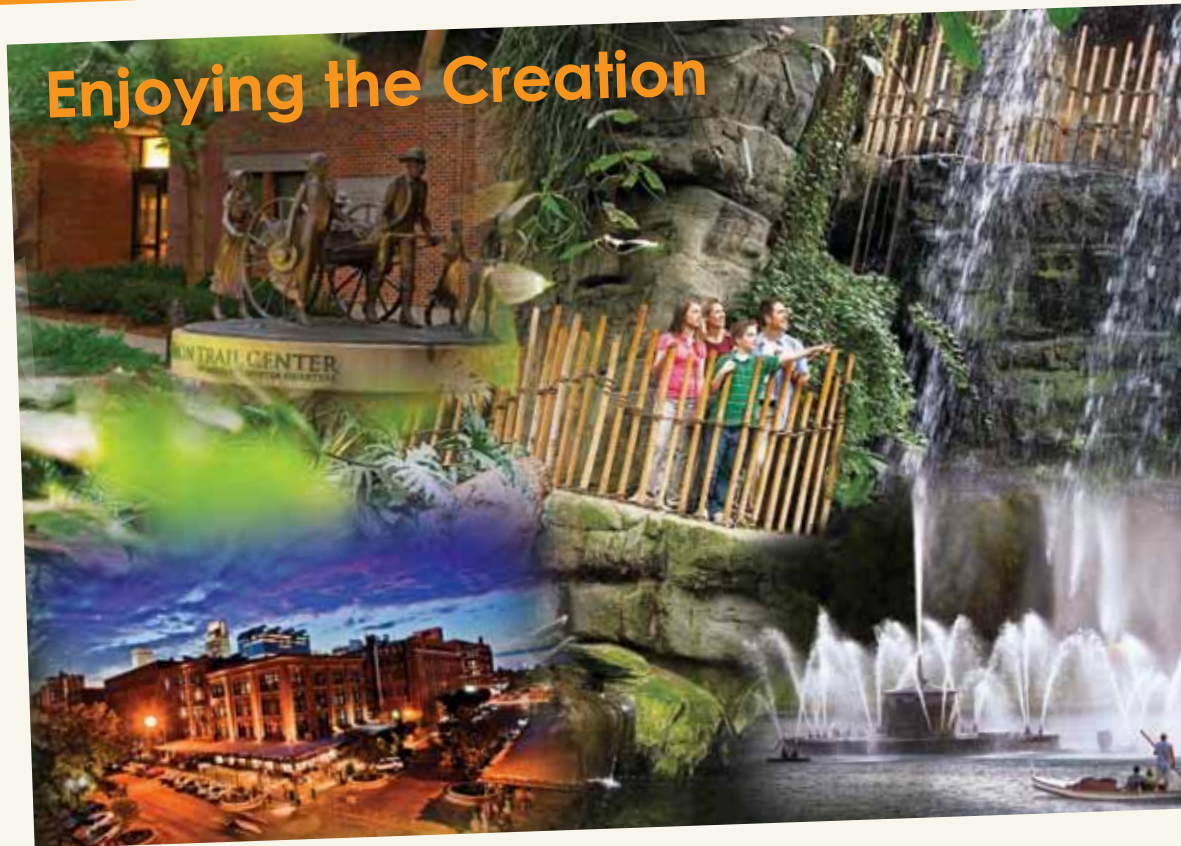


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The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way

Vol. 165/No. 4

Congregationalist.org

December 2013

BLACK CONGREGATIONALISTS IN EARLY NEW ENGLAND

DOUGLAS LOBB ON
**FOLLOWING
JESUS**

**BURIED
TREASURES**
AT 14 BEACON STREET

ELIZABETH DRESCHER
**DECIPHERS
THE NONES**

and more ...



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FEATURES



10 AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND NEW ENGLAND CONGREGATIONALISM

1730-1830

by Richard J. Boles



16 CHECKING OUT THE “NONES”

Elizabeth Drescher,
interviewed by Laura Darling



21 FOLLOWING JESUS

by Douglas Lobb



24 NEW ENGLAND’S HIDDEN HISTORIES

by Peggy Bendroth

The
CONGREGATIONALIST
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Vol. 165/No. 4

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ON THE COVER:

Joelle Sommers researches her husband's family tree in the spacious reading room of the Congregational Library, 14 Beacon Street, Boston. The library, which holds many original source materials on Congregational church history, may become a stop on Boston's famous Freedom Trail before the 400th Anniversary of Congregationalism in America in 2020 (see pp. 8-9 and 24-27).

DEPARTMENTS

4 Relation

A moveable feast

5 By the Way of Mutual Care

“Association” vs. “Denomination”

6 Net Mending

Next Slide, Please

7 Strangers and Pilgrims...

The Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism

8 Along the Way

19 Book Review of *Coolidge*

reviewed by Randy Asendorf

20 More Light

Good Reads for God's Free People

30 Missionary News and Needs

30 Necrology

31 Pastorates and Pulpits

31 Calendar

A moveable feast

Our little church has recently been hit with a triple whammy: (1) Problems with the fiscal management of our daycare operation; (2) an un-delayable need for a costly new meetinghouse roof; and (3) scant cash flow from a dwindling base of committed members.

Our cupboard is bare.

But happier times are ahead, and one reason is our persistent *associationalism*.

Yes, of course, we are working hard to improve our management and discern a new vision for our church; yes, our own members dug deep and came up with cash to cover most of the cost of our new roof; yes, we, as a church, refuse to die.

Still, we couldn't get by without help from our friends.

The Building and Loan Team of the National Association moved swiftly to lend us the remaining funds needed for the roof—on very favorable terms.

Individual friends in distant churches have made generous emergency gifts—friends involved in our church life because

we attend NACCC meetings and participate in NA events. Churches and individuals we know through our state and national associations are pitching in with management expertise for our daycare.

We plan to host a Vicinage Council, inviting sister churches to give us advice on future vision and strategy. Congregationalist friends will get up early and drive across the state to donate a whole Saturday of their time and wisdom—just to help us, because they care.

So our bare cupboard will fill up again, and we will have an abundance of our own to share with others, as we have received from the abundance of our friends in the Congregational Way. The time and care we have invested over the years in our associational relationships are being paid back to us in our hour of need.

There's a lesson here for others: You can't share in the food if you're not at the table. It's your association—come to the feast.

LARRY SOMMERS, *Editor*

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“Association” vs. “Denomination”

I am a Congregationalist. I claim that name because, for me, the Congregational Way of doing church makes sense. It “works” for me. As committed as I am to this Way, however, I cannot and will not make any claims to its universal appeal to all of humanity. The Spirit has led and continues to lead different people to different expressions of faith and practice. That’s the way it is supposed to work, provided each seeks to remain true to his or her unique understanding of the Gospel call.

Besides, if you go to any two Congregational churches, you will find different expressions of what it means to be Congregational. Even the members of individual churches do not always agree on just what it means to be Congregational. Do we draw a line in history and say, “This is the point at which the truest expression of the Congregational Way was embodied and the model for our practice today?” I don’t think so. We have, appropriately, evolved in our understanding of God’s call in our lives.

One of the ways this question of identity manifests is in the discussion of “association” versus “denomination.” Many of our NACCC stalwarts would find the latter term problematic, at best. For some, it speaks of the exercise of outside, worldly authority over the affairs of the local church; a potential violation of our autonomy (though not all denominations are hierarchical). Yet as a friend of mine from another tradition recently pointed out to me, our efforts to claim the one title (association) over the other (denomination) may serve no other purpose than to draw a distinction that suggests that they are wrong and we are right in our approach to church order. I think my friend is right.

We don’t have to live with an identity that says, “we’re not them—they are wrong and we are right.” We should never express our identity in the negative. The Congregational Way ought to stand on its own merits.

At the end of the day, does it really matter which term we use? Far more important to our Congregational Way is the health of each of our local churches and the ways that our covenant community in the NACCC can support the members of these unique and beautiful embodiments of the faith, to thrive in ministry to all of God’s children. The debate might be an interesting academic exercise; but the minute that it, or any other disagreement, gets in the way of effective ministry, we begin to wander from our true vocation.

Called together “by way of mutual care,” our task is not to point out to ourselves and to the world what others are not, but to be, authentically and with loving kindness, the people we were created to be, in Christ’s name. That’s what our sisters and brothers, our neighbors, need from us today.



CASEY VANDERBENT
Executive Secretary

Your e-mail address, please!

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

E-mail Courtney Schultz at the NACCC office, cschultz@nacc.org, from the e-mail account you want us to use, and put “Congregationalist E-blast” in the subject line.

Thanks and blessings,

Larry Sommers, *Editor*



Next Slide, Please

Whining children; slow drivers in the passing lane; customer “service.”

One thing surpasses them all: Bad PowerPoint.

There was a day when you only had to endure slideshows when your aunt Ethel came back from her trip to Iceland. Now they pop up everywhere, like weeds. And just like weeds, they are never—ever—going away.

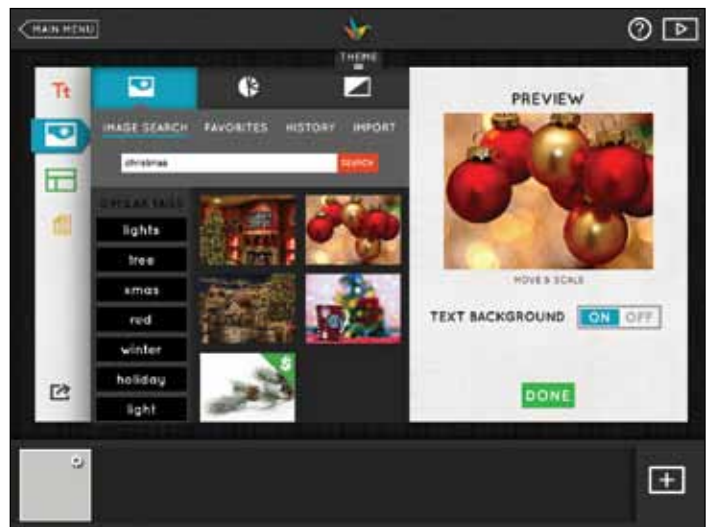
A hundred different free and public Web sites will teach you to craft a compelling presentation, so I’ll limit myself to a single, crystal clear proscription: Thou shalt not read text off thy slides!

If you put text on the screen, it’s because your audience knows how to read. Then why are you reading? They’re not kindergarteners! In fact, they can read with their eyes far faster than you can speak with your mouth, so not only are you insulting them, you are wasting their time.

If you want help putting this rule into practice, try a 7-21 talk. I learned about them through the JoPa Group, and here’s how they explained it: “A speaker has 21 slides cued up, each timed to advance automatically after 20 seconds. The slides cannot have any words, and should be one, single image. Once the first slide is started, the talking starts. After 21 slides — that’s 7 minutes — the talking stops (whether you’re done or not).”

It’s exciting, fun, and a little bit nerve wracking. I know, because I did one for the Michigan Conference’s Annual Meeting. I preach every week, and this got my heart pumping. It felt a bit like performance art. Tick. Tick. Tick. As with most things creative, the boundaries were a blessing. They forced me to choose. They forced me to move. And people could tell. They tuned in. They asked questions. They engaged. Isn’t that what all these presentations are supposed to do? Isn’t that what we were promised when we started making these things?

There’s one glaring problem. It doesn’t matter how amazing your presentation is if you can’t get the precious little thing to actually play on someone else’s computer! I used a Web



It’s easy to find images with Haiku Deck’s Search feature. Some photos cost money—note the dollarsign in the corner of one—but plenty are available for free.

site called Haiku Deck, which makes it dead simple to build a slideshow using legal, free images. They offer professional ones too at a reasonable price, but the free ones worked great for me. You can play or edit the slideshow anyplace you can find internet access, you can publish it for the world to see, or you can export it as a PowerPoint or Keynote file. It’s the simplest thing I’ve found to get a presentation built and shared. And best of all, it’s free!



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

The Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism

*Note: In this space last issue, we conspicuously failed to acknowledge our debt to the Rev. Dr. Robert Hellam for permission to condense and print excerpts from his book, *The Congregational Minute*, in this format. We therefore conspicuously offer sincere amends by recommending that readers purchase his excellent book, publication details of which can be found at the end of this column.—Editor*

Theologians in our tradition have insisted that the true Church is composed only of genuine believers, and that a local church ought to reflect that reality as much as possible, nobody being admitted into membership who could not give a clear testimony of having been born again.

In 1657 ... the Massachusetts General Court called a group of Congregational pastors to an assembly. In 1662, that assembly decided to seek an agreement from a synod of all churches in Massachusetts. What came out of that synod would be called the Half-Way Covenant.

Congregational churches had inherited the practice of infant baptism from their Calvinist forebears, and the children of genuine believers were considered to be eligible for baptism. However, when those children grew up, even though they might not be able to testify to genuine faith, many of them still wanted their own children to be baptized. The Half-Way Covenant said that as long as such parents were not living openly sinful lives, and as long as they would say that they agreed with Congregational doctrine and with the covenant of their church, then their children could be baptized.

Seven years later, Solomon Stoddard became pastor of the church in Northampton. He noted the difficulty of keeping separate records of those who appeared to have a genuine faith and those who were merely eligible for

baptism, and he decided that any persons who wanted to be baptized or who wanted their children to be baptized should not be denied unless they were living indecent lives.

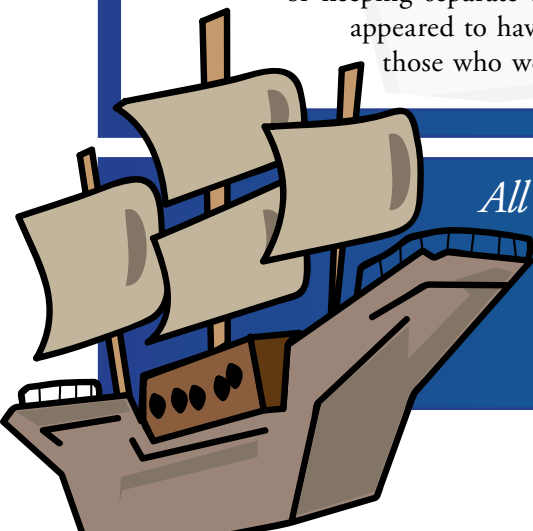
Holy Communion was also an issue, since up till then only true believers had been deemed eligible to take Communion. Stoddard opened that up to all people who were not living in open sin, whether or not those people laid any claim at all to being Christians. Of course, the problem now was that the Congregational churches had become very much like the Church of England that they had rebelled against a century earlier. Virtually anyone who lived near a church building could be considered a member of that church, be baptized, and receive the Lord's Supper, whether or not that person was a Christian. This view came to be known as Stoddardeanism, named after Solomon Stoddard.

It is somewhat ironic that Stoddard's much more famous grandson, Jonathan Edwards, would be dismissed in 1750 after 24 years as pastor of the Northampton church—even though he was a great preacher and a hero of the revival called the Great Awakening—because, among other things, he was an opponent of Stoddardeanism.

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

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

—HEBREWS 11:13 (Geneva Bible)



Along the Way

News from the fellowship of churches

GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., honored the ministry of the **Rev. Dr. David C. Fisher** Sept. 21 as he and his wife, **Gloria**, embarked upon retirement.

The weekend's events began with a Saturday evening party outdoors in the church's Beecher Garden and continued during Sunday morning worship, with participation by Fisher family members—the **Rev. Dr. Karen Fisher Younger**, daughter of David and Gloria Fisher; the **Rev. Dr. William Younger**, their son-in-law; and the **Revs. Paul and Robin Honaker**, Gloria Fisher's brothers.

Fisher announced his retirement from the ministry this past April. He has been a parish pastor for 43 years and is a noted authority on the Jewish background of early Christianity, a teacher of pastoral ministry and preaching, and a frequent speaker at clergy and denominational gatherings. His earlier career in ministry included service to small, rural congregations and as senior minister at Park Street Church in Boston, Mass., and *Colonial Church of Edina, Minn.*

Effectively immediately, the **Rev. Al Bunis** will serve as Plymouth's interim senior minister. Bunis, a resident of Brooklyn Heights and member of Plymouth with his family since 1998, joined the church's ministerial staff in 2010 as assistant minister.



THE DISTINCTIVE PIECE of Plymouth Church furniture shown in the photo of David Fisher, left, is known as the Beecher Pulpit.

In the 19th century, Plymouth Church was led by the famous orator **Henry Ward Beecher**, who thundered forth anti-slavery and other progressive themes from its pulpit. After the Civil War, church member **Moses Beach**, publisher of the *Daily Sun*, led a group of tourists on an epic cruise to Europe and the Holy Land. One participant was a recent arrival to New York, **Mark Twain**, who immortalized the journey in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). On the trip, Beach acquired some olive wood from the Mount of Olives; he brought it back and had it made into a new pulpit, as well as a chair, a baptismal font, and two small pulpit tables. These pieces continued in regular use in the church into the 1940s. Eventually the pulpit was replaced by a more modern one, except that the olive wood top was saved and incorporated into the new pulpit.

"With the 2004 arrival of Rev. Fisher to Plymouth Church and growth in the church's History Ministry came new interest in building a pulpit that honored the church's past as well as its modern presence," according to a 2010 church press release. Plymouth member **Sabrina Hemminger**, an interior designer trained in woodworking in her native Germany, working from old drawings and photographs, designed a reproduction piece, which was then built by master craftsman **Franz**

Fischer from Mediterranean olive wood, with the original "Beecher" top incorporated into the finished piece. Funding for the project came from a bequest by the late **Rev. J. Stanley Durkee**, Plymouth's Senior Minister from 1926 to 1941. In the photo at left, Franz Fischer, foreground, woodworker **Johannes Wukovitsch**, and **Sabina Hemminger** examine the newly-finished reproduction Beecher pulpit at Fischer's workshop in June 2010.



GIFTS SHARED IN MAYWOOD—Led By His Grace, a worship band made up of both members and friends of *First Congregational Church, Maywood, Ill.*, gave its premier community concert, "A Song for the Harvest," at the church Saturday, Oct. 26.

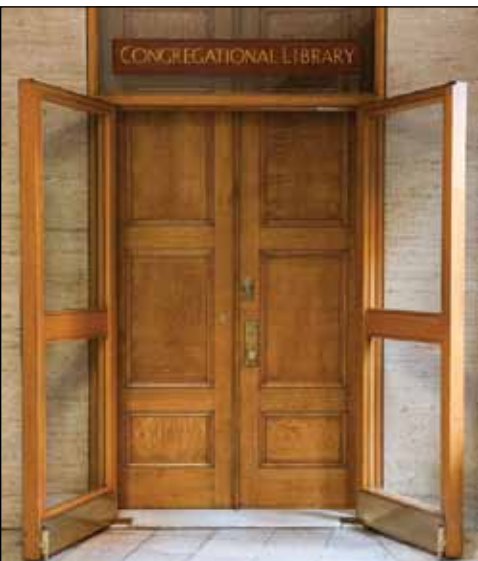
"The impetus of Led By His Grace on sharing their gifts is from their hearts to His people for His glory," according to **Pastor Elliot Wimbush**.

The program included songs such as "Breathe," "Jesus is Mine," and re-workings of traditional spirituals like "Down By The Riverside." What began as a concert quickly morphed

Pastor Elliot Wimbush claps to the rhythms of Led By His Grace during the "A Song for the Harvest" concert in Maywood, Ill.



into a time of worship. The enthusiastic audience of about 60 members of the church and community made the event a critical and spiritual success.



The Congregational Library's simple entrance could be enhanced as a result of the Massachusetts Cultural Council's matching grant.

REVOLUTIONARY—*The Congregational Library* in Boston, Mass., faces a golden opportunity to teach waves of tourists the importance of Congregationalism in America's early history.

Just half a block off Boston's famous Freedom Trail, the library is well-sited to tell the story of the Puritan "first founders." The Massachusetts Cultural Council agrees and has awarded a \$30,000 matching grant to study the feasibility of a public exhibit on Puritans and

Puritanism; the study could pave the way for a major renovation of the library's entry and reading room area, giving much-needed public exposure. The first step is to raise \$30,000 from donors, to earn the \$30,000 matching grant.

The average Boston tourist learns about Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, and other Revolutionary War heroes—but almost nothing about their Puritan predecessors, whose Congregational system of church government pioneered ideas behind the drive for American independence, including consent of the governed and the equality of all people before God.

"The prospect of telling the Congregational story to a wide audience is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that should

energize people and churches everywhere," says library director Peggy Bendroth. "We welcome contributions large and small from anyone who'd like to get in on the ground floor of this important project."

For more information, or to make a donation, contact **Peggy Bendroth**, 617-523-0470, ext. 240 or mbendroth@14beacon.org; or development director **Cary Hewitt**, 617-523-0470, ext. 246 or chewitt@14beacon.org.

AMBUSHED—**The Reverend Wayne McLeod** was taken by surprise Sept. 23, when the Central Illinois Agency on Aging presented him the third annual **Kathryn W. Timmes** Award for Outstanding Commitment to Intergenerational Services. Mrs. Timmes, who personally bestowed the award, spent most of her career as a distinguished teacher and counselor at Peoria, Ill., high schools and colleges.

McLeod was recognized for his many years of service toward others, through Stark County and its ministerial associations, Resource House, Food Pantry, Good Samaritan, Christmas Food Baskets, and individual interventions—in addition to serving full-time as minister of the *First Congregational Church of Toulon, Ill.* He is also active in the Midwest Association of Congregational Christian Churches and has been active in the Toulon Lions Club for over a decade.



McLeod

PARTHIANs, MEDES, ET AL.



First Congregational Church of Naples, Fla.

(where ingenuity is never in short supply) celebrated World Communion Sunday Oct. 6 with an opening processional of 23 people from different countries carrying their own national flags. Afterwards, they read a "Litany of Countries from Around the World," each person in his or her native tongue, according to the Rev. Les Wicker. The choir sang the Michael Jackson/Lionel Richie song, "We are the World" and the sermon focused on the thought that "Though we are many, we are one in Christ."

AFRICAN-AMERICANS and New England CONGREGATIONALISM 1730-1830

by Richard J. Boles

At the Hollis Street Congregational Church in Boston, Sarah Vingus was baptized on Oct. 19, 1735. She was the seven-year-old daughter of John Vingus, who like many parents in New England, publicly affiliated with a church by “owning the covenant” in order to have his child baptized. Unlike other parents at this church, however, John Vingus was “a free negro, baptized in his own country by a Romish priest.” Although his spiritual journey likely started with Roman Catholicism in western Africa, by 1737 he was accepted by white Bostonians as a covenanting congregant in their church.

The First Congregational Church of Newport, R.I., admitted Newport Gardner as a member in full communion on Aug. 26, 1781. On the same day, the Rev. Samuel Hopkins baptized Prince and Dinah, children of Newport and his wife, Limas Gardner. All were slaves of Caleb Gardner in 1781, but Newport Gardner had been born free (and given the name Occramer Marycoo) in Africa. Eleven more of Newport and Limas’ children were baptized at First Church between 1782 and 1800. Additionally, Gardner developed a friendship with the Reverend Hopkins.



Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784), the most famous black Christian of the 18th century both in her own time and presently, appears pensive and writerly in black Bostonian artist Scipio Moorhead's 1773 image from the frontispiece of her Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral.



Old South Church, Boston, spiritual home of African-American poet Phillis Wheatley.

Research for this article was supported in part by the Massachusetts Historical Society, Congregational Library, Boston Athenæum, New Hampshire Historical Society, Rhode Island Historical Society, Connecticut Historical Society, and New England Historic Genealogical Society.

Gardner and his family may have acquired a pew of their own, alongside other African-Americans, when church members voted in 1806 “that the pews on the South Gallery which were built by the black people six in number shall be their property.” This African-American family had a long-standing relationship with this predominantly white church, and they made it their spiritual home, as did other black men and women, between 1780 and 1823.

The experiences of these black Christians were by no means uncommon. The vast majority of eighteenth-century Congregational churches in New England, in cities and small towns alike, included black congregants and members, especially between 1730 and 1776. Put another way, most New Englanders of this era worshiped in interracial churches, because most Congregational churches baptized, catechized, and admitted some enslaved and free blacks. Churches near Native American communities also sometimes included Indians and Afro-Indians.

The interracial nature of these churches, however, did not last. By the 1830s, black and white New Englanders usually worshiped in separate churches.

Most New
Englanders
of this era
worshiped in
interracial
churches.

INSTRUCTION “BY WORD AND EXAMPLE”

One factor encouraging African-American participation in the earlier period was that ministers—many of whom owned slaves themselves—encouraged slave owners to instruct enslaved blacks in Christianity and to bring them to church. The Rev. Benjamin Colman in a 1728 sermon argued that those fathers and masters who did not teach Christianity to their children and servants (a common euphemism for slaves) risked eternal damnation: “Offspring and Servants will rise up in Judgment against him, and accuse him, that he never instructed them by Word and Example in the Worship and Fear of God.”

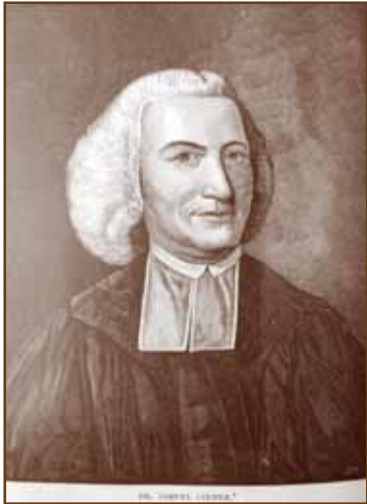
By 1750, New England included an estimated 10,982 slaves. Many of them willingly affiliated with a predominantly white Congregational church. For example, on Oct. 11, 1741, “Newport alias Gregory a Negro Servant” was baptized in the Congregational Church of Ashford, Conn., after he had “Solemnly Covenanted before the Congregation & Related some things.” The following March 7, he was “Received into Full Communion in this Church to partake of the Holy ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.” This man was probably held as a slave by someone in this town, but he still chose to join this church.

In sampling Congregational church records for the 19 years from 1730 to 1749, I have identified roughly 115 churches that baptized or admitted black men, women, or children. These included every Congregational church in Boston whose records have survived, and churches across Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and southern New Hampshire. Other blacks affiliated with Anglican churches as well.

From the 1750s to the start of the American Revolution in 1776, many Congregational churches continued to baptize and admit blacks. New England’s slave population neared 15,000 by 1770. At least 110 Congregational churches across



The Rev. Benjamin Colman, 1683-1747.



The Rev. Samuel Cooper, 1725-1783.

New England baptized or admitted two or more black persons in this period, but the rates of black baptisms declined slightly in many locations. At the First Church of Mansfield, Conn., only two blacks and two Indians were baptized between 1750 and 1763 compared to eight black baptisms in the two decades prior to 1750. The yearly average number of black baptisms at Brattle Street Church in Boston decreased from 2.3 yearly (1730-1749) to 0.93 yearly (1750-1763), and the percentage of all baptisms that were black persons decreased from 4.06 percent to 2.95 percent. Despite the lower baptismal rates in many churches, many black New Englanders still chose to affiliate with predominantly white churches through the 1770s.

CONGREGATIONALIST POET

On Aug. 18, 1771, “Phillis Servant to Mr. Wheatly” was baptized at Old South Church by the Rev. Samuel Cooper of Brattle Street Church (Old South lacked a settled minister at the time), and she was admitted to membership in the Old South on the same day. Old South, or Third Church, had among the highest rates of black baptisms among Boston churches in the 18th century.

She had been transported from Africa around 1761, as a seven-year-old girl. She was purchased by Bostonian John Wheatley as a servant for his wife, Susanna, and was given the name Phillis. While it was relatively common for Congregationalists in New England to teach slaves to read, Phillis Wheatley received an unparalleled education considering her enslaved position. She began writing poetry by 1765, much of it religious in content; and in 1773, some of her poetry was published in London as a book titled *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Thus she became, and remains today, the most famous black Christian of the 18th century.

Not only was Phillis Wheatley’s faith expressed in public poetry, but it was also often the focus of her private correspondence. From at least 1772 to 1779, she corresponded with an enslaved black woman in Newport, R.I., and they often encouraged each other’s faith. Wheatley asked Obour Tanner for prayer, and Tanner requested that books be sent to her from Boston. Responding to a religious reflection that Tanner wrote, Wheatley stated that “Your Reflections on the Suffering of the Son of God, & the inestimable price of our immortal souls Plainly demonstrate the sensation of a Soul united to Jesus.” As Wheatley struggled with her own illness and poor health, she wrote that she was encouraged by “him who declar’d from heaven that his strength was made perfect in weakness!”

While most of Phillis Wheatley’s life experiences were extraordinary and exceptional, she was like many black New Englanders in her embrace of Christianity and her affiliation with a predominantly white Congregational church before 1776.

A NEW ERA

The American Revolution brought about changes in government and society, including a slow end to slavery in New England; but it was also a turning point



Another image of Phillis Wheatley.

in race relations within churches. Gradually, churches became less welcoming to African-Americans, and black New Englanders increasingly worshiped in their own separate churches instead of predominantly white Congregational, Anglican, or Baptist ones. At least 28 predominantly white Congregational churches baptized or admitted blacks between 1777 and 1790, and 41 of the Congregational churches that I sampled had two or more black baptisms or members between 1791 and 1820. Between 1821 and 1850, however, only 15 Congregational churches seem to have baptized or admitted two or more African-Americans.

Among those who did affiliate with Congregational churches after the Revolution were two men of African descent who made significant contributions to religion in their communities: Lemuel Haynes and the aforementioned Newport Gardner.

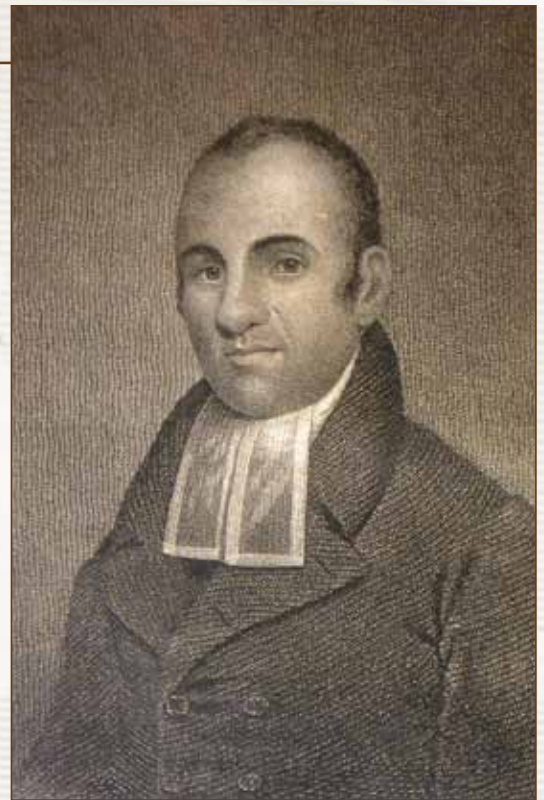
Lemuel Haynes became the first African-American ordained as a Congregational minister, during the same period when black participation in Congregational churches was declining. Haynes was born in West Hartford, Conn., on July 18, 1753, and he was indentured until age 21 to a family in Granville, Mass. Like many blacks in white colonial households, Haynes participated in family religious devotions and attended church. He was baptized by the Rev. Jonathan Huntington and joined the East (First) Granville Congregational Church.

Haynes fought with the Continental Army during the early years of Revolution, and he began studying theology in 1779. He was licensed to preach a year later and ordained in 1785. During these years, he led religious services at predominantly white churches in Granville, Mass., and Torrington, Conn., and on a preaching tour of Vermont. On March 28, 1788, Haynes received an invitation to become the pastor of the West Church in Rutland, Vt., and he accepted. He served this “white” congregation for roughly three decades.

Newport Gardner was a slave who became a member of the First Congregational Church of Newport, R.I., in 1781 and who continued in that church until the 1820s. Slave traders brought Gardner from Africa when he was about 14. He became educated, literate, and so proficient in music that he was permitted, while still a slave, to operate a singing school in Newport. He became friends in the late 1780s with the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, an outspoken advocate against slavery. In 1791, Gardner purchased his freedom and freedom for much of his family with his share of a winning lottery ticket. In addition to other employments, he worked for the First Congregational Church as sexton from 1807 to 1825. A man of many talents, Gardner was an important leader of black community institutions, including the Free African Union Society and the African Benevolent Society, which ran a school for black children. Hopkins wrote that Newport Gardner was “a discerning, judicious, steady, good man, and feels greatly interested in promoting a Christian settlement in Africa.”

A PARTING OF THE WAYS

The Gardner family continued to attend Newport’s First Church until a separate black church was founded. Gardner, in fact, helped form Newport’s black church in 1823.



The Rev. Lemuel Haynes, the first African-American ordained to Christian ministry.



The Rev. Samuel Hopkins, 1721-1803.

African-
Americans
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churches.

Other African-Americans also formed separate churches in New England cities between 1790 and 1830. After the Revolution, New England states gradually abolished slavery, and African-Americans sought to be treated as equals in the churches they had joined and attended. Sadly, most white members were unwilling to treat their black fellow-worshippers on equal terms, and some evidence suggests that racial discrimination in churches became more pronounced in the 1820s.

While a vast majority of Congregational churches were integrated between 1730 and 1776, they were not integrated on the basis of social equality. Black members were usually denied the right to vote in church business with other members and they were kept out of leadership positions. Colonial churches usually assigned seating to everyone based on wealth, social status, age, and sometimes gender, and black church attendees were usually also separated into specific seating areas or pews. As white Christians still generally treated blacks as inferiors—even under a new, national government that claimed “all men are created equal”—African-Americans withdrew from all types of white churches and started their own churches.

In a striking example of unequal treatment, whites forcibly prevented a black man from occupying a ground-level pew at the Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, although he had legal claim to a church pew there. Frederick Brinsley, a “colored man” who lived on Elm Street, was given the pew at Park Street Church in payment of a debt. Unable to sell the pew for his desired price, Brinsley with his wife and children occupied the pew one Sunday in March 1830. After the service, he received a note from the church informing him that his pew had been rented to another person without his consent and that “the pews in the upper galleries are at your service.” When Brinsley returned to the church, he found a constable “at the pew-door,” and he did not attempt to sit—either on the lower level or in any part of this church.

A few Congregationalists, such as the Rev. Harvey Newcomb, publicly denounced segregated seating in churches during the 1830s, but they were minority voices.

By the 1830s, many Congregational churches made clear that blacks were not going to be accepted as equal church members or attendees, if they were welcome at all, and African-Americans generally preferred their own churches. While Congregational churches often contained black worshippers in the 1730s and 1740s, they rarely did in the 1830s and 1840s. Numerous white Congregationalists opposed the spread of slavery to the western territories and denounced slavery in the South during the 1840s and 1850s, but separate white and black churches remained the norm for New England through the Civil War and beyond.



RICHARD J. BOLES is a visiting assistant professor of early American history at the City College of New York. He is currently preparing a book-length study of race relations in all northern Protestant churches that covers the years 1730 to 1850.

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Checking out the "Nones"



Elizabeth Drescher, interviewed by Laura Darling



Drescher

Religious leaders have become very concerned about “the Nones”—those people who answer “None” or “No preference” on surveys about American religion. Dr. Elizabeth Drescher has been asking the Nones about themselves. She was interviewed last spring by Laura Darling, who published the interview in a blog entry May 23. Both Drescher and Darling have graciously agreed to allow us to publish a slight condensation of the interview for our readers—Editor.

First, can you tell us what is meant by “Nones”? How do you define that?

The term comes from sociology and demographic studies in sociology in particular as any sort of remainder group in a survey. It becomes more nuanced in the study of religion when people are asked, given a list of religious beliefs, “Which of these are you?” and you say “None.” Technically, the term is “religiously unaffiliated.”

What’s the difference between being a “None” and being “Spiritual but Not Religious”?

Some Nones are Spiritual But Not Religious—they have beliefs and practices that nurture the spirit, but they are less

comfortable with institutional religion. The terminology tends to be declining in popularity; it’s baby boomer terminology, and many religiously unaffiliated self-identify and self-label in other ways—although that word “label” itself is problematic for many Nones.

That’s the really important thing about the Nones designation. One of the people I interviewed for this project explained it this way: “I really don’t want to be labeled. I might be religious, I might be spiritual. I don’t want to be defined by terms of my identity.”

The religiously unaffiliated often tell me, “When I say ‘none,’ I mean ‘none.’” Religious belief is not a marker of identity for them.

After October 2012, when the Pew Forum's "Nones on the Rise" report came out, more people started self-identifying as "Nones." Now "None" is a part of the popular culture.

I remember when you were trying to find real, live, actual Nones to talk to. How did you find them?

Several ways. One is that I did a survey in early 2012. I wanted to understand spiritual practices, practices that were spiritually meaningful to the religiously unaffiliated. Traditionally what's measured is the extent to which people believe in God, the extent to which they identify with a particular religious tradition, read scripture, and pray. But that's not telling us the whole story about how people make meaning.

In March 2012, I developed this survey, hoping for 200 people to respond. I sent out e-mails to people and said, "If you know people, please share this survey." I received 1,166 responses in a few days to test the survey, from people all over the country who have a lot to say about their spiritual practices and spiritual background, how they came to be believers and unbelievers.

This year, I have been using the "Nones Beyond the Numbers" narrative online survey, which is like an online journal with open-ended questions, to let Nones tell their story. Pew data indicates—and that data is reinforced by my survey—that a majority of Nones are urban, coastal, a little bit younger, a little bit more male. But Nones are growing in every demographic category in every area of the country. I talked to Nones in the Deep South, the Bible Belt, Hawaii, Kansas, Wyoming, Alaska.

Were they willing—or eager—to talk about their experiences?

Absolutely. That said, the population I'm *not* talking to are the group that aren't interested in talking about it. But the ones I did talk to often said, "You know, I've never taken the time to think through this."

I gather most Nones actually have a religious background—is that accurate? Do they have anything in common about their background?

That's true. Seventy percent of people who identify as Nones come from a Christian background.

I recently saw a comment you made that "Catholics who become Nones are hurt. Evangelicals that become Nones are angry. Mainline Protestants who become Nones are just bored." Can you say a little more about this?

In the Roman Catholic tradition, it's a bigger deal to give up the religious identity label than it is for Mainline Protestants. It's almost an ethnic/cultural identification. In the Nones who grew up

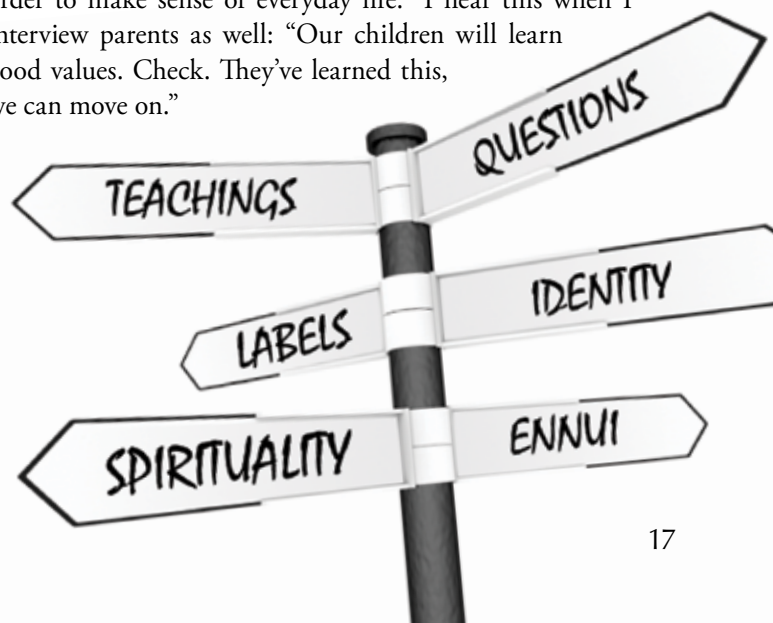
Roman Catholic, there's a real theme of feeling hurt or wounded by the church—especially women, whose full identity may not have been honored in that tradition. Lesbian and gay people have the same feeling of being hurt or excluded from their tradition. Whether they were directly affected or not, many are of course deeply troubled by the clergy abuse scandal and how the Vatican hierarchy have seemed to respond to that. What they often told me was that they left the Catholic Church not so much due to a theological shift, but because "something happened to me. My identity was not affirmed and that was painful."

For Evangelicals, the theme that emerges consistently is anger. Many have felt that conservative evangelical teaching in regards to science, Darwinism, and the environment set them up to look foolish. They feel they were tricked. Some reason brings them to a place where they get more information and understanding about the world, and they feel like they were duped by the teachings in their traditions. They didn't need to be, but they feel they were set up to look like idiots and it makes them really angry.

For Mainline Protestants, we know that the data tells us that about 55 percent now of young people raised Episcopalian will leave the church as adults. Among Congregationalists, it's closer to 65 percent. About 20 percent of those will become "Nones."

For Mainline Protestants, the theme is neither hurt nor anger, but a sense of ennui. They got it. They get that they're supposed to be good to people, share what they have, do good in the world. If I had a nickel for how they love, love, love their youth group, or what a great time they had on their mission trips, I'd be a very wealthy woman.

What tends to happen with Mainline Protestants is that they are deeply affirmed in early formation and then they "graduate" from church. And we let them have that model. Our church schools are parallel to other kinds of schooling. One young woman told me, "I learned everything I needed to know there, I get it. I don't need this in order to be a good person or in order to make sense of everyday life." I hear this when I interview parents as well: "Our children will learn good values. Check. They've learned this, we can move on."



One thing about this comment is that it makes me suspect we in the church are setting ourselves up for failure and for losing people. What are we doing that drives young people away? And what do you think we should be doing differently?

Doing formation on the model of age-segregated schooling—worst idea ever. Doing church school, youth group, confirmation class, separated from the rest of the church—worst idea ever.

The fact that we're not doing intergenerational formation limits the durability of formation over time, across demographic sectors of the church. Adults are not responsible for forming one another in faith or for reinforcing the formation of young people who are not their own children. Parents are modeling that you let any formation practice go after church.

What I'm finding is a deep spirituality when we understand why going to church is meaningful for people. Worship does have deep spiritual meaning for people, but for young people especially, we tend to keep them out of worship until they're older.

What surprised you as you talked to Nones?

One big, big thing: When I originally planned the book, I had planned to focus on the so-called "religious Nones." I thought the

other people were not really about meaning-making. But as I collected the data, the non-religious Nones asked me, "Why aren't you writing about our spirituality?" So the book changed to the deeper question of how do people make meaning regardless of how they understand themselves in terms of religious belief.

The other big surprise was the significance of practices of everyday life. I wrote in Religion Dispatches about how both religious affiliated and unaffiliated value as specifically spiritual enjoying what I've called "the 4Fs of contemporary spirituality": Family, Friends, Food, and Fido. People feel most connected to whatever they understand as God, the divine, a Higher Power when they're deeply engaged in the fabric of everyday life, spending time with family, with friends, preparing and sharing food, enjoying their pets. This was true of both Nones and the affiliated in my test survey. Likewise, in both categories, prayer was the only traditional spiritual practice that was seen as spiritually meaningful. It ranked fifth after the "4Fs."

What do you hope the church learns from the Nones?

The way we talk about Nones right now is like a shell game: Do we focus on believing, belonging, or behaving in order to "capture" them? Nones don't want to be "captured;" no one does. And I don't hear them much talking about believing, belonging, and behaving.

The Nones with whom I've talked are interested in *being*. They have an organic sense of being in the world that is in itself a site of spiritual depth. They want to live in that space without feeling that they have to make a declaration of belief or identity or anything like that.

To stay in relationship with Nones—and that really needs to be the goal rather than keeping them or getting them back—we need a deeper understanding of spiritual pluralism and of the dynamics of personal and spiritual change over the course of a much longer lifetime. That means we have to think hard about how we can sustain relationships with people who are stopping in, not seeing them as potential members, but as whole human beings.

DR. ELIZABETH DRESCHER is a faculty member in religious studies and pastoral ministries at Santa Clara University, a senior correspondent for the online magazine Religion Dispatches and a scholar-in-residence in the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real. She holds a Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union and an M.A. in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University. Her new book, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of American Nones*, will be published by Oxford University in 2014.

LAURA DARLING is managing director of *Confirm not Conform*, a confirmation program available online at confirmnotconform.com. A California East Bay native, she is a graduate of Oberlin College and an Episcopalian priest with a 2001 M.Div. degree from the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. She served as chaplain at Kenyon College, as assistant rector at Christ Church in Alameda, Calif., as a microfinance facilitator in Kampala, Uganda, before joining *Confirm not Conform*.

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Yankee in the White House

Keep cool, count the pencils

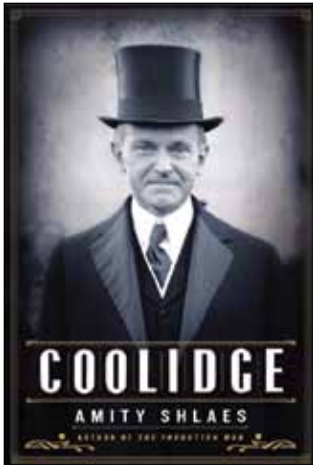
by Randy Asendorf

Review of *Coolidge*

by Amity Shlaes

Harper, 576 pages, \$18.99

Kindle/\$23.79 hardcover/\$15.03 paperback (Amazon)



Wheaned on a pickle,” Alice Roosevelt Longworth famously said of Calvin Coolidge.

She was probably right about our dour and taciturn 30th president; yet voters elected him resoundingly in 1924 (after he became president upon Warren Harding’s death), and they would likely have re-elected him in 1928 had he chosen to run again.

Our only Congregationalist president, profiled in this new book by political columnist Amity Shlaes, was not exceptionally religious, but his presidency was very much informed by his Congregational faith. Independence, frugality, and modesty were traits bred into Calvin Coolidge in his native New England. Those values guided Coolidge as a young Massachusetts state senator, then as governor of that state, and later as vice-president and president of the United States.

What kind of Congregationalist was Coolidge? Though he attended a Congregational church, like most of the student leaders at Amherst College, the independent-minded undergraduate gave “none” as his religious preference on a student form. He so little believed in religious structure that he refused to define himself so narrowly; affiliating with any denomination meant ceding his independence.

Coolidge became famous for steely resolve when, as Massachusetts governor, he defied the union during the Boston police strike. His thrifty ways have also been well documented. It was his policy as president to issue one pencil to each government

employee; it had to be worn to a stub before it could be exchanged for a new one. Now that’s frugality!

Coolidge was no less circumspect in his personal life, eschewing personal comforts and loathing the idea of going into debt. He was every bit the conservative, pro-business president historians have claimed him to be, who said, “The chief business of America is business.” But he was no pompous, insensitive ideologue either. Ms. Shlaes portrays Coolidge as an ardent supporter (at least for the 1920s) of civil rights for blacks and a strong opponent of the Ku Klux Klan.

He was also a surprising advocate of new technology and a determined opponent of war. Beyond this, he was a loyal son, a loving though somewhat emotionally distant husband to the gregarious Grace (one of America’s most popular first ladies), and a doting yet stern father to John and Calvin Jr.

Amity Shlaes’ depiction of Coolidge is rich in detail and evenhanded in its assessment of a president completely comfortable with himself and apparently unconcerned with the pressures of public opinion. Even while smoking cigars on the aptly-named presidential yacht *Mayflower*, Coolidge was hard at work. Whatever one might think of his policies, he was the kind of leader who actually gave politics a good name. He believed that an officeholder should serve, not be served.

To what extent his policies contributed to the Great Depression, Shlaes doesn’t opine. Neither does she suggest, as some might, that Coolidge’s cuts in military spending left the nation unprepared for World War II. But the facts are here, and the reader may draw his own conclusions.

Calvin Coolidge embodied the Pilgrim spirit: One’s deeds, not one’s rank, were important. Of the Pilgrims, he said, “No like body ever cast so great an influence on human history.” He lived his life emulating those brave men and women and encouraging his fellow citizens to do the same.



RANDY ASEENDORF is a retired teacher and a student of Congregational history. He has served the NACCC as a member of the Communication Services Committee, the Editorial Advisory Board, and the Executive Committee. He and his wife, Nancy, live in Sun City, Arizona.

Good Reads for God's Free People

by Steven Blackburn

We asked a distinguished librarian, the Rev. Steven Blackburn, to suggest a few good new books for consideration as Christmas gifts, or just to snuggle up with on a cold winter night. His recommendations are listed below.—Editor

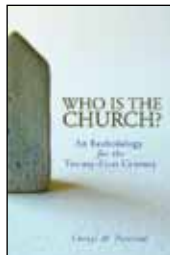
Elsie Chamberlain:

The Independent Life of a Woman Minister, by Alan Argent.
Equinox Publishing Limited, 2013. 271 pages hardcover; \$94.95 (Amazon).



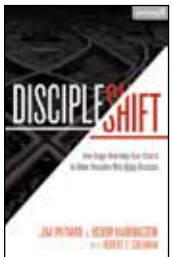
The Rev. Alan Argent, of the Congregational Federation (UK), has written a balanced yet sympathetic portrait of one of Britain's finest Congregational ministers of the 20th century—a woman who served not only as a local pastor but also as a national and international leader, a chaplain for the Royal Air Force, and a familiar voice on BBC radio over many decades.

Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century, by Cheryl M. Peterson.
Fortress Press, 2013. 153 pages; Kindle \$12.31, paperback \$19.26 (Amazon).



Peterson offers not a “how to” prescription of what to “do” in the face of growing secularism, but a guide to focusing on who and what the church actually “is.” Her views of the Puritans may puzzle a few of us, but her willingness to consider those outside her own Lutheran tradition makes for a thought-provoking work.

DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples, by Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington with Robert E. Coleman.
Zondervan, 2013. 239 pages; \$7.99 Kindle, \$14.13 paperback (Amazon).

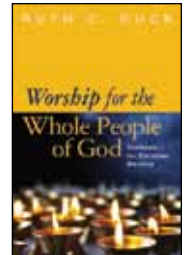


This evangelically-oriented book is user-friendly, with the “Ask Dr. Coleman” portions of the book providing insight to the five “shifts” the authors see as essential. These shifts are not merely tactical, but strategic. Readers will need to wrestle with the principles stated to adapt them to the local church's situation.

Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century, by Ruth C. Duck.
Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. 334 pages; \$23.56 paperback (Amazon).

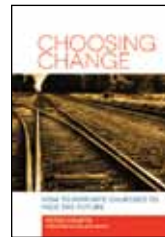
A prolific hymn writer, Ruth C. Duck offers an almost encyclopedic approach to worship for churches of varying size, outlook,

tradition, affiliation, and history. Though not generally prescriptive, she spots potential pitfalls as congregations consider alternative methods and practices, as well as trends in worship and discarded practices that could be profitably reclaimed.



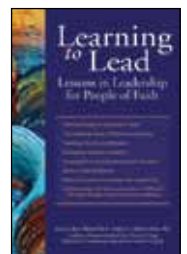
Choosing Change: How to Motivate Churches to Face the Future, by Peter Coutts.

The Alban Institute, 2013. 240 pages; \$9.99 Kindle, \$16.20 paperback (Amazon).



A “continuing Presbyterian” in Canada, Coutts can relate to continuing Congregationalists in temperament if not polity. He brings experience as a pastor, but also as an expert motivator in the business world, so this book isn't “preachy” or burdened with the language of churchy piety. It includes many practical illustrations, sample questionnaires, charts, and other visual materials that can be applied to our own churches.

Learning to Lead: Lessons in Leadership for People of Faith, edited by the Rev. Willard W. C. Ashley Sr.
SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2013. 353 pages; \$22.99 Kindle; \$31.57 hardcover (Amazon).



Ashley, as editor, has compiled more than two dozen articles on leadership. Of special interest is the section on working with leaders of other faiths, especially essays 24 and 25, on our Jewish and Muslim neighbors. Also of importance is essay 17, on working with undocumented immigrants; and the final essay, on “Leading a Multifaith Disaster Response Group,” was both unexpected and welcome.

Happy Reading!



THE REV. STEVEN BLACKBURN, PH.D., is Hartford Seminary's Library Director. He has served Congregational Christian Churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and was elected to three terms as executive secretary of the Connecticut (now Northeast) Fellowship. He has also chaired the NACCC's World Christian Relations Commission.

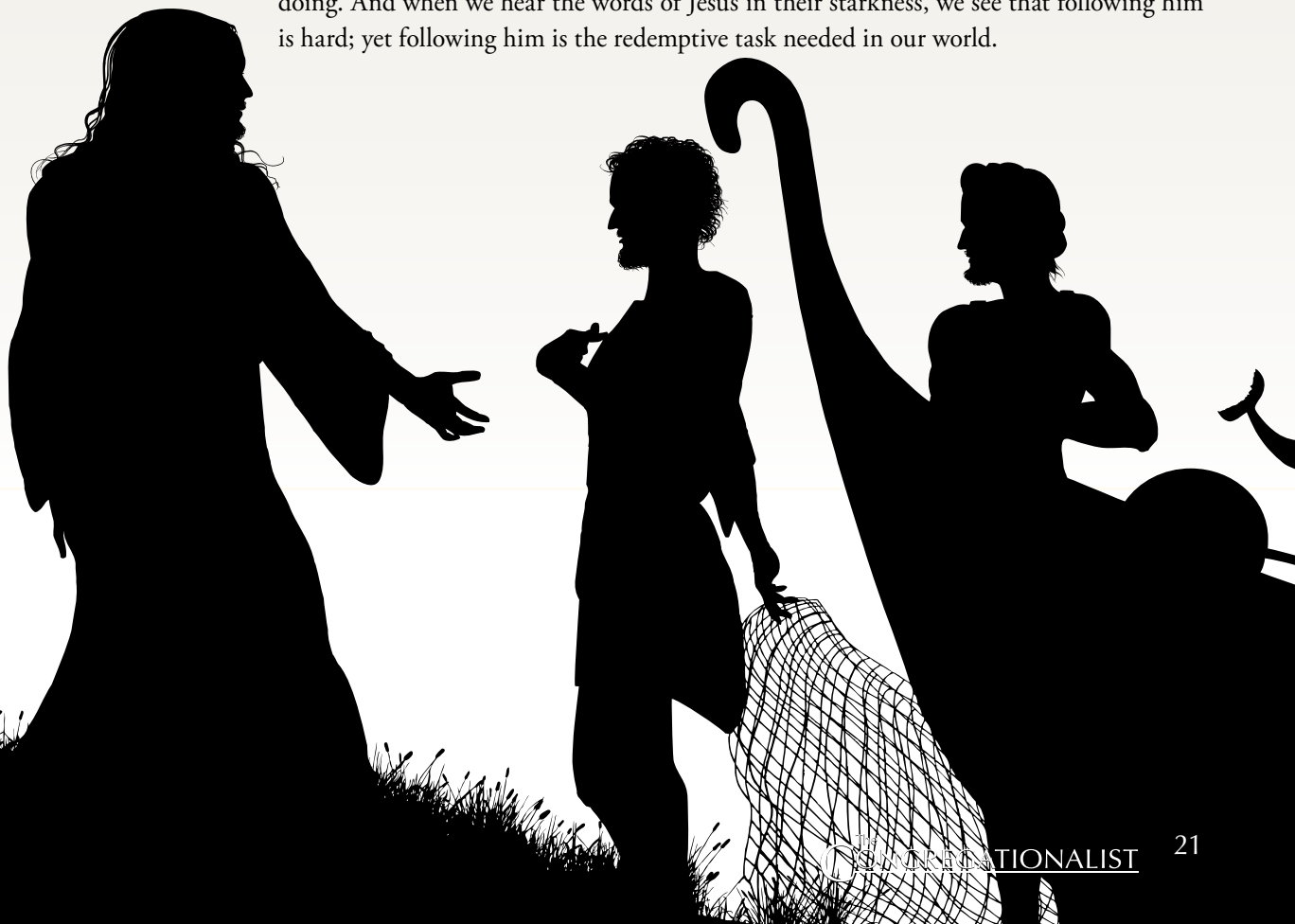
FOLLOWING JESUS

by Douglas Lobb

For centuries, scholars and serious followers of Jesus have sought to determine who the Jesus of history was and what he said before first-century church officials and scholars created the Christ of faith. Complicating this task is the reality that the Gospels of the Bible were all penned decades after the death of Jesus. The result is that we are left with the haunting question, “Who was Jesus before he was Christ?”

The most pressing theological question we should be asking in this troubled age is, *“What kind of a God did Jesus reveal; what did Jesus say about how we should live if we follow him?”* That, in fact, is the real issue. Even a cursory reading of the limited number of words we can say Jesus actually spoke reveals the fact that he never said anything about what we should believe; he gave instructions as to what we should do.

Read the Sermon on the Mount again: Not one word about believing, but plenty about doing. And when we hear the words of Jesus in their starkness, we see that following him is hard; yet following him is the redemptive task needed in our world.



Unfortunately, just a few decades after Jesus' death, the Church and its leaders dropped the emphasis on following and developed creeds that stated what people were to believe. The acts of "doing" in the service of God gave way to believing what the creeds proclaimed. Doing, which is active, gave way to believing, which is passive in nature.

Since the fourth century, instead of following Jesus, the Church has preoccupied itself with what one should believe. We see it today: Instead of following Jesus and non-judgmentally healing, aiding, feeding, caring for our planet, and embracing all people with the love of God, we have created an institution that argues about evolution and homosexuality. Instead of praying for our enemies and walking the second mile, we have reared leaders who argue about a just war and justify killing people, especially if they are "infidels," non-believers or adherents of another religious persuasion. Instead of working to improve the lot of the downtrodden, poor, marginalized, homeless and unaccepted—the Church has busied itself arguing over the literalness of apocalyptic images, heaven and hell, judgment and punishment, while casting Christ as a cosmic rescuer who rewards believers and punishes non-believers. The preoccupation with specific doctrinal statements rejects the claims of modern scholarship and distorts the message of Jesus.

In the light of today's Christian world, I find that I have great difficulty calling myself a Christian; because what is generally construed as Christian conduct is far from the teachings and life of Jesus. I prefer to simply say, "I am trying to follow Jesus, and I am finding that it is difficult."

Jesus was killed because he confronted the Roman government with the idea that power and conquest were not the roads to peace and Rome was not omniscient. Only God is omniscient, said Jesus; and

following the way of God, which Jesus proclaimed, was and is the answer to peace.

Any reading will show that Jesus' harshest words were directed at the religious leaders of his day. Jesus was opposed to the legalism they proclaimed, the practices they prescribed, and the cozy relationships they created with the Roman officials. Such proclamation will get one in trouble. Jesus was crucified.

By the fourth century, the Church and its leaders had successfully wedded their view of the faith into a creedal formula that made salvation available by accepting the teachings, which were an amalgamation of Middle Eastern religious thought.

Robin R. Meyers points out:

After Constantine engineered the merger of Christ worship with sun worshippers in the fourth century, the creeds solidified and finalized the view of faith we hold today. Not only was this politically expedient but it gave the church many elements of Mithraism that survive to this day. Christ is depicted in early paintings as the Sun (with rays bursting from his head). Sun-Day is the day of rest, and Christmas was moved from January 6 (still the date for Eastern Orthodox churches) to December 25, the birthday of Mithra. The ornaments of Christian orthodoxy are nearly identical to those of the Mithraic version: miters, wafers, water baptism, altar, and doxology. Mithra was a traveling teacher with twelve companions who was called the 'good shepherd,' 'the way, the truth and the life,' and 'redeemer, savior and messiah.' He was buried in a tomb, and after three days he rose again. His resurrection was celebrated each year.

—*Saving Jesus From the Church: How to Stop Worshiping Christ and Start Following Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), p. 26.

The real stumbling block to truly following Jesus remains the Church's stubborn insistence that the Bible is a cohesive, inspired document. Such a view rules out the inspiration gained through scholarly endeavors. Taking the Bible seriously is not synonymous with taking it literally. Parable, metaphor, and apocalyptic mysticism are powerful tools to truly understanding the Bible, yet they were never intended to be taken literally.

Sound scholarship cites the Bible as a very human document. People of faith wrote about their encounters with the Holy and the impact on the writers' lives. No Middle Easterner would consider taking the apocalyptic passages literally and researchers into God's insights would cringe at the idea of a God who would send his son into the world to be beaten, belittled and killed "for the sins of humanity." That is a horrible image of a loving God and it is an image that Jesus never embraced.

Following Jesus means accepting the admonition of Micah—"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)



Jesus put it all concretely by saying, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends the rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Matt. 5:43-45)

When we cease worshiping Christ and start following Jesus, we will begin bringing the redemptive message the world needs. It won't be easy and the cost may be heavy, as Jesus found, but the message is true and God knows this world needs some news that steers us away from the selfishness and greed that is rampant. Serving and caring is what Jesus did, and that is what we must do.

SERVING AND
CARING IS WHAT
JESUS DID, AND
THAT IS WHAT
WE MUST DO.



THE REV. DR. DOUGLAS L. LOBB served NACCC churches in Pomona, Calif; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Fox Point and Wauwatosa, Wis.; and a large congregation of the United Church of Canada in Toronto. He served as executive secretary of the NACCC 1997-2002 and now lives in Idaho with his wife, Christine.

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14 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108
(617) 523-0470

*A Record of those that have dyed of the
Indians belonging to Natick since the year 1725.
as near as I can collect it*

Anno 1722 March.

1 Samuel Dumptownin's Wife	30 Christian Dumptowin	68 Will Thomas Child
2 Sam ^e Dumptownin	31 John Speen's Child	69 Rachel Reegan
3 Moses Speen's Wife	32 Thomas Speen	70 Bethiah Thomas
4 John Georges Child	33 Gooducks Child	1730
5 Josiah Topomfo.	34 Han: Pectimey Child	75 Phaleam's Child
6 Isaac Speen's daughter	35 J ⁿ Pectimey's Child	72 J: Coochucks Wife
7 Joseph Ephraim's daughter	5727 June 5	73 Tho: Lawrance
8 Sabi Speen	36 J ⁿ Thomas aged 110	74 Eliz. Speen's Child
9 Abigail	37 Eliz Robbins	75 Eliz. Speen
10 Hannah Will	38 one more	76 Ja Coochuck's Child
55 Capt. Maban	39 Speen	77 Han: Topomfo
	40 Sol: Thomas	78 Allie Speen
	45 Ruth Abraham	79 Mac Monequafin
	52 Sam: Abr: Child	80 Mrs. Monequafin's Wife
	53 J ⁿ Topomfo	81 Widow Comacho
	54 J ⁿ Ephraim	82 J ⁿ Coochuck's 2 Wife
	57 J ⁿ Coochuck's 2 Wife	

New England's HIDDEN HISTORIES

by Peggy Bendroth

History is full of surprises. Contrary to popular myth, Paul Revere did not shout “the British are coming!” on his famous midnight ride; he would have considered himself a loyal Englishman at the time. Nor did Columbus “discover” America; archaeological evidence shows that all kinds of people, including Native Americans, Irish monks, and Norse fishermen arrived centuries, even millennia, before 1492.

Congregational history has its surprises too. The Pilgrims did not organize the first Thanksgiving in 1620—complete with turkey and pumpkin pie—and the Puritans actually spent very little time on witch-burning. But the biggest surprise, from my perspective as director of the Congregational Library, has little to do with these old historical chestnuts—it’s what has been done, and not been done, to the founding documents of our history.

Probably no group has endured more scrutiny from historians than the settlers of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, so one would expect to see all the records of those original settlers safely locked up and preserved. But in fact, many of those records are in real danger of disappearing: They languish in damp church basements, unheated attics, unguarded file cabinets, and bank safety deposit boxes—inaccessible to all but the most determined researchers.

MEMORY-KEEPING MISSION

This is where the Congregational Library comes in. Since its founding in 1853 the library has been the memory-keeper of the Congregational churches—the primary spot for gathering, preserving, and explaining their long history. What began as a small offering of old books from friends and supporters has grown into a collection of 225,000 items as well as a large archive and rare book room. We cover the full gamut of Congregational history in America, from Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay to the 20th-century records of the General Council. The library’s shelves contain old periodicals, town histories, 19th-century Congregational manuals, and sermons galore—some 15,000 on every subject one could imagine.

We are also a modern library. That means that we can no longer sit and wait for people to come in and use our collection, as in the old days. Our secular digital age provides the challenge and the opportunity to reach out beyond our walls, to not only house old records but to explain what they mean and why they are important. We offer online classes and brown bag lunches, blog postings and Twitter feeds, to explain not only what a “Congregationalist” is—we can no longer take even the name for granted—but why the average person should care. Instead

At left, a list of deaths among the “praying Indians” of Natick, Mass., compiled “as near as I can collect it” by an unknown church historian.

of waiting for patrons to come in, rifle through the card catalog, select a book and take it home, we offer digital material on our Web site, available to anyone, any time, anywhere.

NEW ENGLAND’S HIDDEN HISTORIES

Our memory-keeping mission has broadened in ways the Congregational Library’s founders could not have imagined, but we still honor their passion for Congregational history, especially in the case of all those fugitive Puritan records. “New England’s Hidden Histories” is our answer to the potential loss of valuable documents—a program that brings together local churches with historians and scholars in the common task of gathering and preserving irreplaceable stories of the past, and making them accessible to all.

The first part of the project, gathering church records, is a unique challenge in itself. Anyone who knows anything about Congregationalists will immediately understand why our task is so difficult. There has never been a central agency or uniform process for keeping track of old documents: In fact, we know about the records in Massachusetts only because my predecessor at the library, Hal Worthley, drove to every town in the state with a church organized before 1805, knocked on the doors, and created an inventory, published as his Harvard dissertation in 1980.

OUR ANCESTORS WERE NOT CARDBOARD CUTOUTS OR PLASTER SAINTS, FLAT AND BORING OR DAUNTINGLY HOLY, BUT REAL PEOPLE JUST LIKE US.

But Congregational polity is not the only problem. Many churches today are simply too stressed to deal adequately with their own history. This is true everywhere, of course, not just in New England. Some churches appoint a kindly soul to act as volunteer “church historian,” which often means dealing with closets and attics of old material—but without the resources needed to care for all this material adequately. This is unfortunate, but understandable; most churches have a hard enough time just being churches, let alone being curators of 17th- and 18th-century documents.

This is why the Congregational Library is so necessary. We have the expertise, and the historic connection with Congregational churches, that allow us to overcome both local church inertia and denominational polity. We do our best to gather whatever

materials we can, but we know that much more is “out there,” sometimes literally awaiting discovery. Stories abound: The carefully locked church safe that turned out to have only three sides, the rare records moldering away in an unheated cubby-hole under the organ, and boxes and boxes of 18th-century testimonies stuffed in the pastor’s closet. In one case, an ancient diary, kept by the minister and dating back to the 1670s, was simply missing from the church. After a diligent search, it was given up for lost. Then one day the church received a phone call from the local bank in the next town over: they had found an old document in a safe deposit box, in a bag marked “DIMES.” It was the 17th-century diary everyone had been looking for. The bank was closing and just by chance someone knew about the missing diary and who to call.

IMPORTANT ALLIES

We have some important allies. Jeff Cooper, professor of history at Oklahoma State University, is our very own Indiana Jones. He spends his summers traveling around New England, sleuthing out records. Jeff wrote his dissertation using colonial church documents, which meant spending many months following Hal Worthley’s original path, driving around New England and knocking on church doors. (In 1999 Oxford University Press published his dissertation as a book, *Tenacious of Their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts*.)

Continued on pg.26



The main reading room at the Congregational Library, Boston, Mass..

**MANY OF THOSE RECORDS ...
LANGUISH IN DAMP CHURCH
BASEMENTS, UNHEATED ATTICS,
UNGUARDED FILE CABINETS, AND
BANK SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES.**

The library also has a partnership with the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University and Ken Minkema, its director. The Edwards Center has provided expert help in bringing obscure old church records to the public, greatly reducing the costs to the Congregational Library.

This is the key to our Hidden Histories program. Tracking down records is only half our work. Once the records arrive at our library at 14 Beacon Street, Boston—either as outright gifts from local churches or on permanent loan—we digitize them. Right now anyone can go to the Congregational Library Web site at any time and read scans of the original documents we have retrieved from local churches. As of this writing we have completed twenty-two sets of records, with many more in the production line.

The process is in the capable hands of our newly-hired digital archivist, Sari Mauro, who oversees the digitizing and careful handling of sometimes fragile old volumes. In their final form, each set of church records will be accompanied by a transcription so that they will be not only electronically searchable but decipherable. Script from the 17th and 18th centuries is not easy to read; and when it covers every inch of a page (paper was scarce in those days) it is pretty much impenetrable, except to an expert eye.

Why are these records important? Why go to all this time and trouble?

RECORDS OF ORDINARY LIFE

Congregational church records provide the best view of ordinary life in colonial New England. They include lists of births and deaths and baptisms; but more than that, they give accounts of church meetings, places where people argued over doctrine and polity but also made decisions together about everything from treatment of adulterers to the division of farm land. Most of the surviving records of the 1600s and 1700s come from the “usual suspects,” the wealthy and well-educated, people who had the time and the financial means to have their opinions published. In New England church records we see what ordinary people thought and how they acted.

We see them working out the details of what would later become Congregational polity—there was no rulebook or



LEISE JONES

manual on the *Arbella* for anyone to consult. They had to decide together about standards for church membership, baptism, and the ordination of ministers—things taken for granted today or assumed to have been written in stone long ago. Above all we see ordinary church people setting down the limits of authority, keeping close tabs on their ministers and calling them to account when they felt it was necessary.

These are not necessarily the roots of American democracy—that was a huge and complex development that incorporated the work of many people up and down the Atlantic coast. But the Congregational churches did provide a key concept—the idea that those in power are answerable to the people who put them there; in other words, the consent of the governed.

In the end, however, those old church records are important to us because they are a gift. They are in a true sense, other people's property. That old ledger full of tiny script once sat on a pastor's shelf, taken out to record baptisms and church meetings. It was made by someone else on behalf of future generations—us. Old records are also a spiritual legacy, a testimony of divine faithfulness and human frailty, high ideals and dashed hopes. They remind us that our ancestors were not cardboard

Leise Jones Photography.



Cary Hewitt of the Congregational Library Staff holds an old church record book from Byfield, Mass.

cutouts or plaster saints, flat and boring or dauntingly holy, but real people just like us, who lived in another time and place, people we have the joy and obligation to remember.



MARGARET (PEGGY) BENDROTH is director of the Congregational Library in Boston and a historian of American religion. Her books include *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (Yale 1993) and *Growing Up Protestant; Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (Rutgers 2002). Her most recent book, *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering*, has just been issued by Eerdmans Press.

DO YOU NEED HELP GETTING TO NAPF OR HOPE 2014

APPLY FOR ONE OF THE NAPF AND HOPE SCHOLARSHIPS

There are scholarships available for anyone wishing to attend NAPF or HOPE but may need some financial assistance with the cost of attending.



There is an application form available on the NACCC website (NACCC.org), as well as information regarding the available scholarships.

Scholarship Application deadline

January 15, 2014

You don't want to miss out on the opportunity of participating in either NAPF or HOPE 2014, and the Commission on Youth Ministries is looking forward to being able to help you out!



NEWS

INTERNATIONAL CONGREGATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

The Rev. Dr. Harding Stricker, missionary at **Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational (Argentina)**, sends the following message on the recent ICF Meeting:

“The International Congregational Fellowship was formed in 1975, as a fellowship of Congregational churches and associations. The first conference was held in 1977 in the UK, and there have been conferences every four years since that date, in a variety of global locations.

“At the 2013 meeting, which was the 10th Quadrennial Conference of the organization, we had the chance to hear from Congregational Christians in the UK, USA, Greece, Lebanon, Myanmar, Argentina and South Africa, among others.



The Rev. Harding Stricker, M.D., left, with the Rev. Dr. Phaedon Cambouropoulis



The Rev. Elvis SaDo

“The theme of the conference was ‘A Pilgrim People, We are on The Way,’ and it was held July 29-Aug. 2 at Brunel University, Uxbridge, London, England. The presentations included Keynote Addresses about the story of International Congregationalism and its practices throughout the world. Also workshops were offered about Congregational ministry in different settings and cultures.

“The ICF has voluntary officers and structures, which enable the work of mutual support to continue between the quadrennial conferences. Membership is open to individuals, churches, associations and institutions.”

Juana Santos, **Panamerican Institute (Mexico)**, also attended, and she shares:



The Rev. Peter Ndungu



The Rev. Fa'afouina Solomona, left, and Juana Santos

“It was my first trip outside Mexico and US. The first day I was there the Fillebrowns [Rev. Bill and his wife Debbie] invited me to go into London. They took me on a tour of St. Paul’s Cathedral and the double-decker bus! What a treat!

“The University’s campus was beautiful, meals were very nice too and the program was superb! Meeting people from other parts of the world and learning how Congregationalists work in their communities and churches was a great experience.”

NEWS FROM OUR MISSIONS

Fishers of Men (Mexico): Julie and Victor Zaragoza lost their 6-year-old son. “Danny went home to be with Jesus at 12:01 a.m., Sunday, September 8th, 2013,” Julie wrote. “His heart went into a bad arrhythmia since Sat. morning around 9:00 a.m. and the doctors were unable to resolve the arrhythmia. His heart finally gave out that night. ... Victor and *Danny*



I spent about an hour with him after his death.” Danny had recently received surgery to correct his life-threatening heart and lung defects.

Indian Trails (Arizona/Mexico): The Rev. Dr. Tom Gossett’s mother, Rev. Pearl A. Gossett, was called home to the Lord Sept. 14, at the age of 83. She was an active part of the Indian Trails missionary work throughout the years.

Morgan-Scott Project (Tennessee) helps to provide over 200 families the basic needs to raise their own gardens. Morgan-Scott Project provides seeds and fertilizer, which are very expensive for low-income families, through the Good Earth Program. They are looking for donations now.

NEEDS

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

The NACCC Mission and Outreach Ministry Council has collected over \$32,000 for Hurricane Sandy Relief and \$9,500 for Oklahoma Tornado Relief. The funds for Hurricane Sandy have been disbursed. The funds for Oklahoma will be disbursed very soon.

MOMC is collecting funds for the Old Stone Congregational Church of Lyons, Colo., which was affected by the Colorado flooding.



Victor Zaragoza removes mud from a public school kindergarten so it can be used as a temporary medical clinic, after Hurricane Manuel struck western Mexico.

While Colorado was dealing with flooding, Mexico was hit by two hurricanes: Manuel on the West Coast and Ingrid on the East Coast. The two storms together constitute the greatest disaster in Mexico since the earthquake of 1985. Victor Zaragoza, **Fishers of Men (Mexico)**, went on a 10-day disaster relief crusade to the area. You can read his blog of the disaster under October 9 at fishersofmenmexico.org. **Mission Mazahua (Mexico)** is participating with Operation Blessing to give disaster relief to areas affected by the two storms. **Indian Trails (Arizona/Mexico)** is providing relief to the East Coast where Hurricane Ingrid hit land.

The Philippines have felt the effects of many typhoons this season and then in October experienced a magnitude 7.2 earthquake. **Christian Mission in the Far East** and **National Association of Congregational Churches—Philippines** have been providing relief efforts.

One Great Hour of Sharing donations are sought for relief of these disasters (see below).

PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for Pastor Hezron's daughter, Aruna, who is having health issues, **Indian Community Fellowship (India)**.

Pray for the Rev. Charles Sagay, **Mission School of Hope (Cameroon)**, and his daughter, Ynes, in the loss of her newborn child.

Pray for our missions in the Philippines, **Christian Mission in the Far East** and **NACC—Philippines** while they help their people recover from typhoons and an earthquake.

Pray for the relief efforts in Mexico.

Pray for **Piney Woods School (Mississippi)** and its financial concerns.



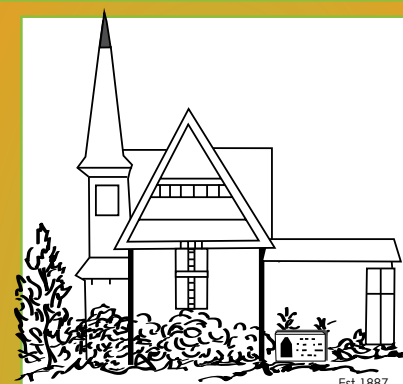
Local residents use machetes to remove a downed tree after one of the typhoons in the Philippines.

Thank you for your support!

For more information on any of these missions; or to make a donation to any of the above projects; or if you would like any of our missionaries to visit your church or your State and Regional Association meeting, or to do pulpit supply, please call Linda Miller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618.

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

For a complete listing of NACCC Mission Projects, please go to our Web site, www.naccc.org, and click on "Missions."



LaMoille Congregational Community Church

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Seeking a part-time minister (20 hours per week) for a small rural church with plenty of opportunity for growth.

See NACCC website for position details.

■ Necrology

Dwayne Summers

Dr. Dwayne Summers, 75, of Roscoe, Ill., died at home Sept. 2. Summers was pastor at First Congregational Church of Beloit, Wis., 1978-1984, and served on the National Association Missionary Society 1983-1985.



Congregational Church in Rhode Island” and were both active in the Mayflower Ministers Association, writes the Rev. Jack Swanson of Wollaston, Mass.

William Hillman

The Rev. William J. Hillman, 84, died July 25 in Morton, Pa. A native of Chicago, he graduated from Beloit College and Andover Newton Theological Seminary. He served churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut, retiring as pastor emeritus from First Congregational Church of Barkamsted, Conn., in 2002 after serving that church for 16 years. His wife, MaryJean Hillman, died in 2011. He is survived by one son, two daughters, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



Stella Gordan

Stella Gordan, 99, passed away this summer. She was the wife of the late Rev. Jerry Gordan and “together they had a wonderful and long ministry at the Cooks Corner



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Pastorates and Pulpits

RECENT CALLS

First Congregational Church of Otsego, Mich., has called the Rev. Darin Youngs as senior minister.

Hampshire Colony Congregational Church of Princeton, Ill., has called the Rev. Sarah Gladstone as senior minister.

Riverpoint Congregational Church of West Warwick, R.I., has called the Rev. Gail Mills as part-time pastor.

United Church of Marco Island, Fla., has called the Rev. Dr. Greg Smith as interim senior minister.

Baleville Congregational Christian Church of Newton, N.J., has called the Rev. James Backing as pastor.

Church of the Oaks, Del Rey Oaks, Calif., has called the Rev. Robert Hellam as senior minister.

ORDINATIONS

Plymouth Congregational Church of Wichita, Kan., ordained the Rev. Karen Robu with concurrence of a vicinage council, Sept. 15, 2013.

Pilgrim Congregational Church of Green Bay, Wis., ordained the Rev. Dr. Mark McAnlis, Sept. 29, 2013.

IN SEARCH

SENIOR MINISTERS

Bethany Union Church,
Chicago, Ill.

Church of Christ Congregational
Stony Creek, Conn.

Community of Faith & Fellowship
Limerick, Maine

Congregational Christian Church
LaFayette, Ohio

First Congregational Church
Albany N.Y.

First Congregational Church
Durand, Mich.

First Congregational Church
Porterville, Calif.

First Congregational Church
Ceredo, W.V.

Ingle Chapel Congregational Church
Milton-Freewater, Ore.

LaMoille Congregational Community Church
Marshalltown, Iowa

Oneonta Congregational Church
South Pasadena, Calif.

St. Lukes Reformed Church
Salisbury, N.C.

United Church
Beloit, Wis.

NON-NACCC MINISTERS

Pilgrim Congregational Church
Billings, Mont.

PART-TIME MINISTERS

Second Congregational Church
Jewett City, Conn.

ASSOCIATE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

First Congregational Church
Nantucket, Mass.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DIRECTOR

First Congregational Church
Kingston, N.H.

Calendar

Jan. 27

General copy deadline for *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* March 2014 issue
Contact Larry Sommers, larrysommers@gmail.com or 608-238-7731.

Feb. 7-9

Word & Note, with Amy Jill Levine and
Main Street Brass Quintet—*Wichita, Kansas*
Contact Don Olsen, office@plymouth-church.net or 316-684-0221

April 28-May 1

Annual Ministers Convocation—*Adrian, Michigan*
Contact Marie Steele, msteele@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1614.

SAVE THE DATE

June 19-26

Short-term Mission Experience
—*Misión Mazahua, Mexico*
Contact Jack Brown, pilgrim_pastor@hotmail.com or 269-749-2631

June 28-July 1

NACCC 60th Annual Meeting and Conference
—*Omaha, Nebraska*