on the mission field – wherever it is found – is difficult. Consequently, many people take spiritual, psychological, and emotional shelter in unbending patterns of thought.

The trouble is that perhaps nothing hinders a missionary's effectiveness more than a lack of adaptability. Mental, spiritual, and emotional elasticity is crucial to every aspect of mission work. Learning another language at a high level requires entrance into another culture. Language nuance is bound tightly to the culture in which it is spoken. Interacting effectively with people who don't think like you, requires what may appear to outsiders to be an absurd amount of empathy and understanding. Rigid thinking does not lend itself well to effective mission work. Ministering cross-culturally must be adaptable, nonjudgmental, and relatable.

An adaptable missiology, the kind that flows naturally from our culture and heritage, has incarnational impact that rigidity simply cannot. Rigidity reinforces opposition to the Gospel-bearer and the

Continued>

Toward a Congregational Missiology

CONTINUED

Gospel, while adaptability allows for the creation of life on life relationships.

A lot of people want strict adherence to rules and regulations when it comes to programs of Christian discipleship, patterns of local outreach, or participation in global evangelism and foreign mission. I've experienced and witnessed a great deal more value and lasting spiritual and material fruit flow out of authentic community life. In Haiti, we take people on mission who barely know Jesus and watch Christ life come alive in them. In Church discipleship we steer people toward a Holy Spirit led personal and communal search of the Scriptures and watch people become personal students of God's Word and imitators of Jesus in the world.

Freedom to follow Jesus is an invitation to a hurting world to find lasting hope.

Fellowship

The essence of our way is "life on life" connection. A lot of Christians are gravitating toward this notion because it is seen as inherently missional, incarnational, and consequently, life-giving. But these ideas aren't a new discovery. They are just a new articulation

of truths that have been present among Congregationalists from the time of the English Reformation! Congregational missiologists have something of great value to share with this generation. Ours is a life-giving way with roots.

The Congregational Way is inherently incarnational. Covenant connection, not contrived community, is central to our way. Our way is living, breathing, moving, because it is essentially voluntary. Our churches partner with one another out of a voluntary conviction that two are better than one. Our members voluntarily associate with one another because we recognize that where two or more are gathered Christ is there with us.

I'm suggesting that it's time for us to restate, reshape, and reimagine a robust conversation as to a Congregational Missiology. My wife and I planted a seed in Haiti wrapped up in Congregational identity and are watching it flourish. Our Haitian church and community investments and partnerships couldn't be more cross-denominational. Our supporters and friends in America come from every corner of Christendom. We're seeing that plant in Haiti coming back to America by way of seeds of similar content in the hearts of mission team members who have tasted its fruit in Haiti

and want to find its sweet savor at home.

The Congregational Way is not easy to pin down to one concrete set of dogmas or definitions, yet it is visible. A Congregational missiology is fluid and moving, like a river winding into a nearly unpassable valley. That is because our way reflects the very heart of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed and we live out.

It was a kingdom of insights and ideals and the true understanding of prevailing forces – a kingdom of visions and incarnate love. It was for the moment real only in a life and words which had been sown as seed across the fields in the souls of fishermen and tax-gatherers. Surely there was never so strange a kingdom as that and even its king was on His way to a Cross.⁷

Our way is uniquely adaptable. It is at least uniquely relational. It is entirely incarnational. Mission activity isn't something we should do. It is something that – when rightly considered – flows supernaturally out of The Congregational Way.

¹Gaius Glenn Atkins, *Things That Remain*, (First Congregational Church Detroit, 1910), 85.

²Washington Gladden, *Applied Christianity*, (Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, Boston, and New York, 1886), 215.

³Gaius Glenn Atkins, *Preaching and the Mind of Today*, (Round Table Press, INC., New York, 1934.) 135.

⁴Gaius Glenn Atkins, *The Godward Side of Life*, (The Pilgrim Press, Boston, and Chicago, 1917), 93.

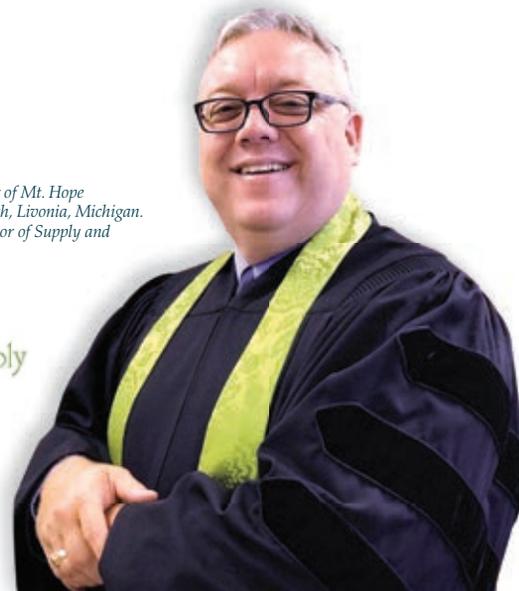
⁵Charles Reynolds Brown, *Why I Believe in Religion*, (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1924), 68.

⁶This book is comprised of the Washington Gladden lectures delivered in First Congregational Church of Columbus, Ohio in 1923.

⁷Arthur Stanley, *On Missions*, (Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, New York, 1874), 64-65.

⁸Gaius Glenn Atkins, *The Undiscovered Country*, (Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, 1922), 180-81.

Chris Surber is pastor of Mt. Hope Congregational Church, Livonia, Michigan. He is Executive Director of Supply and Multiply (Haiti).





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WHAT IS A Congregational Church?

Creeds and Liturgy

How It Started

Some articles are designed to persuade. Others are meant to question. The June 2018 issue of The Congregationalist featured the article, "What is a Congregational Church" by Bob Hellam. With the goal of generating a dialog, Bob presented, without offering any opinion, a list of statements he has heard regarding Congregationalism. His hopes were realized. The article was catalyst for a robust discussion chain on the NACCC Ministers Facebook page.

Andrew McHenry, pastor at Craig Memorial Congregational Church in Paradise, California, kicked-off the discussion and did the hard work of compiling the resulting Facebook posts. He also obtained permissions to share some of their remarks in this magazine.

The following is first in a series – "What is a Congregationalist Church?" – which will feature several of the responses generated by the statements in Bob's article.

Statement:
"We are a non-creedal association. There is no place for creeds and other liturgy in our worship."

Of all the little phrases and ideas that make their way into Congregationalism, the variations of this one annoys me the most. I came into the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) in 2000 from an independent church. The congregation that called me (wisely) insisted that I take the Congregational history and polity course in Boston that fall. Part of it involved purchasing and reading Williston Walker's *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*. The book contains 600 pages of very dense reading.

Now that I've done all that work, I'd hate to think I was deceived, and that I wasted my time because we actually have no creeds in Congregationalism. It's simply not true that Congregational churches "have no place for creeds and other liturgy in our worship."

I think some definition of terms would be helpful here. A creed is basically a summary statement of belief. Liturgy is a mode of worship. So, every kind of worship service has some form of liturgy, even if it's just half an hour of singing and half an hour of preaching. And every worshipper has some kind of creed – even if it's just an expression like "deeds not creeds" or "the Bible is our only creed" or "Jesus is Lord." These are all creedal statements.

It is true that Congregationalism traditionally has used creeds as more a form of testimony than as a test. This is for good reason; the Bible prescribes no single direct creed itself. And holding to dry beliefs makes for

By Andrew McHenry

a poor substitute for a real living faith. Christianity consists of much more than believing beliefs.

I think our refusal to adhere strictly to any one of the creeds is good for allowing each of us (or better yet, each congregation) to find the one that best suits how we understand the faith. For me, the Creed of 1883 is the best one ever written. It was superseded by the Kansas City Statement of Faith of 1913, which is certainly orthodox but is laden with a lot of turn-of-the-century optimistic language that makes it seem trendy and less timeless. But I'm just not enough of a Calvinist to be enthusiastic about the older confessions either (Saybrooke, Savoy, etc.). That's just me. Others may feel differently, and that's fine.



Pastor Andrew McHenry, pictured with wife Hillary, describes himself as a hybrid of mainline, evangelical, and emergent influences. He has been pastor of Craig Memorial Congregational Church

since 2017. The church building was lost in the recent Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise, California. He and his congregation are currently worshipping at Sycamore Glen in Chico. Pastor McHenry is active in the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and has ministerial standing with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference. He has a B.A. in Religious Studies from the University of Kansas and an M.Div. from Saint Paul School of Theology.

Along THE WAY

Building On Faith

This past fall, volunteers from Rockwood First Congregational Church joined volunteers from Thrivent Financial to help Habitat for Humanity during Building on Faith 2018 in Monroe County, Michigan. Thrivent Financial and its members provided a \$5,000 grant to start the projects, and 140 local community members donated their time and resources during the event.

The construction and non-construction activities helped provide affordable housing in local neighborhoods. Sponsored by Thrivent Financial, the month-long campaign connected Habitat affiliates with their local faith partners and encouraged volunteers to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their neighborhoods by helping to build a Habitat house.

"We talked about it every week and how important it was for us to get out there," said Pastor Dave Pniewski of Rockwood First Congregational Church in Rockwood, Michigan. Pniewski recruited 24 volunteers from his church to help build a Habitat house and to provide lunch during Building on Faith.

This was not Pastor Dave's first brush with Habitat. After Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, he traveled there on a mission trip and worked with Habitat to help rebuild the hard-hit 9th ward.

Throughout the weeks, volunteers worked on two houses located in Monroe County. These two projects were the 100th and 101st undertaken by Habitat for Humanity in the county.

Volunteers also provided lunches and assisted at Habitat Monroe's ReStore. The Rockwood First Congregational Church group was assigned to the house in South Rockwood.

"It was pretty amazing that they could take a group of a dozen of us, and actually, with minimal guidance, make us productive," said Michael Stiles, a volunteer from Rockwood First Congregational Church.

Monroe County's Building on Faith events were a part of a broader effort that included 26 communities throughout the northeast and thousands of hours donated by volunteers who put generosity into action.

Thrivent Financial is Habitat for Humanity International's largest corporate partner. Thrivent and its members have contributed more than \$240 million and over 5.2 million volunteer hours to Habitat for Humanity. Up to 138 teams led by Thrivent members built or repaired homes in the U.S. and abroad in 2018.

Thrivent is a not-for-profit financial services organization that provides Christians products and guidance that help them obtain a life of contentment, confidence, and generosity.

Submitted by the Reverend David Pniewski, Rockwood First Congregational Church, Rockwood, Michigan



Rockwood FCC volunteers at work



*Rockwood volunteers gather for a pic
Submitted by Rev. David Pniewski*

News AND NEEDS of OUR Missions

NACCC WELCOMES NEW MISSION

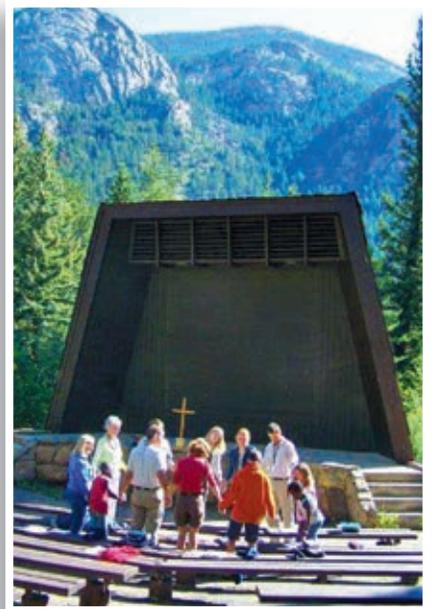


The Reverend Joy Matos is a new chaplain for Seafarer's Friend in Massachusetts.

Joy is pastor of New Day, a mission church in Quincy, and an ordained minister associated with the NACCC. She was the recipient of the Charles Rush Award at the 2018 NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference.

This past November, the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council voted to add a new mission. A **Christian Mission in the National Parks** (ACMNP) was recommended to the Council by the Warden Community Church in Warden, Washington.

The mission, based in Colorado, provides a positive God-honoring impact on the National/State Park communities that include park visitors, concessionaire employees, and the park employees. The mission teams lead worship services and provide opportunities to cultivate a sense of community with coworkers. They also provide leadership training. ACMNP has a presence in 40 to 45 national parks and 275 mission team workers.



Worship time in the national park

Prayer is needed

The Reverend Charles Nyane, Word Alive Mission, Ghana, has glaucoma and will be coming to the United States for surgery in the spring of 2019.

The Reverend Matthew Oladele, Christ to the Villages, Nigeria, is recuperating from malaria and typhoid fever.

People affected by natural disasters during 2018 continue to need our prayers.

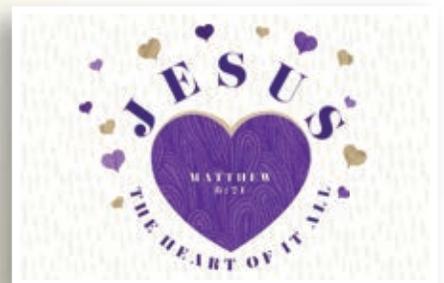


Hosanna Industries, Pennsylvania, staff worked with volunteers to rebuild two homes in Wilmington, Delaware, in January 2019. This is a relief effort from Hurricane Florence.

Annual Meeting 2019 in Cleveland

The invited missionaries for the NACCC 2019 Annual Meeting & Conference are the Reverend Harding Stricker, **Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina**, and the Reverend Julio Santana, **Bread of Life, Florida**. Many other missionaries will attend. Please consider joining us. This year, the Annual Meeting and Conference will be in Cleveland, Ohio, June 22

through June 25, 2019. Information is posted on the NACCC website at www.naccc.org.





The Camp Fire destroyed the church building in Paradise, California, but the Craig Memorial Congregational Church congregation is currently worshipping at Sycamore Glen in Chico.

One Great Hour of Sharing Update

Fall 2018 saw more disasters. Hurricanes Florence and Michael swept through Florida and the Carolinas. Fires in California destroyed entire communities. The NACCC family has been very generous. Over \$35,000 has been donated to these disasters. Thank you very much for your generosity. The publicity dies down, but people are still in need. Please keep these people in your prayers.

Congratulations to Fishers of Men

Fishers of Men, Mexico, celebrated its 15-year anniversary this past October with a full weekend of activities. During 2018, the mission continued its important work. The volunteer teams of the Evangelistic Medical Mission Crusades provided 6,826 individual services, including appointments in general medicine, dental care, haircuts, massage therapy, optometry, and podiatry. Each patient served heard the Gospel in an individual or small group setting. As a result, 1,181 individuals prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior! Contact information for these individuals was passed on to the local pastor or missionary, who follow up with visitation and discipleship. Fishers of Men has a schedule for the Medical Brigade set up for the new year.



The celebration was held at a local Bible school

2018 Update from Morgan Scott Project

Under new leadership, Morgan Scott Project, Tennessee, has done wonderful things in 2018. Their "Christmas Give Away" served 448 families reaching 1,257 children. In its third year, the 2018



A student receives a back pack full of school supplies.

"Camp in the Community" provided a week-long camp for 70 children in the community. The Back Pack Program helped 567 children with back packs full of school supplies. Remote Area Medical Program hosted two clinics providing dental and vision services for 137 people. The Good Earth Program provided seeds, plants, and fertilizer to 263 families so they could grow their own food. With the support of volunteer groups, the mission was able to work on 27 homes and four community projects.

For more information on any of these missions, or to donate to any of these projects, please contact Janet Wilson, chair, NACCC Mission Council at jaw.47jaw@gmail.com.

For a complete listing of NACCC Mission Projects, please go to our website: www.naccc.org and click on the Missions tab.

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

MISSION NEEDS

Indian Community Fellowship, India, would like more sewing machines to train women in the community. The skill will enable them to be self-sufficient. The mission also needs study Bibles for cell leaders.

Christ to the Villages, Nigeria, needs a four-wheel vehicle for the mission.

MISSION VISITS

December 2018: Tom and Gisela Chelimsky, North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, Wisconsin, visited **Pilgrim's Presence, Kenya**.

January 2019: The Reverend Joy Matos, New Day Church, Quincy, Massachusetts, visited the Reverend Elvis SaDo at the **Congregational Church of Myanmar**.

January 2019: Barbara Dabul from the NACCC Mission Council and the Congregational Church of Sun City, Arizona, visited **Fishers of Men, Mexico**.

A Look at a Too-Little Known Benefit:

The Providence Endowment

by Edith Bartley

I am on the Board of the NACCC's sister organization—an affiliate, to use legal terminology—namely, the Congregational Foundation. The Foundation has a problem which is common these days: we have identity issues. Nobody seems to know we exist, much less understand what we do. Quick answer? We manage the NACCC's endowments prudently, we raise more money, and then we hand over the money to the NACCC, which decided what to do with the money.

Until very recently, the one exception was a small amount of money whose recipients were chosen by the Board of the Foundation itself. These recipients were awarded grants from the Richard Fund for arts programming and the Providence Fund to help churches send delegates, who could otherwise not afford to attend, to the Annual Meeting and Conference.

The exception is now history. Thanks to the past president of the Leadership Council, Laura Hamby, recipients of the Providence Endowment Award are now named by the Growth Ministry, and Richard Award recipients by the Vitality Ministry. The following is a personal essay based on my time on the Grants and Awards Committee of the Congregational Foundation from 2012 until 2018 when we handed the baton to the Growth Ministry.

In 2012 the Grants and Awards (G & A) Committee was headed by Grant Stannard, one of the great and dedicated leaders of the NACCC and the Foundation, who also served as Foundation Treasurer for many years. At different times, Tom King, Harry Holz, and Lowell Linden (who most readers will remember from the days of the NACCC Executive Committee) served on G & A.

Giving away “Other People’s Money” in a good cause was always fun, although sometimes we did dig into our own pockets to supplement what the stock market had done for the Providence Endowment investments. Happily, those days are over. The Fund now stands at \$75,600, compared with \$4,500 in 2006!

To be perfectly accurate, the Grants and Awards Committee didn’t technically choose the recipients of the Providence Endowment Award. Fortunately or not, we had so few applicants we simply allocated the available funds among those who applied, based on how much they requested, and whether they could drive or would need to fly to the Annual Meeting & Conference. The maximum award is \$500, if there is enough funding. The award covers the registration fee, and any balance can go for transportation and other items.

Although the word “providence” does have a theological ring, the fund actually takes its name from Providence, Rhode Island, where the 2004 Annual Meeting was held. There was money left over after expenses were met (we try to avoid the word “profit”), and that is the original source of funding. I remember the 2004 AMC. I think I was my church’s alternate. Our church delegate was Dick Davis, who had grown up on a potato farm in nearby Little Compton. I remember the wonderful homemade cookies which local churches provided for our breaks. I remember waiting for the elevators. And I remember playing hooky. . .there was just too much that Dick wanted to show me and his wife, Bobbi.

Since the goal of the Providence Endowment is to help churches to send delegates to the AMC who otherwise could not afford to attend, awards are available to lay leaders as well as ministers, part-time as well as full-time.

In putting together this article, I did have vivid recollections of some recipients from various years, but I also wanted to speak with recent recipients. A three-year list of eleven was quickly whittled down: recipients didn’t use their awards (health reasons, mostly), pastors have changed churches or email

Edith Bartley is a 50+ year member of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York. She served a term on the Executive Committee of the NACCC and has been a member of the Board of Governors since 2010. She is originally from Iowa.



addresses or have left the NACCC altogether, some small churches have no email, and, in some cases, there was no response to my email or phone calls.

I am immensely grateful to Rev. David Barnes, 2018, pastor of Hampshire Colony Congregational Church, Princeton, Illinois; Rev. William Muller, 2016, Onondaga Community Church, Onondaga, Michigan; and Rev. Peter Stickney, 2016, Minister of Music and Arts, Newfield Community Church, Newfield, Maine, for taking the time to answer my laundry list of questions and provide insight into their experiences at the AMC.

All three mentioned fellowship as one of the highlights. David complimented the meeting's structure, saying it allowed lots of downtime which permitted "very genuine conversations, getting to know a lot of different people of different ages." Bill actually used the word "fellowship," mentioning "fellowship with people from other states." When I asked what surprised him about the AMC, Peter, who is gay, commented on everyone's "refreshing lack of hatred and judgment of gays." Peter said he experienced a "natural acceptance of the whole person" at the NACCC event. He compared that to the UCC (he edits the UCC's sacred music journal), which compels its churches to at least say they are "open and affirming." Initially, as a first timer, he seems to have encountered the "frozen chosen" side of us (my choice of words, not Peter's), but he experienced "wonderful fellowship after awhile."



Newfield is eleven members strong

Another compliment to the NACCC: a genuine sense of Congregationalism—experiencing our polity in action—and witnessing the commitment and dedication to the association on the part of everyone present. Individual favorites: one person mentioned the Bible lecture, one the Congregational lecture, two the missionaries and the missionary breakfast, and two complimented the

way that particular AMC was organized and staffed. Some said they wanted to attend the AMC to get an understanding of the NACCC. Two were pastors who previously served in other denominations and spoke of their appreciation of Congregationalism.

Cycles of church life. Many ministers will identify with David who said his church has passed the "will we survive?" stage and is now in the "fling open the doors" stage. Specifically, they are starting a children's Bible club and next fall will begin a high school for teens who don't fit in at public school. Five years ago Bill's church moved from an older clapboard building, which saw an average attendance of 40, to a new structure and has seen average

attendance go to 65. In 2015 Peter's nine-person church began drawn-out negotiations and finally acquired a former Methodist building, leading to much physical plant work on the white clapboard, steepled structure.

Some quick memories. In Salt Lake City in 2015, I met an older black woman from a very conservative African American church in the South. Some people in her church thought the NACCC was too liberal on social issues. She had been granted her award in 2014 but needed more time to save up for the rest of her expenses. In 2017 I spoke with a Hispanic part-time pastor who served a church in Connecticut which some of my own ancestors attended during the American Revolution. On another occasion I interviewed a man who later became a Providence Endowment recipient; he was a long-time NACCC pastor of a thriving but cash-strapped church and a former contributor to this magazine.

If anyone somehow thinks the NACCC lacks diversity, just go down the list of Providence Endowment recipients since 2012. From a tiny church or average in size. Cradle Congregationalist or convert. NACCC long-timer or newcomer. Full-time or part-time. Clergy or lay. Note the demographics: black, white, Hispanic, straight, gay, from the South, the East, the Midwest. Since the committee didn't actually choose recipients, this variety was not intentional: it just happened. Because this is who the NACCC is.





Buckles, Aprons, & Plymouth's Golden Thread

by James P. Nichols

PROLOGUE

Sitting on a communion table in the front of the sanctuary in Stanton, Michigan, is a large, ornately constructed book. It lies open on a gold-plated stand and is centered between a pair of candles, all of which rests atop a rectangular table. The vignette is the focal point of the platform upon which local Congregational Christians are led in weekly worship. Such an arrangement of artifacts is not uncommon within the NACCC, and the reason is unsurprising. If we were to pull on the shared thread of history that runs through all Congregational churches, we would find it is a golden thread tying us back to the pages of Holy Scripture. Ideas such as God's redemptive activity, a sinless Savior, or a Heavenly Father would be unimaginable apart from the Bible. Quite simply, remove the Bible from history and God's glorious gospel would vanish. Given Scripture's critical place in the historic Christian faith, the central placement of a Bible in a house of worship is not arbitrary.

For earliest Congregationalists, the Bible is never a signpost pointing us toward God's word, it is God's Word. This fact is why so many of us preach and pray from it every week. Though we do not worship the book, we revere it as the inspired guide it is; it explains who Jesus is and how to walk with him; it is our authoritative rule for understanding what pleases or displeases the LORD; it stands as the reliable story of our faith and the historical record of the Living God's interaction with humanity. Without this amazing book, religious understanding would be left to nonspecific generalizations about God's power and divinity. Without the Bible, God's people would, as Jesus' brother said, "wander from the truth" (James 5:19). Without it, there would be no Congregational Christian churches. No Christmas. No Easter. No Eucharist. The Bible is far more than sanctuary décor. It is far more than a mere symbol. Historic Congregationalists unequivocally believed this book to be profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Faithful are the Modern Congregationalists who affirm there to be no higher authority on matters of Christianity.

In 2020, America will commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival in the New World. In recognition of this milestone, symbols will likely be referenced. Of those symbols, the two most likely to rise prominent include 1) the hoisted sails of the Mayflower (think NACCC logo), and 2) the 10-ton boulder we call Plymouth Rock. As the country looks forward to the quadricentennial, churches of the NACCC

have the unique opportunity to promote a contextualized, unvarnished accounting lest history be re-envisioned with cozy platitudes that miss the mark.

Whenever symbols are interpolated rather than interpreted, symbolism runs roughshod over history and we offend the memories of those whose sacrifices were the seedbed from which the symbols grew. At risk of being overly dramatic, missing the point of Pilgrim symbols is somewhat akin to violating the third commandment (Exodus 20:7). The Name is something we receive and submit to on God's terms, not our own. The Name sets us free, but never free to represent it any way we wish. Similarly, the Mayflower and Plymouth Rock may take on symbolism of their own for modern secularists looking backwards, but fresh explanations of their meaning are more a case of symbol hijacking than faithful commemoration.

In a world of symbols and substance, prudence calls us to handle our historic symbols in a way that preserves the substance from which the symbols sprang. To put it simply, symbols reflect an original substance worth remembering.¹ By rehearsing and reinforcing the values, subsequent generations are able to hold on to the original substance. If the original substance is forgotten, symbols may end up reimagined beyond their historical scope. In such instances, what would remain is a cherished symbol whose meaning has become confused or, at worst, entirely redefined. Consider any number of second or third generation business owners whose parents or grandparents put in long hard years of work to build something special only to see their silver-spooned offspring make it into something radically different or run it into the ground. In many cases, what is passed down gets squandered through irresponsible decision making. The original values may have been in grandpa's heart, but only the rewards, not the values, made their way through the family tree.

In the wider culture, primary iconic symbols became iconic because they were born from a place of achievement embedded in relative unity. For example, we're all familiar with the tri-colored banner often constructed of weather resilient fabric. It comes in various sizes but, thanks to Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1959 executive order, the familiar rectangle is typical in its proportions and design. The alternating rows of red and white, the smaller rectangular field of blue in the upper corner, and the familiar white stars within that blue

field combine to form an artifact so inseparable from American culture it's unthinkable a citizen could live a normal lifetime without knowing of it. Constituently speaking, the banner I describe is nothing more than fabric. Symbolically, it's much more. Were we to speak of "how much more" by contemporary standards, explanations would be far broader than they were for the 2nd Continental Congress. For them, it was about a new, independent identity and a commitment to self-governance without infringement from England. Today, one needn't look far to find expanded meanings such as opportunity, privilege, loyalty, volunteerism, or responsibility. The challenge is deciding whether contemporary meanings fall within the essential ideals undergirding the founding fathers. Most people I've known would have no issue accepting the idea of "loyalty" as one meaning conveyed by the US flag. And, on the opposite end of the continuum, every person I've known would not hesitate to say that the My Lai Massacre fell outside the scope of American ideals. But what about less obvious aberrations? What will our collective reject and what will we embrace? And, more importantly, how do we decide between what is an unfaithful interpolation and what is an historically faithful interpretation? I believe the answer lies among founding values.

A commemoration that truly honors the Pilgrims would never spotlight imported meanings. Instead, it would magnify the beliefs and values of those without whom there would be no commemoration. To rightly understand why the Mayflower is iconic, we must tap into the passions and values of the religious dissenters who sailed aboard her. We must listen carefully for the religious ideals undergirding their thought processes. We must answer the questions, "What would compel intelligent people to risk a transatlantic voyage and settle the rocky shores of a mysterious and daunting wilderness? What beliefs were so passionately held

that this wearied band would be compelled to endure disease, malnourishment and harsh conditions such that nearly half their community died the first year?"

Fortunately, there's no need for speculative explanations when original Separatist writings exist.² To understand the thinking behind their epic exploits, we would be silly to ignore the body of work from those who were leaders in the movement. Among source documents, readers will not find political rantings about freedom for its own sake. There is nothing to read about courageous pioneering, wanderlust, or rugged individualism. Yes, readers will observe a fear of some American natives, but it's fear of being targeted by those who would harm them rather than bigotry and hatred. And above all, nowhere among the writings of Winslow and Bradford (Mayflower passengers) or Browne and Robinson (Separatist leaders) is there any indication of their movement being an English revolt in favor of self-determination or some prescient sense of a preconscious "American dream." Source documents reveal that the Separatists took risks because certain theological beliefs burned within them. These Christians shared convictions for which they were willing to die. That fact must never be glossed over. Moreover, the source that informed their convictions was the same book sitting front and center in our houses of worship. Early Congregationalists believed the Bible was God's written Word. They were persuaded that, by studying it, a person could learn the will of its Author; and, that without the intervening doctors of the church.⁴ They believed these things unto persecution and death long before they set sail in 1620.⁵

As we anticipate the 400th, I pray our NACCC churches remember the religious passions that compelled our spiritual ancestors. Among such courageous Christians, may we find



Rev. Dr. James P. Nichols is pastor at First Congregational Church in Stanton, Michigan. He and wife Michelle have raised their three children in Stanton since coming to pastor FCC in 2002.

inspiration to reconnect with The Book that undergirded their world view and encouraged their resolve. Our Pilgrim identity is far more than buckles and aprons. The NACCC has an ancestry descending from godly martyrs who stood unequivocally on biblical convictions. Their commitment to obey God rather than man compelled them on an historic pilgrimage that is foundational to who we are. Imagine those gaunt and haggard survivors sitting among us as America commemorates her present blessings vis-à-vis their agonizing losses. Let us be swift to recall what their suffering meant to them before elaborating on what their symbols mean to us. Furthermore, let's honor our forebearers' sacrifices by invigorating their values and giving prayerful consideration to our own readiness to suffer, risk imprisonment, forsake our homes, and hazard death so that we might live. "ruled by the laws of God's word," conducting our fellowships "according to the Scriptures" (William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation).

¹In certain cases, a symbol may be ascribed substance. Consider how images of flag burnings are so evocative. Some might argue, "It's just a symbol being desecrated. The substance it represents is superior to the symbol." To argue that point alone ignores loyalties of the human heart. We care about symbols because we believe they are shorthand for something more. The one who publicly flies a flag is using shorthand to say something. So, also, is the person who burns it. This is no less true with wedding rings, company logos, family crests, bald eagles, and so on. Symbols grow to become precious because they reflect something precious—often deeply held beliefs and cherished convictions.

²The Online Library of Liberty and the website mayflowerhistory.com are both accessible sites for primary sources.

³As with all nationalities, none is monolithic—Native American included. Pilgrims reported Indian tribes who tended toward friendliness, others toward violence. Mayflower passenger, Edward Winslow was one of a number of Pilgrim Fathers who took an early interest in evangelizing the Indians. Additionally, noteworthy, the first Bible published in the American colonies was not in English, but Algonquin in 1663.

⁴In reading Separatist writings, their foundational objections are primarily ecclesiological. While many Congregationalists today are keen to declare a "freedom to interpret the gospel," historical evidence does not indicate such freedom was a core value of the Separatists. I'm currently unaware of any Separatist or Brownist writings alleging differences with the COE over basic soteriology. Neither is there evidence that the evangelism was open to varieties of interpretation. Predominate Pilgrim objections were against an oppressive, top-down institutionalism that had taken over the organized church. As for soteriology (and, most other Christian doctrines), the evidence reveals solidarity of belief. Historical Congregationalists openly cited concurrence with doctrines of the French Reformed Church and the Westminster Confession. History also shows that Congregationalists eventually unified around the doctrines outlined in the Savoy Declaration. Departures may have been considered, but only upon persuasion by Holy Scripture.

⁵Later Puritan writings also bear this out.

⁶Henry Barrowe and John Greenwood were hanged in 1593 for their separatist religious beliefs.



SAME DATES, DIFFERENT CONVOCATIONS

by Justin Nierer

It was a dark and stormy night.

The rain soaked the ground, and I could not wait to warm my cold hands by the fire. . .

That would have been a dramatic and very literary start to my convocations story. It was, however, a sunny Thursday morning on the campus of Piedmont College where I first met the Reverend Dr. Phil Jackson who invited me to a meeting that, to be honest, I probably wasn't supposed to attend. It was a meeting of the Vitality Council of the NACCC. I had been nominated, but this was the first day of the Annual Meeting, and elections wouldn't be held for days. It was at this first meeting, though, that I heard the idea of Regional Minister's Convocations . . . an idea that would be realized in less than a year.

For many years the Minister's Convocation was held at one venue for all pastors and leaders of the NACCC, which created a few problems right away. One, of course, was travel. Our brothers and sisters in California sometimes needed to take out a small loan to travel to the event each year. The Vitality Council wondered how we could ask those traveling so far to attend the Convocation as well as the Annual Meeting, where travel and other costs would be even more? That is not being good stewards

of our time or our resources. Over time, the result was a large number of leaders attending the annual Convocation who were predominately from the same geographical area in which it was held.

Regional Minister's Convocations do two things well. They most definitely communicate the Congregational Way of Faith, Freedom, and most certainly Fellowship, and they produce what I have defined as "Convocational Math."

Convocational Math is this: when you have one convocation and you have 30 pastors attend, you have 30 churches

represented; 30 pastors that will hear the speaker, that will learn, that will be challenged and ministered to. Those 30 pastors will go back to their 30 churches and they will be the better for it. A convocation is an incredible tool of education and enrichment that every pastor should experience. Now, there are three regional convocations, and each is attended by 20-30 pastors and leaders. We have now tripled the number of churches represented. How many churches are represented at our Annual Meeting? If you want anything communicated and discussed at the national level,



The Reverend Justin J. Nierer is the lead pastor of Sandstone Congregational Church in Jackson, Michigan. He absolutely loves being a Congregationalist, adores the NACCC, and enjoys spending time with his wife Seneca and their six- year-old son Wesley. He can be reached anytime via email at theoutreachguy@hotmail.com.



you need to bring it to the local church (as Congregationalists this should make the most sense) and you do that by bringing that vision and idea to the Minister's Convocation. That is how "Convocational Math" works, now that we have three regional events across the country that will communicate and celebrate both the Congregational Way and the Vision of the NACCC.

This spring's three Regional Minister's Convocations will take place simultaneously in April. The newest one will be in California, along with the established convocation in the Midwest (Michigan) and the second annual convocation in the North East (Massachusetts). This is exciting beyond words, and you will see these events bear fruit almost right away. We will be gathering together to strengthen our faith and celebrate our freedom; and there is definite reward in being able to sit down with one another and to break bread.

I see a time not long from now at our Annual Meeting when many conversations will start with the words "at our convocation this past year..." And that, my friends, is exciting to me and should be to you. Because of Regional Convocations and the fruit from them, we will be finding new ways to tell the world about the Congregational Way, a way of sitting down and, in love, being able to agree to disagree; a way that should be, can be, will be, extremely attractive to generations that just know debate and anger. Those ideas, those conversations will begin at the Regional Minister's Convocations as we gather together.

Make your way to one of the three Regional Convocations this year. I truly believe that when you do, your life and ministry, along with the ministries and legacy of your church, will be the better for it. It will also make you a part of the fellowship and true congregationalism that is the NACCC.

The Convocations will be April 29 - May 2, 2019. They will run simultaneously. We even plan to have communion together if the technology works out. Exciting times for sure!

To register go to www.naccc.org.

Make Your Plans to Attend!

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Conference Center
167 Middleboro Road (Route 18)
East Freetown, MA 02717

Mid-West 50th Annual - Michigan
Weber Retreat and Conference Center
1257 East Sienna Heights Drive
Adrian, MI 49221

West Coast Nevada
Zephyr Point
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Zephyr Cove, NV 89448

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A Prophecy Revealed to Me...

IS THE **Golden Rule** *tarn*

“Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.”

(John 4:44).

Late one night in 2008 while I was brushing my teeth and getting ready for bed, I heard a clear voice say to me, “The United States will soon face great trials and struggles that will threaten our existence. We will come through alright if we adhere to the Golden Rule.” I believe it was the voice of God. I was told to pass this message on to those who would “hear.”

The Golden Rule:

‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’

Matthew 7:12 (NIV)

I immediately told my wife, Rose, but otherwise kept the message to myself for a few years. At first, I was in shock, having received “The Message.” Then I was afraid for my country and afraid to expose myself to the doubt and ridicule I knew would follow if I shared it. My faulty reasoning told me that I couldn’t know who would “hear” and that I wouldn’t be believed if someone did “hear.” I told myself that if I were not believed, “The Message” certainly would not be believed. In fact, I was disobeying God! But “The Message” would not let me rest. I thought and prayed about it constantly.

Eventually, I sought advice from several trusted pastors and close, religious friends and asked them what I should do. I was told what I already knew: “The Message” would not leave me alone, and I must do God’s Will. In time, and with the help of others, I developed the courage to share “The Message” openly. With Rose’s help, on November 25, 2011, we sent it to over 600 people including our President, his cabinet, the entire Congress, Supreme Court Justices, governors, mayors of major cities, some nationally known celebrities and religious leaders. We received three cursory replies. We started passing out “The Message” to friends and acquaintances. I wrote a song about it and have performed it in churches and at various events at which I have spoken. We continue these efforts today. On March 23, 2015, Rose sent “The Message” to Pope Francis. In his speech to our US Congress, September 2015, he quoted the Golden Rule and added: “Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated...the

yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us...” In 2016 we repeated the process of mailing “The Message” to all our country’s leaders and others as mentioned above. We continue our campaign and have hired a part-time assistant to help us.

It is 2019 and a new year has begun. Where do we stand as a country? According to a March 2018 *Washington Post* article, Americans are more glum now than they were during the 2009 Great Recession, according to the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index. While the data shows that most Americans feel the economy is improving, they don’t think their overall well-being is going up. To date, 2017 was the worst year for well-being on record. The results for 2018 aren’t looking any better. The overall index score was even lower than during the financial crisis of 2008, and, for the first time in the decade that Gallup has done this poll, no state in the country showed a statistically significant increase in well-being.

Witters, Gallup research director for the Well-Being Index, said: “What we found was an unprecedented decline in well-being nationally.” What’s driving the gloominess now is very different from what Gallup and Sharecare, a health and wellness company, saw during the Great Recession of 2009. Today, emotional and psychological factors dominate. People are not content in their jobs and relationships. Depression diagnoses are at an all-time high in the United States.

Some blame politics and polarization for causing people to feel more anxiety and bitterness toward work colleagues and family. There’s a constant narrative

ished?

by Bill Rhoads

of division between Republicans and Democrats, gun-rights supporters and gun-control advocates, the religious and the nonreligious, and so on. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center there are now 932 registered hate groups in the United States.

"I think one reason people may be anxious is because the government itself seems to be in disarray," said Isabel Sawhill, a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution. "We don't know what is going to happen next. There's no clear path toward stabilizing either the country or the world."

The Prophecy: "The United States will soon face great trials and struggles that will threaten our existence. We will come through alright if we adhere to the Golden Rule."

Is it too late? Am I doing enough? Do we hear? Did I deliver "The Message" in time? The Golden Rule is not tarnished. It is still a timeless truth. It is man's vision that has become blurred. My prayer is that God will see our shortcomings and grant us time to heal and learn to live by His commandment: "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

As I wrote in my song,
God's Golden Rule:
Pass It On, Pass It On, Pass It On
Til all trace of hunger, hate
and war is gone
Only "do unto others as
you'd have them do to you"
That's God's Golden Rule, Pass It On



Bill Rhoads, pictured with his wife, Rose, is retired from the United States Army and a veteran of the Vietnam War. He is a singer and songwriter. He and Rose are members of the Congregational Church of Menifee, California.

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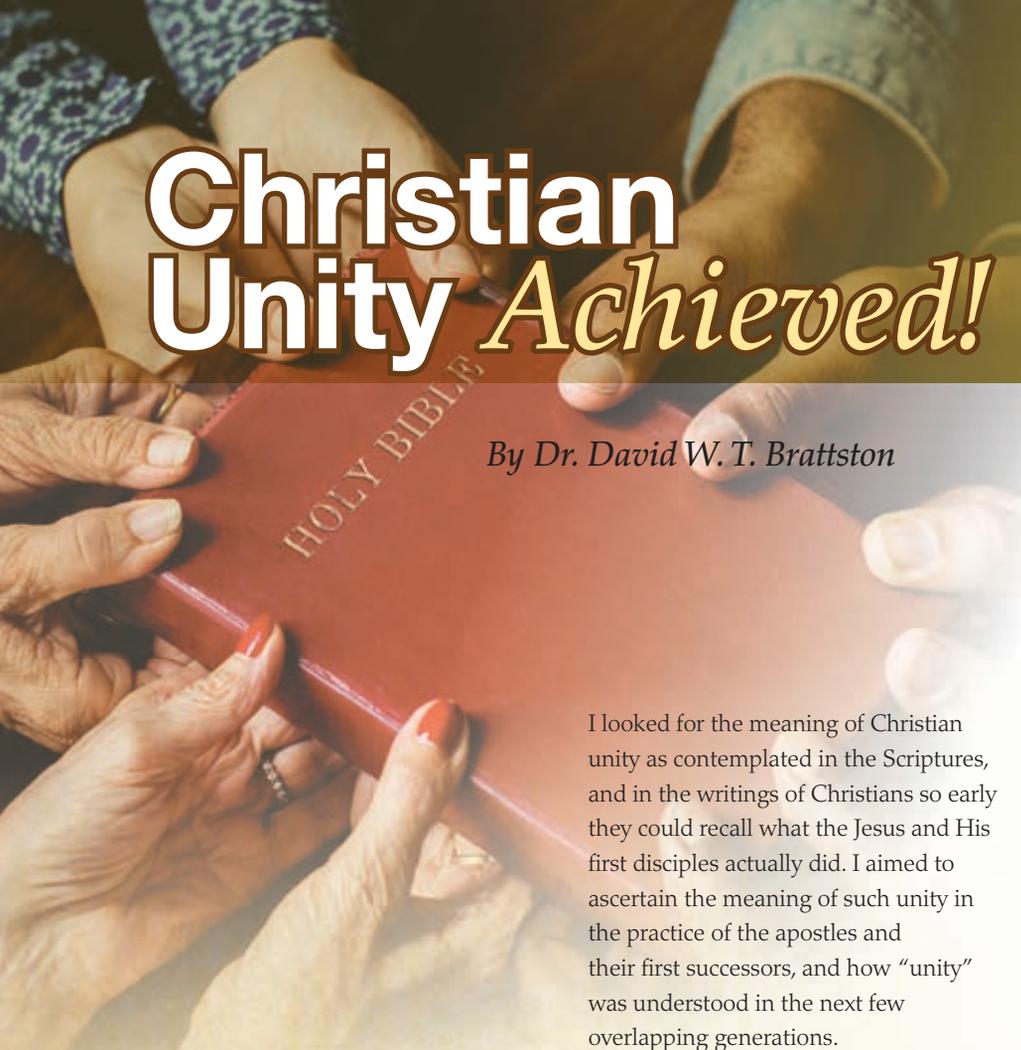
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Christian Unity *Achieved!*



By Dr. David W. T. Brattston

Dr. David W. T. Brattston, a retired lawyer residing in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada, who has been a self-directed student of authoritative Christian texts since a teenager. His articles on early and contemporary Christianity have been published by a wide variety of denominations in eleven countries.

I looked for the meaning of Christian unity as contemplated in the Scriptures, and in the writings of Christians so early they could recall what the Jesus and His first disciples actually did. I aimed to ascertain the meaning of such unity in the practice of the apostles and their first successors, and how “unity” was understood in the next few overlapping generations.

Drawing on Christian sources to the middle of the third century AD, I discovered that “unity” means attitudes, qualities of character, or modes of relating to people with whom one is in personal contact. In the Biblical sense, it is a pattern of conducting one-to-one interpersonal relations among Christians that fosters peace, love, and harmony at the neighborhood level. The Scriptures and church fathers never mentioned merger of organizations or bureaucracies.

My research resulted in the December 2011 *Congregationalist* article that investigated and countered allegations that the Christian churches today are too fragmented to fulfill Christ’s will. The article demonstrated that there already was—or could easily be at a moment’s notice—Christian unity among mainline denominations, especially at the local and person-to-person level.

Even if we substitute the phrase “Christian unity” in its Biblical sense by the “organizational unity” or “structural unity” that fringe denominations and

some members of mainline churches mistake it for, believers of every denomination can practice John 17 now, in their daily lives. Even when we narrow down the meaning of Christian unity to structural or bureaucratic arrangements, there is no longer any sense to regard disunity as a problem, for there exist far too many avenues for churches to share and cooperate with each other, such as intercommunion agreements, open Communion, unhindered mutual acceptance, joint ventures with other church bodies, and cooperation in local, national, and world councils of churches.

True, some church leaders allege that disunity remains, but this may be a mere public relations gesture by some of them. They usually mention it as if it were the only sin of which they are guilty, and hasten to add that they are working hard to overcome it.

In the last hundred years, the tireless efforts of many leaders of major churches and the goodwill of local laity towards their counterparts in other communions have achieved a real, viable, and practical unity through many branches of Christendom, which answers Christ’s prayer. Let us honor them or their memories, and concentrate instead on redoubling Christian efforts more towards feeding the hungry masses of the Third World. Even here there is opportunity for interdenominational cooperation.

There is no further need for efforts toward Christian unity. The major churches have already attained a sufficient degree of harmony and mutual acceptance to fulfill Jesus’s call for unity among Christians in John 10:16 and in His oft-cited prayer in John 17. We must now concentrate on more vital endeavors.

Look at mainline denominations, such as Congregationalist. Most of them have intercommunion agreements, fellowship and joint ventures with other church bodies, and cooperation in local, national, and world council of churches. Any disunity is largely illusory, with the differences being only in nonessentials which other major church bodies are willing to tolerate. What keeps denominational separation in place are the secular laws which confer corporate status and property-holding arrangements, which were laid down centuries ago, and can be overcome only by an act of Congress or state Legislature.

Necrology 2018



REVEREND DR LLOYD M. HALL JR

The Reverend Dr. Lloyd M. Hall, Jr., passed away on October 22, 2018, at age 78. He resided in Waterford, Michigan. For over 40 years, Dr. Hall served as an ordained minister in member churches of the

National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC). Dr. Hall's devotion to the association included many years of service, which included the Division for Ministry (1992-1996), Executive Committee (1982-1986), Nominating Committee (1987-1989), Program Committee (1985-1986, 1989-1990, 1996-1997), Moderator (1990 -1991), Library Board (1998-2000), and Historian (2000-2009). His service to the NACCC dates to his involvement with the Youth Committee from 1964 to 1967.



Dr. Hall received his education at Harvard University, Bangor Theological Seminary, and Southern Bible Seminary. He was ordained by Plymouth Congregational Church of Wichita, Kansas, with the Mid-America Fellowship. Dr. Hall's significant legacy includes his extensive writings about The Congregational Way.

Dr. Hall also was an active contributor to his community. He was a local and regional leader of the Boy Scouts of America for 30 years, a committed member of Kiwanis during his time in southeastern Wisconsin, and a member and leader of numerous religious, youth and community service organizations throughout his life. He was a gifted vocalist and avid gardener.

A devoted husband and father, Dr. Hall is survived by his wife, Hannah, his children Lloyd (Dorothy Dawson) Hall III, Jennifer (Steven Parker) Hall and Martin (Sharon) Hall, five grandchildren, and his brother William.

Memorials can be made to the Congregational Foundation of the NACCC or the Spina Bifida Association of America.

Letters TO THE EDITOR

After reading Rev. Tamilio's article "Unleased to Witness," I beg to question who exactly is he referring to by the religious right, "who use the term (Evangelical) as a clenched fist ready to dislodge the jaw of the unbeliever." Though certainly words like these make good copy are they Christlike? I think not. Over the years I have seen again and again conservative Christians caricatured as bigots and closeminded louts. In my experience I have seen close minded clenched fist individuals many times; however usually they have been liberals.

John Swanson

Thank you for putting the article about our trip to Houston in the recent Congregationalist (December 2018). I don't know if it was brought to your attention that the article is mislabeled on page 12. I was the author of the article not Amber Hagin of Maine. I am sure this doesn't happen too often, but I thought I would bring it to you attention.

Thanks for telling our story.

Pastor Stu Merkel
Faith Community Church
Franklin WI

Editor's note: Thank you for sharing your story, Stu. My apologies for the error.

A Labor of Love

by Lawrence Balleine

Some call them “work camps.” Others refer to them as “mission trips.” Both involve recruiting a group of volunteers who travel to a mission location where they offer their services to the mission.

I became familiar with work camps in the summer of 1974 while serving as an intern pastor with the Robbins Parish (three Congregational churches in Robbins, Glenmary and Deer Lodge, Tennessee) and assisting with the ministry of the Morgan-Scott Project for Cooperative Christian Concerns. Morgan-Scott is an ecumenical Appalachian ministry that has received support from National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and its congregations for over 40 years. During that summer three or four church youth groups and their leaders arrived at the Morgan-Scott Project from their homes in the Upper Midwest and the Northeast. Identified as work campers, each of these volunteer groups spent a week doing home repairs, helping with the operation of local thrift shops, taking on painting projects, pouring concrete, and completing a variety of other tasks during daylight hours. In the evenings the staff of the Morgan-Scott Project offered educational programs that were designed to sensitize the work campers to the unique problems, challenges, and opportunities facing those living in this section of central Appalachia.

Witnessing the value of the work camp experience for both the work campers and those of us who served as hosts, I envisioned myself becoming an advocate for work camps with the congregations I would come to serve.

Thus, while serving the Rapid River Congregational Church – our initial call – my spouse and I took a group of youth to the Morgan-Scott Project in the summer of 1978. One participant was a 15-year-old girl named Sue. In the years that followed, Sue often said the work camp was a formative experience for her. It must have been, because for the past 25 years she has been a United Methodist minister.

Many other work camp experiences would follow. The last congregation I served sponsored a work camp for 17 consecutive years. We offered our services at church-related colleges, church camps, a home for mentally disabled adults, children's homes, an ecumenical Appalachian mission, and a regional Heifer International* farm. We've painted homes, laid flooring, constructed porches and decks, poured concrete, planted flowers and shrubs, built picnic tables, anchored rafts, blazed trails, felled trees, washed windows, installed windows and doors, removed fallen trees, and shoveled manure. Most importantly, we have shared our lives with those we have sought to serve, just as those we served shared their lives with us.

Now, over four decades later, as I look back upon the many work camps I coordinated, I feel both pride and satisfaction in all that our work groups accomplished. More importantly, I am awed by how those experiences impacted the work campers involved.

The following guidelines may help other churches in planning, executing, and evaluating a successful work camp:

Before the Camp

Start small. If it's the congregation's first work camp, a three-to-four day experience is recommended. If it's successful, a five-to-10 day camp may come next. Alternating a shorter work camp one year with a longer one the next year often works well.

I recommend that church staff (pastors, Christian education staff, or youth leaders) assist the mission committee (or other designated committee) with coordination of the work camp.

Plan the work camp well in advance. Most work camps occur during the summer months (although this is not mandatory). If the work camp is scheduled for summer, it is advisable to begin planning the prior fall – October or November.

Contact the intended mission site as soon as possible to determine tentative dates for the work camp. During the initial contact, discover if there are age requirements for the workers. Check also on the types of projects to be undertaken and determine if the skills needed match the abilities of the potential work campers.

Introduce the proposed work camp – its purpose and benefits – to the church council and secure their blessing.

Offer a preview on the upcoming work camp at the annual meeting of the congregation (assuming that meeting is in January or early February)

Start recruiting volunteers for the work camp. Remember that work camps are not only for youth. Some of the best work camp experiences are inter-generational, and participants may well include youth through senior adults. It is

Lawrence H. Balleine is a 1975 CFTS graduate and past contributor to The Congregationalist. Now retired, he served as a pastor with Congregational and United Church of Christ congregations for over forty years.



advisable to have one adult participant for every four youth.

Begin in-church fund raising for the work camp. Solicit financial support from Women's and Men's groups and the church's other auxiliary organizations. Consider fundraisers, such as soup 'n salad luncheons, rummage sales, and auctions, to be executed by those who will be the work campers. Such events allow the whole congregation to feel a part of the venture.

Provide the hosting mission with the estimated number of work campers.

Ask the hosts at the mission site if materials (paint, brushes, cleaning supplies, lumber, hardware, and other tools, etc.) will be provided at the site, or if the workers will need to supply them. Secure a list of projects to be completed.

Arrange for transportation to and from

the mission site. If large passenger vans and/or trucks need to be rented, reserve them well in advance.

Prepare permission slips for youth participants. Conduct background checks for the adults who are participating. Request appropriate medical records from all participants. And make sure the church has adequate liability coverage for both the travel and activities associated with the work camp.

Conduct team-building experiences and an initial orientation for the work camp participants.

Provide "boundary" training for adult volunteers.

Report the final number of work camper participants to the hosts.

The Sunday before leaving, commission the workers during the morning worship service.

Hold a prayer circle with all the work camp participants just prior to departing for the work camp location.

During the Work Camp

Work campers are guests of the mission and representatives of their local congregations. Work campers need to know they are not doing something for the mission, they are doing something with them. Work campers are to be good team players as they cooperate with their hosts and fellow workers.

Start each day with morning devotions. Follow this with the assignment of the work that is to be continued or accomplished for that day. Close each day with evening vespers and a time for participants to share their thoughts and reflections on the day's experience.

Continued>



A Labor of Love

CONTINUED

Try to complete all work assignments.

Tidy up all work sites after each day's work.

Appoint a scribe to briefly record each day's activities so that a more complete report can be developed upon returning from the work camp.

For shorter work camps of three-to-four days, take one half-day off for a fun, recreational or educational activity. For works camps of five or more days, take at least one day off for every five days of work.

Following the Work Camp

Thank the hosts.

A brief report (three to four minutes) on the work camp should be presented by one or more of the participants on the Sunday immediately after the group returns.

Offer to give detailed reports regarding the work camp to groups in the congregation and local community.

Write an article for the church newsletter. Report on who participated, tasks completed, and include some appropriate comments or brief reflections from some of the workers.

Place on file a one-to-two-page summary/evaluation of the experience, indicating what was positive about the work camp. Also note areas needing improvement for future work camps.

The Benefits of Offering and Engaging in a Work Camp

Work camps help church members realize that mission work is not just a matter of giving monetary gifts. It

involves offering our time, talent, and physical labor as well. And it can entail face-to-face contact with the recipients of our efforts. The work campers often learn useful skills, such as painting, carpentry, and mixing/laying concrete.

A work camp is a venture in which the entire congregation can participate. Even those not going on the actual trip can be supportive in a variety of ways, such as helping with the fundraisers, providing vehicles or gas money, offering needed tools and equipment.

Inter-generational work camps often break down age barriers and have the potential for developing on-going mentor/mentee relationships. Participants have the opportunity to be a part of a team that works together to accomplish shared goals. Friendships often develop among the participants that last long beyond the work camp itself.

Some ask, "Why go somewhere else to volunteer? Isn't there plenty we can be doing around our own church?" Yes, there is often work that can be done among our own membership and with our own church facilities. Engaging in such "local" ministry is a good thing. But traveling to a mission site "away from home" often puts us in touch – face to face – with persons from other parts of the country and, sometimes, in cultures very different from our own. As we get to know the recipients of our work efforts – sometimes working side by side with them during the work camp experiences – the stereotypes that may have existed about them often banish.

And as we come to an appreciation of people and places that are often quite different than our own, we grow personally and spiritually.

Work camps can result in financial savings for the missions. I recently estimated the value of the labor provided by work camp participants from the last congregation I served. An estimated average of 12 workers per work camp, with each participant providing an average 25 hours of labor over a period of 17 years equals a total of 5100 hours of volunteer labor. If that labor is valued at \$15 per hour, the savings for the mission sites amounts to a little over \$75,000.

In the final analysis, work camps/mission trips are also about building relationships – relationships among the work camp participants, and relationships with those at the mission location. Whether you call them work camps or mission trips, they remain labors of love.

*Heifer International is a non-profit organization that helps improve impoverished communities around the world by training people in sustainable farming, helping them to access markets, and offering women opportunities to develop leadership skills and entrepreneurship.

TREASURES: A Quiet Day Retreat

By Charles Packer

Reverend Dan Vellinga, Senior Minister of the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa, will lead a Quiet Day Retreat at the Jesuit Retreat House in Parma, Ohio, on Friday, June 21, 2019, 8:30 am-3:30 pm.

The retreat will give us time to reflect on what we find valuable in life in comparison to the Lord's values, noting Jesus' statement in Matthew 6:19-21. Participants will consider how our resources of time and money align with our values.

Situated on over 50 wooded acres, the Jesuit Retreat House (JRH) has been more than an institution in the Cleveland area. Since opening in 1898, it has been serving people of the Diocese of Cleveland, providing leaders and programs to meet the needs of the times.

The event is sponsored by the Congregational Retreat Society. For more information, contact the Reverend Dr. Charles Packer, Chaplain-Director of the Society, at drcapacker@gmail.com or call him at (734) 755-4131.

Cost is \$30, which includes lunch. Checks made out to the Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides may be sent to the Pine Hill Congregational Church, 4160 Middlebelt Road, West Bloomfield, Michigan 48323.

Registration Deadline is Friday, June 7, 2019. Space is limited, and registration will only be finalized when full payment is received..

2019 Quiet Day Retreat Registration form

Name _____

Street Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

Telephone number _____

Email _____

Dietary Restrictions: _____

_____ Yes, I can drive _____ people (including myself) in my vehicle. _____ I will need transportation.

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ (\$30 per person)
made out to the Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides or CSCRG

An *Easter* Hope

Submitted by the Reverend Dr. Michael Chittum

As we look ahead to Easter, let me share with you one of the classic poems that has an Easter theme. It was written by George Herbert, an early 17th century Englishman.

This poem speaks to my hope in sharing in the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Is this not the hope that each of us has in faith? Despite our sin and rebellion, in faith, we affirm that we also are raised to new life through the power of God's love, grace, and mercy.

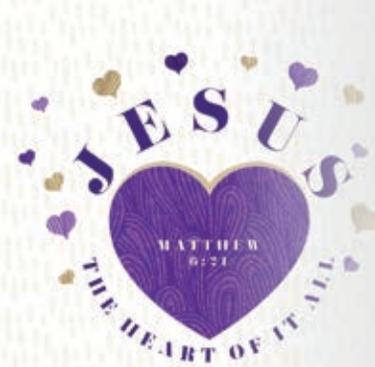
Easter Wings

By George Herbert (1593 – 1633)

*Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.*

*My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.*





Speaking of **NACCC** **THE ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE . . .**

Two keynote speakers promise to enlighten, educate, and entertain attendees at the NACCC's 65th Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. This year's event is hosted by the Ohio Association, June 22-25, 2019, at the Cleveland Marriott Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio.

The Reverend Brett Younger, Ph.D. will present this year's Bible Lecture. Rev. Younger has been the Senior Minister of Plymouth Church in Boston, New York, since 2016. He loves giving tours of the "Great Northern Depot of the Underground Railroad" – also known as the church basement. He enjoys writing, preaching, and sharing life with the congregation.

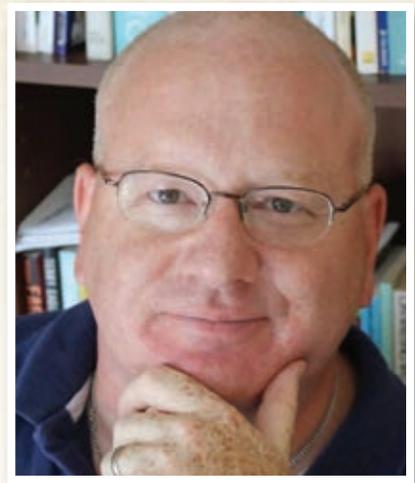
Before coming to Plymouth, Rev. Younger was a professor at the McAfee School of Theology of Mercer University of Atlanta for eight years. Prior to that he was a pastor for 22 years in Texas, Kansas, and Indiana. He has authored four books: *Time for Supper: Invitations to Christ's Table*, *Reflections Daily Devotional Guide*, *The Lighter Side: Serving Up Life Lessons with a Smile*, and *Who Moved My Pulpit? A Hilarious Look at Ministerial Life*.

Rev. Younger presented the workshop, "Prophetic Preaching: Preaching on the Edge of the Cliff," at last year's Annual Meeting and Conference in San Diego.

The Reverend John Tamilio

III, Ph.D. will present the Congregational Lecture: The Heart of Our Heritage and Our Treasure. Dr. Tamilio is Pastor of the Congregational Church of Canton, Massachusetts, which joined the NACCC in June 2016. He is also a visiting Associate Professor of Philosophy at Salem State University, his undergraduate alma mater. Dr. Tamilio holds graduate degrees from Northeastern University, Andover Newton Seminary and Boston University. He has conducted post-doctoral research at Harvard University as part of its Minister in the Vicinity program.

Dr. Tamilio is a member of the International T. S. Eliot Society, the Society of Christian Philosophers, the Mercersburg Society, and is an Ambassador of the Harvard Club in Boston. His first book, *Blind Painting: Poems*, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Letters in 2003. He is a frequent contributor to *The Congregationalist* magazine.



Dr. John Tamilio III

For more information and the registration brochure, please go to www.naccc.org and click on the 65th Annual Meeting & Conference logo under "Now Trending."



The Reverend Brett Younger

Pastorates & PULPITS

Recent Calls

First Congregational Church, Crown Point, N.Y., has called

Rev. Joshua Mancini as Senior Minister.

Little Washington Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio, has called Rev. Michael Ziadeh as Senior Minister.

The First Congregational Church of Yarmouth Yarmouth Port, MA



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More information about our church may be found on our website www.fccyarmouth.org as well as on our Church Information Form at www.naccc.org.

Installations

Rev. Carrie Orlando

First Congregational Church, Royal Oak, Mich.

November 4, 2018

The Reverend Jim Harper

Thomas A. Edison Congregational Church, Ft. Myers, Fla

November 4, 2018

Rev. Maxwell O. Nkansah

Olivet Congregational Church, Olivet, Mich.

November 11, 2018

Rev. Dr. Alexander W. Hunter

Stafford Springs Congregational Church, Stafford Springs, Conn.

November 18, 2018

IN SEARCH

Senior Minister

Atkinson Congregational Church, Atkinson, Ill.

Congregational Church of Bound Brook, N.J.

First Congregational Church, Interlachen, Fla

First Congregational Church, Peterson, Iowa

First Congregational Church, Terre Haute, Ind.

First Congregational Church of Yarmouth, Yarmouth Port, Mass

First Congregational Church of Roscommon, Mich.

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

Founders Congregational Church, Harwinton, Conn.

Gahanna Community Congregational Church, Gahanna, Ohio

People's Congregational Church, Bayport, Minn.

Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif.

Second Congregational Church, Jewett City, Conn.

Second Congregational Church, Warren, Maine

St. Jacobi Congregational Church, Richfield, Wis.

Tinley Park Community Church, Tinley Park, Ill.

Associate Minister

Congregational Christian Church, North Manchester, Ind.

United Church of Marco Island, Marco Island, Fla.

Assistant Minister – Minister of Youth

Amelia Christian Church, Clayton, N.C.

Non-NACCC Church

First Congregational Church United Church of Christ, Springfield, Vt.

2019 CALENDAR

APRIL 29 -MAY 2, 2019

Copy deadline for the March issue of *The Congregationalist*
Contact editor@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1624

April 29 -May 2, 2019

East Coast Minister's Convocation
Cathedral Camp Retreat & Conference Center
East Freetown, MA

APRIL 29- MAY 2, 2019

Midwest Minister's Convocation
Weber Center, Adrian, MI

April 29-May 2, 2019

West Coast Minister's Convocation
Zephyr Point, Zephyr Cove, NV

JUNE 21, 2019

Treasures: Quiet Day Retreat
Jesuit Retreat House, Parma, OH

JUNE 22-25, 2019

65th Annual Meeting & Conference of the
National Association of Congregational Christian Churches
Cleveland Airport Marriott, Cleveland, OH

SAVE THE DATES

JULY 22-28, 2020

International Congregational Fellowship Quadrennial
Conference, Curry College, Milton, MA

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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.

The NACCC reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

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The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

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