

# PEDALING FOR A PURPOSE

## ONE PASTOR'S JOURNEY TO SUSTAIN THE CONGREGATIONALIST

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It was in 1988 that I became the pastor of a new church startup. After a couple of months of looking around for an affiliation, all 15 of our members voted to join the NACCC. That step was to prove crucial to our success as we navigated our way to becoming a larger church. One of the great resources that I discovered early was *The Congregationalist* magazine – the oldest continuously published Christian magazine in America, first published in 1849. The resources and ideas that this magazine offered to us as a new church were essential to our progress and development. Perhaps the most important of all was that it taught us, as a new church, that we were not alone, but there were other like-minded folks around the country who believed in the Congregational Way as we did.

When it was announced in 2003 that *The Congregationalist* needed \$25,000 to buy new computers, I decided to do something about it. In late April 2004, I set off from Huntington Beach, California, by bicycle, bound for the NACCC Annual Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island. My church gave me a 3-month sabbatical (as did my wife). I stopped by NACCC churches along the way, giving talks on the pilgrims and making appeals for donations toward the magazine. We called it the Pilgrim Ride. I rode alone, but was accompanied by Vince Dunlap, who drove my car and met me every night at a predetermined spot.

Most of these spots were small towns where it would be easy to find each other, because in those days, we couldn't depend on cell phones. I remember stopping at a café in a small town in western Kansas. Behind the counter was a sign that said: "There is not much to do in a small town, but what you hear makes up for it."

One day, just west of Wichita, I confronted the first harsh weather of my trip. There were tornadoes visible most of the day, and at one point, I could see seven tornadoes all around me. I couldn't call Vince because of limited cell service, so I just kept praying and rode right through them without a scratch. That night in our motel, the TV screen suddenly flashed red and a loud voice announced: "Tornado! Take immediate cover!" We didn't know what to do, so I just changed channels, and everything was fine.

Wichita was the start of the bad weather that plagued me every day for the last month of the ride.



By the time I got to northern Ohio, the flooding was so bad that many roads were closed. It turned out to be the wettest spring in 30 years. Having to get out of a warm, dry bed and peddle off alone in the rain every morning for those last four weeks was one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

Finally, in glorious sunshine, I arrived at Plymouth Rock. In looking at it for the first time, I said what all first-time visitors say: "That's it?" Because so many tourists chipped away at it over the centuries, the once large rock is now only the size of a loaf of bread. Our last night was spent in a farmhouse nearby. It was hard to get any sleep because I kept reviewing in my mind the many adventures of the trip. Also, it didn't help that there was an owl in the tree right next to our window that hooted all night as though in celebration. I told Vince that the bird must have Irritable Owl Syndrome.

The next morning, we were off for the last 40 miles to a downtown hotel in Providence, where the Annual Meeting was being held. We arrived with great fanfare in beautiful weather. I had ridden 3,242 miles in 8 weeks, averaging 76.6 miles a day, riding 6 days a week. I raised a little over \$27,000. None of this would have been possible without Vince, my loyal driver, and Carrie Dahm, my NACCC contact person who coordinated the ride.

I am now 86 years old, and still riding. I remain in awe of *The Congregationalist* magazine, now in publication for 177 years, and still providing articles of faith and inspiration. My life is almost over, but I pray that *The Congregationalist* will continue on to bless future generations.