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Congregational Christian Churches

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The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way

Vol. 166/No. 1

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March 2014

THE AMA LIVES ON AT PIEDMONT

CHURCH TRANSITIONS AND PASTORS' RETIREMENTS

JACK SWANSON ON FOLLOWING CHRIST

and more ...



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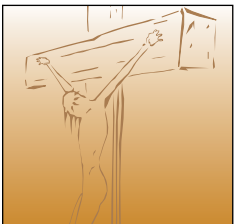


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Larry Sommers

ON THE COVER:

The Rev. Chris Damp, left, relaxes after a special Thursday afternoon service at Bunyan Meeting House, Bedford, England, on Day Three of the International Congregational Fellowship's Tenth Quadrennial Conference, Aug. 1, 2013.

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The Vicinage

by Casey vanderBent

Mutual care happens when people invite others into honest and loving dialogue about the things that matter to them. I've experienced it many times as I've met with clergy, one-on-one or in groups, who bless me with their honest opinion about the state of our association or who share a deep hurt or need. Yet nowhere is it more apparent than when our churches gather together in a Vicinage Council.

The Vicinage Council is a gathering called by a local congregation and attended by representatives of its sister churches, to confer and offer guidance on an issue of importance to the inviting church. It is when we are, quintessentially, Congregational. While most often called to consider a candidate for ordination or installation, the Vicinage Council need not be limited to those events. I recently attended a moving and Spirit-filled gathering at Heritage Church in Madison, Wis. Wrestling with some thorny issues in the life of their church, they humbly and courageously opened their

hearts and minds, to benefit from the group's shared wisdom. It was nothing less than holy ground.

That is what the Vicinage Council is all about—entering into a holy place of discernment for the benefit of a particular local church and to deepen the bonds of fellowship that are foundational to our Way of doing church. The next time your church is faced with an issue of great significance, I pray that you will avail yourself of this peculiarly Congregational blessing, when we place ourselves in the Spirit's hands and offer to one another the mutual care that is part of our Christian calling.



CASEY VANDERBENT
Executive Secretary

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The Great Awakening

The Great Awakening lasted from about 1726 to about 1756. This was a series of Christian revivals that stretched from Georgia to New England. The most famous preachers involved were Jonathan Edwards, a New England Congregationalist, and George Whitefield, a Calvinistic Methodist who had come over from England. The revivals were supported by many Congregational ministers, but they were also opposed by many other Congregationalists. To many, what was called “enthusiasm” in religion was a bad thing, seen both in the Great Awakening here in America and in the Methodist movement in England. ...

Jonathan Edwards wrote a book called *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, in which he told about the conversion of a young woman in Northampton, Mass., who had been one of the loosest in morals in the whole town: “God made it, I suppose, the greatest occasion of awakening to others. ... The news of it seemed to be almost like a flash of lightning upon the hearts of young people all over the town. ... Presently upon this, a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town and among persons of all degrees and all ages. The noise of the dry bones waxed louder and louder. ... And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner and increased more and more; souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ. ... This work of God ... as the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town, so that ... the town seemed to be full of the presence of God.”¹

This Great Awakening spread for the next couple of decades all across the American colonies, led not only

by Edwards and Whitefield but by dozens of others. Whitefield became a great friend of Benjamin Franklin, who, although he was no evangelical Christian, still was persuaded by Whitefield to contribute money to the revival. Perhaps Franklin liked the boldness of men like Whitefield, who once said, “I am persuaded [that] the generality of preachers talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ. The reason why congregations have been so dead is because they had dead men preaching to them. How can dead men beget living children?”²

Statements like this stirred opposition among many Congregational pastors, and the Great Awakening produced a series of splits within Congregationalism. Edwards himself said that there was no middle ground, that “all must be on one side or the other.”³ Many revivalist preachers moved their churches out of the Congregational movement. Baptists were among the fiercest opponents of the Great Awakening at first, but the Baptists and the Methodists emerged as the clear winners in the struggles coming out of the revival. Congregationalism had been almost the only brand of Christianity in New England for over a century, but only a few decades after the Great Awakening had run its course, the Baptists and the Methodists would greatly outnumber the Congregationalists in America.

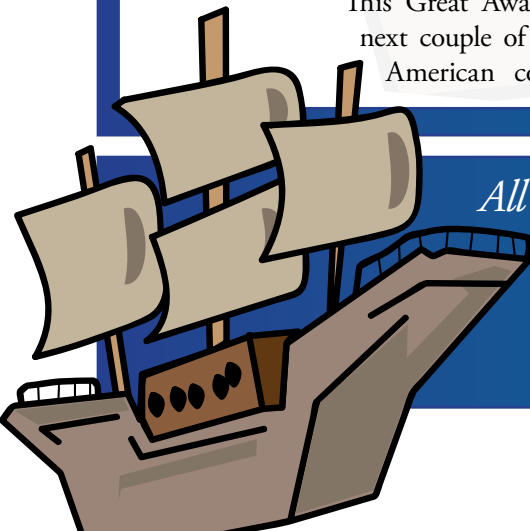
1 William Joseph Federer, *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations* (St. Louis: Amerisearch, 2000), 224 <<http://books.google.com>> (accessed 28 Apr 2012).

2 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830), vol. 4, p. 125 <<http://books.google.com>> (accessed 28 Apr 2012).

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

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)





Counting the Cost of Interruptions

If you're near a computer, take a second to Google the phrase, "This is Why You Shouldn't Interrupt a Programmer." Go ahead, I'll wait....

I hope you found an eight-panel drawing by Jason Heeris, showing how a simple interruption can savage a complex creative effort. The little cartoon is funny ... and it's true.

And not just for programmers. I can't be the only pastor who's lost a sermon illustration to an interruption.

And it's not just creative work. What about home visits, hospital calls, board meetings, or sermons? If you are not fully present, the people know. It's not just ineffective; it's an insult.

Writer and speaker Linda Stone coined the phrase "continuous partial attention" to describe the diminished mental state we create when we allow our tech to take over our lives. Pavlovian checking of e-mail. Refreshing Facebook to see if anyone "liked" your most recent post. E-mail and text message notifications that destroy the flow of a moment. And of course, the dreaded ring tone blaring in a theatre, or at a wedding ... or a funeral.

Every wedding or funeral I do now includes these lines somewhere near the opening:

"Before we begin, a little housekeeping. Please take a moment to turn off any electronic devices. Don't silence them, or set them to buzz. Turn them off. I know you're all very important people, and the world is overflowing with very interesting things. But for this brief moment, let it go. It will all still be there when we get back. Allow yourself to experience this moment fully, for their sake, and for yours."

I wish I could say it was for my hearers' benefit. Mostly, it's to make sure *I* remember to turn off *my* phone.

Don't get me wrong. I use technology every day, happily. We use WorkFlowy to store our church policy and procedure manual. We use GoogleDocs for collaborative project planning. I get something useful out of our NA Clergy group on Facebook every single week. But every piece of technology we bring into our lives comes with a cost. Chief among them is distraction and interruption.

We have many reliable tools to help us manage our time, but none to help us manage our attention. It falls to us to count the cost, and that begins by recognizing the irreplaceable value of focus. In a world full of bells and whistles, the fact that you are fully present for another person means more than ever. In a world scientifically designed to distract you, completing any creative work requires ruthless intent.

Choose your tools, use them well ... and know when to set them down.



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.

Our On Going Transition

by Casey vanderBent

The ongoing transition of our Association's structure has left us, for some time, in a place of "not yet ... not any more ... always will be..." We are certainly not yet what the Strategic Plan and restructuring adopted in June 2012 envisioned for us. For various reasons, including the simple fact that becoming a new thing takes a lot of time and energy, we have not yet achieved the things we set out to do.

But surely, we are *not any more* what we once were. We have left behind much of the old structure that served us so well for so long but was no longer sufficient to support our primary mission of providing services for our churches.

Yet, in the midst of all of this, the NACCC leadership and staff remain dedicated to ensuring that our association continues to be what it has been and *always will be*: The Lord's Free People.

NEW STRUCTURE

Our new structure is coming together much as anticipated. Our ministry councils, into which many of our programs have been placed, are diligently at work providing the resources our churches need to enhance their ministries. Through task teams, the councils harness the efforts of volunteers with specific skills well-suited to the goals and responsibilities of each group. At the governing board level, the Executive Committee still functions as we attempt to move to the two-board structure including a Board of Directors and a Leadership Council. It has taken longer for this part of the plan to "take," as we live into a new way of thinking about leadership and vision. It is most certainly "not yet," but your leaders are working hard to bring every aspect of

the new structure together as solidly as possible, for the benefit of our member churches.

TAX STATUS REAFFIRMATION

One thing contributing to this lengthy transition is the resolution of our IRS status. While we have no definitive information on when our request to reaffirm the Corporation's tax-free status will be processed, we hope it will be approved before our June Annual Meeting and Conference in Omaha. We would then be able to vote on our revised governing documents, officially ushering in our new structure and a final stage of transition as we work to ensure that this new thing is everything we need it to be.

STAFFING

Meanwhile, a broadly-based team of volunteers has been looking into staffing, comparing the current staffing model to the expressed needs of our churches, the requirements of our new structure, and the resources available. With the unanimous endorsement of the Executive Committee and Leadership Council, we are beginning a process of reaching out to our churches, through the state and regional associations and the Year Round Delegates, to share the team's recommendations and develop a detailed plan to present to the delegates at this year's Annual Meeting.

Despite all frustrations, uncertainties, and stresses, we believe there has never been a better time in the history of our association. We covet your prayers and every kind of support as we move into this new time in our life together.

Along the Way

News from the fellowship of churches

ALL IN THE FAMILY



From left, Revs. Fa'afouina Solomona, Moegagogo Solomona, and David Gray.

Two distinguished pastoral lineages touched when *Congregational Church of the Messiah*, Los Angeles, passed the torch on Feb. 2. The **Rev. Dr. David L. Gray**, the church's minister of 17 years, presided at the ordination and installation of his successor, **Moegagogo ("Gee") Solomona**.

It was Gray's last service at the church. He is retiring, after 50 years of serving in churches throughout the U.S., to Quantum,

Mass., where his son, the **Rev. Douglas Gray**, pastors the *First Congregational Church*.

The ordination and installation service was attended by 200, including the *Samoan Youth Choir* and 11 ministers, most of them from the *Cal-West Association*. The **Rev. Dr. Tom Richard** delivered the ordination sermon. The **Rev. Sandy Freud** gave the charge to the minister in the ordination service, the **Rev. Jim Schibsted** gave the charge in the installation service, and **Dr. George Vogel** gave the prayer of installation. Gee was presented a robe by Dr. Gray and a minister's manual by the host church. In an impressive ceremony, the **Rev. Fa'afouina Solomona**, Gee's father, presented a stole worn by his grandfather, one that was given him at his own ordination.

Two busloads of members attended from Gee's home church, the *First Samoan Congregational Church of San Diego*, and the Solomona family hosted a festive reception after the two-and-a-half hour service. Gifts were presented by the San Diego church to Messiah and to Rev. Solomona and his wife, **Nina**.

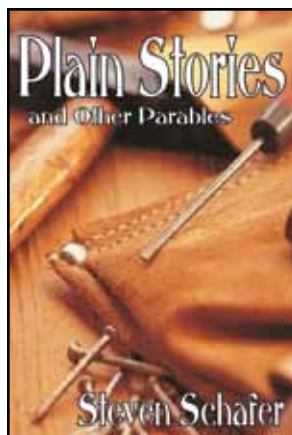
—Submitted by Marjorie Poe

FAITH STATEMENT—In a Jan. 10 called meeting, representatives of five of the seven active churches of the *Alabama/Georgia Association of Congregational Christian Churches* unanimously approved a set of "Proposed Articles of Faith" arising from a process that began with the association's October 2013 annual meeting. The group anticipates that action will be taken at the next annual meeting adding a reference to the articles in the association's bylaws and adopting "a summary Statement of Faith" condensing the preamble and 12 articles, which in current form total more than 1,900 words.

Minutes of the Jan. 10 meeting also note: "All members present recommended that the AL/GA Association should keep an active voice and vote in the National Association of Congregational Churches with our Moderator attending the NACCC Annual Meeting and that funds from our treasury should be utilized to facilitate this."

In an e-mail to the editor of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, the **Rev. J.R. McAliley** of *Center Congregational Church, Atlanta*, moderator of the association, explained: "The concern among our Active Churches is that they clearly address these Christian principles as the framework of our life and

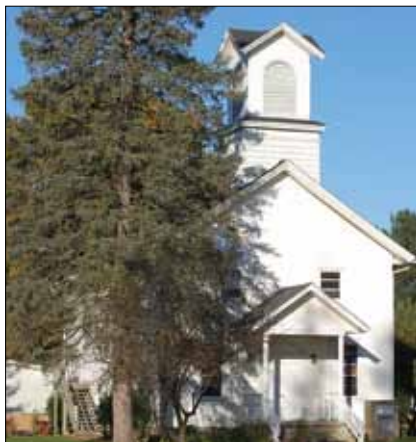
faith practices as we witness to our understanding of God's grace among ourselves and in our communities. We want to be 'Open' to all, but only 'Affirming' of what we hold to be conservative evangelical orthodox Christian principles and practices." As to the association's continuance of fellowship with the NACCC—whose members generally eschew formal creeds—McAliley said "it is a double victory because we can continue to be in active participation on every level, utilizing the voice and vote we have by that openness."



SERMONS IN STORIES—

The **Rev. Steven Schafer**, pastor of *Mount Hope Congregational Church, Livonia, Mich.*, for the past 30 years, has gathered 36 narrative sermons based on the fictional town of Plain, Ohio, in a new volume, *Plain Stories and Other Parables*. It's available for \$15.50 in paperback from Amazon.

A HAPPY WALKOUT—The *Onondaga, Mich., Community Church* began its Oct. 29 worship service in the usual way, bringing the Light of Christ into the sanctuary. But after one hymn and a brief message based on 1 Kings 8:1-11, acolytes took the candles (in hurricane lanterns) and led the congregation from the old sanctuary where the church had met for 136 years to a newly-built meetinghouse one mile away. The congregation, along with many family members and friends, joyfully sang hymns, waved



The old meetinghouse.

to passers-by, and greeted neighbors who came out to see the procession. “Once everyone assembled at the front door of the new building ... the doors were opened and we followed the Light of Christ into the sanctuary where the worship service was completed with an anthem by the choir titled ‘I Am Here to Worship’, Part II of the message, greetings from the NACCC by **Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Mauro**, a couple of hymns and the offering,” reported the **Rev. William Muller**.

The new building, constructed over a period of more than a year, realizes the first two phases of a three-phase project, with the final phase, a permanent sanctuary, to follow when the church is able.

“We know this would not have been possible without the help of many people and we are very grateful to all who helped in some way,” Muller wrote. “But above all, we are



The new meetinghouse.

thankful to God who made the way possible. We have depended on Him all the way, and we will continue to serve Him in Onondaga, Michigan.”

ENCORE—The **Rev. Dr. Robert Hellam**, senior minister at *Church of the Oaks, Del Rey Oaks, Calif.*, has published his third volume of poems. *Huckleberries in the Fog: Poems 2006-2014* (\$8.55 paperback, Amazon) is “Recommended for students, poetry lovers, scholars, theologians, and everybody else.”



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF GREENVILLE, MICHIGAN**

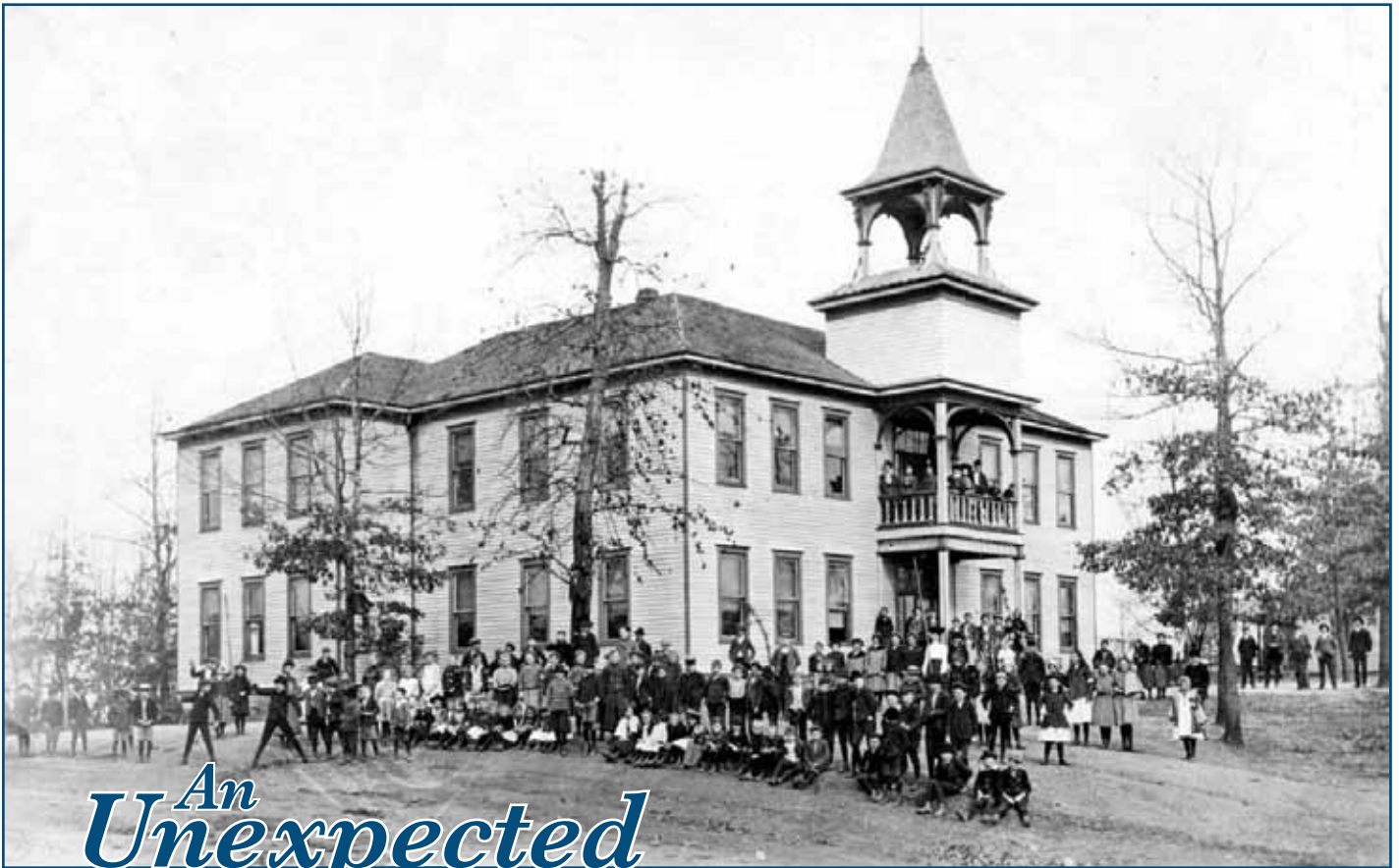
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The American Missionary Association:



Piedmont College

*An
Unexpected*

Legacy at Piedmont College

*Students and faculty crowd the grounds
of the Piedmont Academy.*

by Ashley Cleere

In 1903, the Eighth Conference for the Study of Negro Problems was held in Atlanta, convened by African-American historian and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, with Congregationalist proponent of the Social Gospel, Washington Gladden, providing a keynote address. Du Bois included, as a component of the conference, a report of a sociological survey on black religion in the United States. His analysis of the Congregationalists focused on the work of the American Missionary Association, formed in 1846 as a conglomerate of four missionary organizations with the aim of ending slavery wherever it existed.

Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, efforts of the association escalated along with heightened demand for churches and schools to provide places of worship and education for former slaves. Comprising individuals of both predominant races in the South, AMA leaders envisioned schools that would be both coeducational and co-racial. General population growth, compounded by a rise in the number of children and adults ready to be educated—newly-freed African-Americans—escalated the need for teachers.

In the 1902 report, Du Bois named six higher institutions sustained by the association: Fisk University, Tennessee; Talladega College, Alabama; Tougaloo University, Mississippi; Straight University (now Dillard), Louisiana; Tillotson College (now Huston-Tillotson), Texas; and J.S. Green College in Georgia.

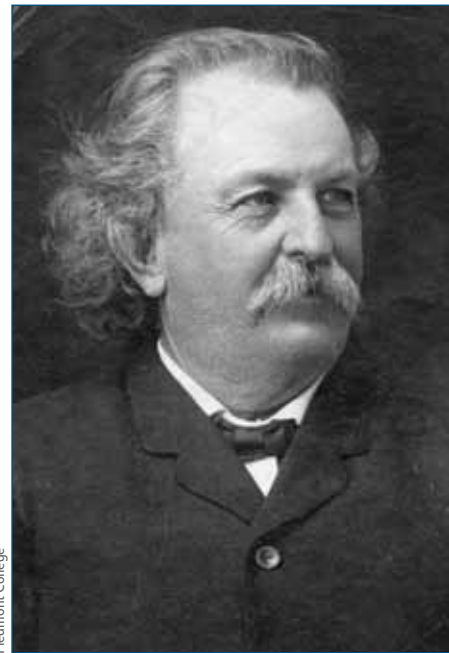
J.S. Green had been taken under the “watch and care” of the American Missionary Association in 1901, and, not long after the completion of the sociological study, changed its name to Piedmont College to reflect the geographic region in the foothills of the Appalachians. In stark contrast to the five historically black colleges and universities supported by the AMA at the turn of the 20th century, it would be more than six decades before an African-American student would enroll at Piedmont College. Yet the broader priorities of the American Missionary Association—general promotion of racial equality and the extension of educational opportunity to people of all races and conditions—are knit into the history of the college in ways both subtle and bold.

Into the Congregational Fold

In 1897 when the school was chartered in Demorest, Ga., Congregationalists and Methodists were the two predominant denominations in the locality. After early designs on Methodist sponsorship of the college disintegrated, its first president, Methodist pastor Charles C. Spence, was aware of prevalent contributions by Congregationalists to higher education and of the emergence of the American Missionary Association in Georgia. At the time, there were some 75 Congregational churches in Georgia, and over 200 churches in the South that were Congregational in name and purpose, but whose ministers lacked formal education. Demand for both teachers and clergy grew increasingly imperative.

Fortuitously, when Frank E. Jenkins was called as pastor of Central Congregational Church in Atlanta in 1898, he also was named a superintendent for the American Missionary Association in the South. Late in 1899, with Spence’s blessing, Jenkins was invited to Demorest. His visit prompted a swift series of conversations that led to Jenkins being appointed president of a J.S. Green Board of Trustees with a Congregationalist majority, paving the way for AMA acceptance the following year. Jenkins remained president of the Board of Trustees until he was named President of the College in 1910, a position he held until 1930. Support by the AMA endured until the dissolution of the association in the mid-1930s when the Congregational merger with the General Convention of the Christian Church took place. After that transition, the Congregational and Christian Churches’ Board of Home Missions (Department of Christian Education) provided for the college until 1949.

For several decades prior to and following Piedmont’s founding, Georgia, like many other southern states, had not yet fully funded public education. The American Missionary Association collaborated with Congregational churches to compensate for that void. For the first 30 years of its existence Piedmont College included one or more of the following: An elementary school, a junior academy, an academy, and a demonstration high school. Graduates of other academies and institutes supported



Charles Spence



Frank Jenkins

Piedmont College

Piedmont College



Meiling Soong and Chiang Kai-shek
wedding photo, 1927.



Lillian Smith

by the AMA or Congregationalists—for instance, Thorsby Institute in Alabama and Grand View Normal Institute in Tennessee—were encouraged by their schools and church leaders to attend Piedmont.

Visitor from the East

Piedmont showed a glimpse of the AMA's vision of racial diversity in 1908 by furthering the education of the young Mei-ling Soong, daughter of a successful Chinese businessman. Her older sister attended college in nearby Macon and made friends with a classmate from Demorest. After spending a summer in Demorest with her sister and her classmate, Mei-ling remained for her eighth-grade year at the Piedmont Academy. She finished her secondary and undergraduate educations at other institutions, but received an honorary degree from Piedmont College more than half a century later, in 1968—when Piedmont College president James E. Walter traveled to the presidential residence in Taipei, Taiwan, to present a Doctor of Humane Letters degree to the former Mei-ling Soong, who had become Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.

A Worker for Racial Equality

In 1915, a few years after Mei-ling Soong attended Piedmont Academy, Lillian E. Smith enrolled at Piedmont College. Smith enjoyed the small classes and intellectual engagement; but, though she was offered a full scholarship for her second year, finances prevented her from returning to Piedmont. In the 50 years following, Lillian Smith became a renowned voice of opposition to segregation. Her novel *Strange Fruit*, published in 1944, portrays the devastating experiences of an interracial couple. Her memoir *Killers of the Dream* poignantly unpacks personal complicity in perpetuating segregation.

At her home in Clayton, Ga., she directed a summer camp for girls. There, she hosted weekend house parties in the 1930s where black women and white women interacted informally, upholding the prophetic model of integration forged by early leaders of the American Missionary Association. A prolific writer of essays and letters, Smith charged Christians to interracial collaboration in a 1944 issue of *Social Action*, a publication of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches. The article entitled “Humans in Bondage,” elaborated on the capacity of congregations to be agents of change.

Lillian Smith recognized the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. the Board of Education*, outlawing school segregation, as a turning point in the Civil Rights movement; she also knew that change would not be immediate. Within a year, Smith published *Now Is the Time*, urging Southerners to accept the ruling. Although the century-old dream of the American Missionary Association had become a legal reality

SOURCES

Mary C. Lane, *History of Piedmont College 1897-1990* (Demorest, Georgia: Piedmont College Press, 1993).

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study made under the Direction of Atlanta University; together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, May 26, 1903* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001). <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/negrochurch/dubois.html#p147>> (accessed January 27, 2014).

for public schools, advocates were still needed to champion the cause. Lillian Smith, a former student of a school sustained by the association, promoted the integration agenda with vigor.

Piedmont Leads in Integration

Integration in Georgia took an important step in 1965, when the first black student enrolled at Piedmont College. Walter “Willie” Scruggs was a basketball player from Franklin, N.C., who had been the first black athlete in his high school. Not only was Scruggs the first black student at Piedmont, he was the first African-American athlete on a collegiate or university varsity team in the State of Georgia. During his first semester at Piedmont, he played every basketball game. According to a tribute by President Walter, all of the other colleges in Georgia were eager for Piedmont to take the lead in this regard. The coaches and teams were most cooperative, and there were no unpleasant incidents. When Piedmont College became integrated, varsity athletics in Georgia became integrated. Thus a central aim of the American Missionary Association resurfaced long after its founding.

It also happened that 1965 was the year the Congregational youth group Heritage of Pilgrim Endeavor was introduced. Although he was Baptist, Willie joined HOPE and is pictured in the yearbook with Congregational students. Sadly, Walter Scruggs died in an automobile accident over the Christmas break during his freshman year. He left the world at a young age, but not before making an essential contribution.

A New Age

As the college approaches its 120th anniversary, key objectives of the American Missionary Association gain new momentum in its life. Piedmont graduates the second-highest number of new teachers among all public and private colleges in Georgia. Just as early residents of Demorest added value to public education with academies, the school’s cohort program strengthens local school districts, allowing teachers to work together to attain their master’s degrees. In 2013, the property that was Lillian Smith’s home and a camp for girls, more recently maintained as the Lillian E. Smith Center for Creative Arts, was conveyed to Piedmont College to be used for educational purposes.

Among other ventures, the Office of Admissions seeks to enroll students of several races and from varied circumstances with the addition of a bilingual recruiter born in Mexico and another advisor who encourages individuals to return to college after years away from school. One can only imagine how the legacy of making education accessible to all will be evident in years to come.



Piedmont College

Walter Scruggs, left, poses for a yearbook picture with other members of the newly-formed HOPE chapter at Piedmont, 1965.

As the college approaches its 120th anniversary, key objectives of the American Missionary Association gain new momentum in its life.



THE REV. DR. ASHLEY CLEERE is a graduate of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies and served NACCC churches in Etna, Pa., Oregon City, Ore., and Hartford, Conn. Currently in her 15th year at Piedmont College, she is chaplain, director of church relations, and an associate professor of religion.

Equipping the Saints: by Wendy Van Tassell

It's **All** about the "Takeaways"

June 28 to July 1 we want as many churches as possible to send representatives to Omaha to experience great Midwest hospitality and a conference designed to give you the "biggest bang for your buck."

The Annual Meeting and Conference Team is working hard with the Iowa-Nebraska Association of Congregational Christian Churches to design a conference that will engage both laity and clergy, equipping attendees with practical takeaways for the local church. As Lisa Rambo, committee member-at-large, states, "It's about taking conference substance home with them."

What can you and your church expect to take away from the NACCC family gathering to be held in Omaha this summer? Here are just a few highlights:

- **A deeper appreciation of God's Word for you for this day**, guided by Bible Lecturer, the Rev. Dr. Richard Cleaves of Cheltenham, UK. Dr. Cleaves led the Bible studies at the ICF meeting in London last summer; attendees couldn't wait for the next session. Dr. Cleaves' style of teaching invites listeners to connect with God's word personally and practically.
- **Ideas—LOTS OF THEM!** Workshops are being planned to help the local church and will be offered daily Saturday through Tuesday. Topics include "Growing a PF Kid into a Leader," "How to Set Up and Maintain a Great Website," "Church Records Management" and many more. Also expect hands-on workshops which will get you out of your head and using your body, like making pottery and learning tai chi.
- **Two Easy Local Mission Ideas:** Attendees will create hospital bags complete with prayer journals, to be given to families in local hospitals, to comfort them while they wait for loved ones in surgery. Attendees will also make birthday bags designed to contain everything one needs

for hosting a birthday party (cake mix, frosting, candles, party hats, plates, plasticware). These will be given to a food pantry.

- **New Music for your Choir/Praise Team:** The NA Marketplace will feature a music exchange where churches can swap music.
- **Joy and New Friends:** You can expect rich fellowship in Omaha! We've arranged for the best square dance caller in Nebraska to break the ice for us on Saturday night to help everyone get acquainted. Sunday night we'll be entertained by Amy and Mark Adams (www.amyandadams.com), an acoustic duo who sings folk, bluegrass, rock and ballads; and Monday night we'll gather for a buffet dinner on the banks of the Missouri River, enjoying a jam session provided by our own NA music lovers.

So what are you waiting for? Come to the Congregational "family reunion" in Omaha this summer. If you've never been before you can look forward to making new friends in Christ. For those seasoned attendees you will reconnect with dear friends from around the country, and **everyone** will take away from the conference a head spinning with ideas to share with the local church and a heart bursting with a deep assurance that "The Lord God is with you wherever you go!" (Joshua 1:9b)

Do come! We can't wait to welcome you! Register today!



THE REV. WENDY G. VAN TASSELL *co-pastors First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, with her husband Tom Van Tassell. She has served the NACCC as a member of the Communications Commission, co-director of HOPE and chair of the Executive Committee. Wendy current co-chairs the Annual Meeting and Conference Team and is co-director of the International Congregational Fellowship Youth.*

2013-14 Annual Meeting and Conference Team Members

Neil Hunt,

Moderator and Co-Chair

Wendy Van Tassell,

Member-at-Large, Co-Chair

Jim Deline,

Moderator Elect

Stu Merkel,

Member-at-Large, Secretary

Lisa Rambo,

Member-at-Large

Dewey and Helen Gierke,

2013 Host Committee Co-Chairs

Kay Miller-Todd,

2014 Host Committee Chair

Michael Chittum and Carol Price,

2015 Host Committee Co-Chairs

Joanne Simpson,

Youth Commission

Carrie Dahm,

*Meeting Planner,
Ex-officio staff member*

Casey vanderBent,

*Interim Executive Secretary,
Ex-officio member*



Adventures Galore in Omaha!

by Kay Miller-Todd

Outdoor recreation, art galleries, gardens or history—Omaha has adventures for everyone! *And, figuring out how to get there won't be part of the adventure for visitors.* Guests of the Hilton Omaha can simply ride a free shuttle to each of the attractions featured in this article, plus all other attractions within a three-mile radius of the Hilton. So, climb aboard!

Our first must-see is the Old Market Entertainment District, with 80+ stores and 30 pubs and restaurants lining cobblestone streets. This historic district has all you could ask for: Boutiques, art galleries, antique emporiums, bookstores, tasty sweet shops, quaint cafés, steakhouses, coffeehouses, and jazz clubs ... along with street musicians, artists and even carriage rides. For history buffs, an audio podcast can be downloaded for an Old Market Historic Walking Tour.

Outdoor gardens and parks are nearby. Relax with a gondola ride in the Heartland of America Park just across the street from the Old Market District. Or stop by later to enjoy a 300-foot fountain spotlighted by an evening light show. Visit the Lewis and Clark Landing on the banks of the Missouri River so you can imagine how the famed explorers felt when they first set foot there in 1804. This area, just across from the Hilton, now includes 23 acres that connect with a riverfront walk leading to the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge. This impressive structure is the longest pedestrian bridge to link two states—in this case, Iowa and Nebraska. It is a popular pathway for walkers, bicyclists, roller blading enthusiasts and moms with babies in strollers.

Or you can immerse yourself in the spirit of the West by visiting two great urban sculpture parks, Spirit of Nebraska Wilderness and Pioneer Courage Parks, also located in downtown Omaha. With more than 100 individual bronze sculptures featured on more than six city blocks, it is one of the largest installations of bronze and stainless steel in the world. The sculptures are larger than life-size and depict a departing wagon train, a stampeding herd of bison, a flock of Canada geese, and more. Just a couple of miles away is Lauritzen Gardens, a 100-acre horticultural area with a rose garden, Victorian gardens, children's garden and arboretum, complete with a café and gift shop.

There are many opportunities to explore the arts. Within the Old Market District is the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts. It houses an international artists-in-residence program and features contemporary art exhibitions that are free and open to the public. Also nearby is the Joslyn Art Museum, the largest art museum in Nebraska. Its permanent collection emphasizes 19th- and 20th-century European and American art. General admission is free. The true art adventurer will also enjoy the Hot Shop Arts Center. It provides hands-on-experience with the artists as they create works of art. There are four

*Photos courtesy of the Omaha
Convention & Visitors Bureau*



Old Market District



Joslyn Art Museum



Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts



Omaha Children's Museum



Henry Doorly Zoo



Mormon Trail Museum



Omaha Skyline

“hot shops” featuring glass blowing, pottery, bronze casting and blacksmithing. There are individual studios, and four are galleries featuring watercolors, photography, jewelry, stained glass, metal and wood sculptures, lampworking, ceramics, and more.

Omaha has museums for all ages. Two of the standouts are the Durham Museum and the Omaha Children’s Museum. The Durham Museum houses restored trains, 1940s storefronts, and some of the world’s rarest coins and documents. Due to the museum’s affiliation with the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, there are also impressive traveling exhibits. The most visited museum in Nebraska is the Omaha Children’s Museum. It has many permanent interactive exhibits, such as a great ball machine, a kid-sized grocery store, tire and auto service center, science and technology lab, art studio and much more. It is a place where adults can express their inner child!

Your family may go “wild” at the Henry Doorly Zoo, featuring the world’s largest indoor desert and nocturnal exhibits in a dome 13 stories high and 230 feet in diameter. It also has America’s largest indoor rainforest. Other popular exhibits include the aquarium, the orangutan forest and gorilla valley, the bear canyon and the butterfly and insect pavilion. This is a favorite for all ages!

And beyond a three-mile radius, Omaha offers other exciting adventures: The Mormon Trail Museum reveals the struggles of pioneer life. Boys Town, founded by the famous Father Edward J. Flanagan, has an expansive campus and historic chapel. The Gerald R. Ford Birth Site and Gardens awaits the American historian. Mt. Vernon Gardens sits atop a Missouri River bluff. Cancer Survivors Park is an inspirational retreat to encourage people to understand and fight cancer. Memorial Park honors World War II, Korea and Vietnam forces. These are just some of the exciting offerings in Omaha.

A short distance from the city is the Holy Family Shrine, a unique glass-walled church overlooking the Nebraska countryside. A little further away is the Eugene T. Mahoney State Park which has activities for the whole family. The Strategic Air and Space Museum is one of the best aviation museums in the country with its extraordinary collection of aircraft and Cold War artifacts.

The Iowa-Nebraska Association invites you to come to Omaha to meet new friends, to see old friends again, to hear and see how God’s love is being shared in the Midwest, to exalt God’s love, to celebrate God’s love, to proclaim God’s love, to help others share God’s love and to deepen God’s love, all while experiencing the hospitality of a great Midwestern city.

Don't miss out!

FOLLOWING CHRIST

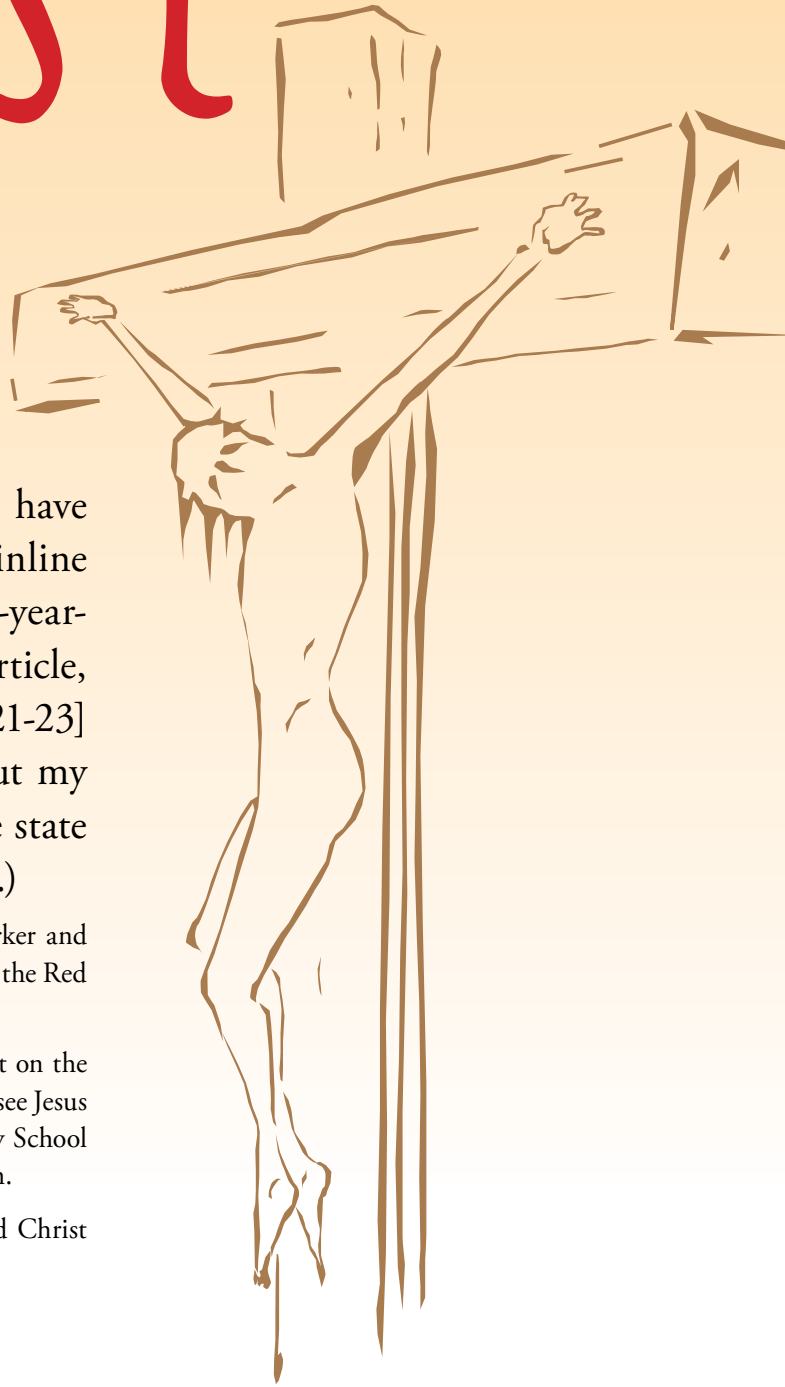
by Jack Swanson

One of the saddest commentaries I have recently heard on the state of the mainline Protestant church came from my 20-year-old pastoral intern. He found Doug Lobb's article, "Following Jesus," [December 2013, pp. 21-23] discouraging. (I myself found it apostate; but my angry reaction is far, far less indicative of the state of the church than Spencer's discouragement.)

Lobb's article reduces Jesus to some sort of celestial social worker and thus reduces the church to nothing more than a saccharine copy of the Red Cross. I follow a risen Christ, not a celestial social worker.

When I was just a bit older than Spencer I saw Jesus the Christ on the ward of a state hospital. I didn't see Jesus the social worker. I didn't see Jesus the great teacher. I didn't see the kind and gentle Jesus of Sunday School imagery; Jesus holding a lamb surrounded by angelic little children.

I saw the Christ—a bloody, beaten, broken and thorn-crowned Christ on a cross.



BILLY SMILED AT ME AND SAID, “YOU’RE SWANSON THE MINISTER, IT’S ALL MOCKERY.”

I saw Him in the face of a sightless old man who had lived his entire life at that state hospital and most likely now lies in a pauper’s grave on the hospital grounds. This is how he introduced me to Jesus the Christ:

In the summer of 1983, I was doing my clinical pastoral education at a state hospital in Massachusetts. There I met and began a wonderful friendship with an elderly man named Billy (not his real name).

Billy had been dropped off as an infant on the steps of the hospital seventy years before and had spent his entire life there. The place was a mental hospital, but Billy didn’t have a mental illness; he was blind, totally blind. Not having a place for a blind infant, the powers that be decided a hospital for the insane was as good a place as any, so there he stayed. Forever.

As Billy grew he began to realize that he didn’t belong in a state mental hospital; with the help of sympathetic staff, he tried desperately for years to be released. He dictated countless letters to politicians, even President Roosevelt, for release; but release never came.

One day when I visited the ward I found Billy bloodied, his sightless eyes black and swollen, the result of a beating by another resident. Billy smiled at me and said, “You’re Swanson the minister, it’s all mockery.”

I recoiled in horror, startled by his appearance and shaken by his words: “It’s all mockery.” I turned and left the ward and, in the stairway of that wretched place, I railed at God. “He’s right, it’s all mockery,” I told God. “How could this have happened, God? Where have you

been the last 70 years? This guy should never have been here, doesn’t belong here and will surely die here and where have You been for him?” I railed.

Suddenly—in a flash of insight from the Holy Spirit—I saw Jesus. I heard Jesus say in my heart, “Hey pal, wait a minute! Where have I been? Where have you been? You weren’t even born when your human social service system couldn’t figure out what to do with a blind foundling and let him stay here. Where have I been? Who do you think has been with him these last seventy years? I was beaten up with him yesterday and I’ll be with him until the Father takes him to me.” In my heart I heard these words; in my heart and mind I saw Jesus on the cross, the Christ, “a perfect payment not only for our sins but the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)—including the sin of a Billy being consigned to a state hospital.

I will not cease to follow Christ, because I have seen Him, first in the face of that sightless old man, and countless times since; in the faces of mothers whose infants I have buried, in the faces of sailors as they gaze upon the body of a drowned shipmate, in dark nights of my own soul, when I have been wounded and broken. You cannot separate Christ from Jesus, for to do so is to take away the power of the Gospel that we are “more than conquerors through Him who loves us” (Romans 8:37).

So to my young friend and to all who are discouraged by the state of the main-line church, Jesus is the Christ and He rose again. Remember, no matter what, that the center of our faith is Jesus the Christ. The Bible is eternally relevant, only because of the reality of Christ. To separate Jesus from the Christ is to give the injustices of the world, like the reality of a Billy consigned to an earthly hell, the final word. To separate Jesus from the Christ is to give death victory and to deny eternal life.

Doug Lobb is a fine man and a loyal Congregationalist, but his article, “Following Jesus,” is discouraging because it begs the question, “What is the point?” H. Richard Niebuhr characterized the doctrine of those who would separate Jesus from the Christ thus: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.”

The point of Jesus is that He is the Christ. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. As the old hymn says, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

Our Pilgrim forbears gifted us with a faith based on the reality of Jesus the Christ, not Jesus the celestial social worker. Happy are we who are called to His table.



THE REV. JOHN SWANSON is pastor of Union Congregational Church in Wollaston, Mass. He was ordained to the Christian ministry in October of 1985 at First Congregational Church in Bingham, Maine. He has served as chaplain of Maine Maritime Academy and as a chaplain in the Naval Reserve, and has pastored churches in Maine and Massachusetts.

PASTORAL TRANSITIONS AND RETIREMENT

THREE GLIMPSSES

Nearly every church will face the process of transition from one minister to another; nearly every minister will at some point retire from full-time ministry. *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* is often asked to provide information and guidance for churches, and ministers, facing transition. Now, by a happy synchronicity, three distinguished Congregational ministers have offered perspectives on the topic, based on their own situations and on their studies.

We hope this information will be of use to all our readers, especially members of the clergy and lay leaders of Congregational churches.

PLANNING, HAPPY DISCOVERIES, AND ADJUSTMENTS

How We Planned for Transition at Stuart Congregational Church

by Randy Hase

On Sunday, April 14, 2013, I retired and said “good-bye” to friends and members of Stuart Congregational Church, Stuart, Fla. I had served them for 22 years.

My successor, Dr. Timothy Roberts, began his ministry in Stuart on Sunday, May 19, 2013. How did that transition take place? It is a story of planning, happy discoveries and adjustments.

The planning began in 2008 when an ad hoc committee of respected church leaders was formed to chart the process that would lead to my anticipated retirement in 2013. Three options were considered:

1. Hire an associate minister, who would become senior minister upon my retirement.
2. Have me as interim minister during the time we conducted the search for a new minister.
3. Have me retire; then, hire an interim minister to lead the church during the search for the person who would follow me.

The committee chose option 3; it was what they were most familiar with. That decision set the active search for a new pastor aside for five years. During that time, however, it still seemed prudent to start addressing the emotional and psychological issues surrounding the coming changes after my long pastorate.

At this point we made a happy discovery: Natural Church Development. I knew something about NCD, so I was pleased

to hear of their three-day seminar being held in Florida in 2009. A church leader and I attended, learned about the program, and shared our excitement with the rest of our church's leaders.

We adopted the program and put together a Health Team to lead us. This turned out to be a very important decision. It helped lift us from being "Randy's Church" to being a healthy church serving Christ well. It also confirmed that the role of the pastor is more than being a chaplain who cares for the people; the pastor is the leader who guides people in being effective disciples of Jesus. We hired a coach, began educating the whole church, took the survey, and began to grow in Passionate Spirituality and the other seven Quality Characteristics of healthy congregations. This work strengthened us for our future.

Why an interim?

We were working our plans until another happy discovery caused us to make further adjustments. David Kaiser-Cross, a colleague from Jupiter First Church, Jupiter, Fla., asked how things were going. I said I was getting ready to retire. He asked what plans were made for my departure. I said I would retire and an interim would be hired to lead the church during its search for a new minister.

He asked, "Why?"

He was doing his doctoral research on church transitions. He said there were other, maybe better, ways to proceed. He suggested the book, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* by Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree (Leadership Networks Publications, \$17.75 hardcover, Amazon). I read the book and immediately got copies for the members of our Board of Directors and the Health Team.

The authors point out that churches in highly mobile communities are quite fragile and do not handle instability well. That insight caused us to improve our plans. First, we decided that we could do all the preliminary work for hiring a new minister and even advertise the position before I retired. That way, we would only need an interim for the time of interviewing candidates—no more than six months, we hoped.

In addition, we decided to use a consultant to help us through all the steps of the search. Not only would this provide expert leadership for the specialized work of hiring a person who would be a good fit for the congregation; it would also give access to a broader range of candidates. Once again, we had a plan of action that we liked.

The next concern was to hire the consultant. We began by contacting Carolyn Weese, one of the authors of *The Elephant*



in the Boardroom. After learning about our church, she advised against using an interim minister. We were a healthy church without major issues to be worked through. In our case an interim minister would make the transition harder because right after saying good-bye to me, the church would have to go through similar pain saying farewell to the interim. This would make it even more difficult to welcome the new pastor. Taking her advice, we once again made an adjustment to our plan.

Hiring a consultant

We hired Vanderbloemen Search Group as the consultant to guide us. They began their work in the spring of 2012. They advised us about forming the Search Committee, then came on site themselves. They interviewed members, leaders, and staff (including me); attended worship; and toured the community. After compiling their gathered information, they wrote the church profile (in consultation with the Search Committee) and began to circulate it. After matching the church's profile with candidate profiles and doing background checks, they gave the committee the resumes of five people who could serve us well. It was the Search Committee's job to make the selection. If none of the candidates had been right, the committee would have been given five more resumes, again and again as long as it would take. Vanderbloemen Search Group gave the church expertise, especially in the area of human resources, and access to more than 800 prospects.

My role was to provide information about the church, our polity, and ministry issues. I did not read the church profile or any ministerial profiles. I did meet with two candidates to answer their questions, but offered no opinions to the committee. My role was as a neutral observer and an information source.

One size does not fit all

I do not recommend our process for all churches. Each situation is different. Whether it was a good process for us ... time will tell.

A few concluding thoughts:

1. Using a search firm costs money. The fees vary from firm to firm.
2. All churches will experience transitions. The best time to plan for them is before the need arises.
3. When it comes to pastoral changes, the major concern is to do what is best for the future of the church; what is best for the departing minister is a secondary concern. But be kind—the church needs to feel good about what it did.

4. The effectiveness of a minister's pastorate is not determined by what the people say on his or her last day, but by how strong the church is five years after he or she departs.



THE REV. DR. RANDALL HASE is a history graduate of the University of Missouri, with an M.Div. from Eden Theological Seminary, a second bachelor's degree in secondary education from the University of Akron, and a D.Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He served two churches in Ohio before his 22-year pastorate at Stuart Congregational Church. He enjoys golf and hiking and now lives with his wife, Linda, in St. George, Utah.

**The Church in Wales: Guide to Clergy Pensions and Gratuities Scheme <<http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/resources/constitution-handbooks/clergy-handbook/section-7-pensions-and-retirement/>>*

The Church in Wales is the Welsh branch of the Church of England. Its pension and gratuity system is paid not by the local church but from a collective fund. While our system is different, the concepts could be transferred into Congregational practice by local churches or associations.

A PASTOR'S Retirement Gratuity

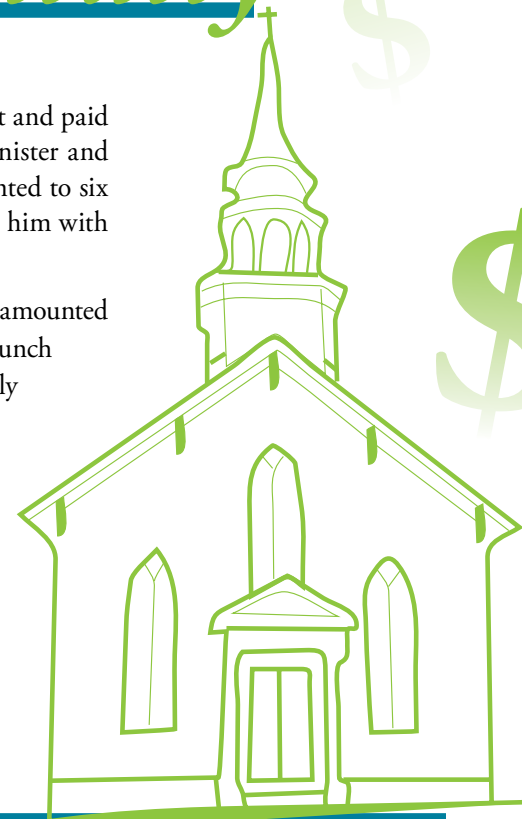
by David Kaiser-Cross

Pastor Ron retired after 40 years of serving his church. Together they built and paid for the new sanctuary, purchased a new parsonage for the incoming minister and paid off the mortgage, and built up a church savings account that amounted to six figures by the time Ron was ready to leave. At his farewell party, they presented him with a retirement gratuity of \$5,000.

Today in retirement, Ron feels bitter about his farewell. The church's gratuity amounted to a "tip" of \$125 per year of service. One might look on this church's leaders as a bunch of ungrateful misers—yet that might not be the case at all. More likely, they simply had no idea what would be a fair and generous gratuity for a long-term, productive, and well-loved pastor.

For-profit corporations may pay bonuses and stocks as part of a retirement gratuity. Not-for-profits—especially churches—often are not so well-prepared. Most churches have no strategic or succession plan, and have scant resources earmarked for leadership transition expenses.

When it comes to a retirement gratuity, there are two considerations—the tangible and the intangible. Tangible elements include length of service, the



pastor's contribution to the growth and well-being of the church, and the current state of the church's finances. Intangible elements include the feelings of the board and the church in general regarding the pastor's leadership.

As a pastor's retirement looms, most church boards will focus on the process of transition. Making sure the retiring pastor is fairly and appropriately recognized is a task that may not receive adequate attention. Some pastors and churches have spent years contributing to a pension account, which is wise. Yet other pastors and churches have not—leaving the pastor virtually destitute at retirement, relying on denominational charity to make ends meet. Regardless whether an adequate pension exists or not, there is no good reason to sour a retirement with a gift that seems trivial.

So, what can a church board do? The first thing would be to search for retirement gratuity guidelines—if there were any. But when I consulted four major U.S. denominations on this issue, the response was the same: We have no guidelines. It's all up to the individual church.

One interesting set of guidelines I did find comes from The Church of Wales, which combines pension guidelines with gratuity guidelines.* In this system, pension benefits accrue by length of service; and a pastor who works 40 years is entitled to a gratuity of one and one-half times his or her last annual stipend (salary), above and beyond the earned pension. If he or she retires before 40 years, the gratuity is pro-rated downward accordingly.

If we translate this model into U.S. terms: For 40 years of service, a 50k salary earns a 75k gratuity. For 25 years of service, a 50k salary earns a 47k gratuity. For 10 years of service, a 50k salary earns a 19k gratuity.

Do those amounts seem excessive? Insufficient?

This brings up the issue of ethics: What is good and fair when it comes time to honor a pastor and offer a gratuity for years of faithful service? What is the right thing to do? When does generosity cross over the line into bad stewardship? On the

other hand, how does stinginess honor God, the church, or the ones who serve?

What should be the criteria when considering a retirement gratuity? Obviously, length and quality of service. Also, has the church already been contributing regularly to a pension account, or provided room for such in the salary package? Has compensation been fair over the length of service? Are there any contractual agreements that need to be honored? A final consideration should be taxes. In the U.S., gratuities are considered taxable income, just as are wages and salaries.

The bottom line for any church board or leadership team is to plan ahead, constructing a model that is fair and gracious, in accordance with what the church can afford. One church began planning ahead over ten years before the pastor's retirement, setting aside a little each year in a restricted fund. Another combined a lump sum from restricted funds with a congregational free-will offering. One small church invited its members to contribute cash to create a "money tree." Another simply decided to designate a percentage of the pastor's salary as a gratuity, and to pay that in the year or two following retirement, to reduce its effect on the pastor's taxable income.

Pastors approaching retirement are asking two internal questions: First, do people care about how I tried to serve? Second, how shall I (or, we) adjust to living on a pension?

There are many non-monetary ways to show your care for the service of a retiring pastor. You can find ideas on the Internet, or generate them through your own planning team.

But a decent monetary gratuity can ease a minister's financial adjustment to retirement and foster a farewell graced with gratitude.



DAVID KAISER-CROSS is the executive minister at JupiterFirst Church in Florida. He has served the church with his wife, also ordained, since 1991. Together they have three grown children, and enjoy vacationing at Lake Tahoe, Calif.

What's a Minister to Do?

MY JOURNEY FROM PULPIT TO PEW

by Mark Jensen

Statistics suggest a wave of clergy retirements in coming years. A resulting concern is that ministers and their churches are called to make the journey into retirement the best it can be. Just as a minister is called to care for the congregation, so the congregation is called to care for the minister—particularly at transitional times. The call to clergy is to practice what we preach, using Scripture and life's lessons to have abundant lives in retirement.

To suggest we care for *mind, body, and spirit* is not just an advertising slogan; it is a concept that suggests a process for this time of change.

My own journey from pulpit to pew is still unfolding. While I am relatively new to the process and an expert on nothing, there are things I have learned since retiring in October 2010 that may be helpful to others.

In our case, a very specific process was used: The week I retired, my wife and I left town immediately and stayed away for a month. This offered a way of separating from the routines and allowing the interim minister and search committee to work.

After 31 years in the same church I was granted the title, "Minister Emeritus." My agreement with the church and the new minister was that I would have no obligations or duties, and that the church would have none to me. We also agreed that Liane and I would stay away from the church for six months to allow for transition.

Upon returning, I was invited to speak. I thanked the congregation for welcoming us back and noted that we were happy to have friends at the church and we needed that; but we also wanted everyone to know that they needed a pastor and I was not their pastor.

Having candidated and been called, Mary "Mimi" Biedron was now their senior minister. Mimi and I had worked together for 12 years, while she was associate minister; now we worked together to create boundaries that allow me to be present in the congregation. According to some denominational guidelines, this arrangement can only be a disaster. Some say retired clergy should be gone forever (and the associate should be gone too!). I see the wisdom of this logic but embrace the freedom of Congregationalists to carefully make determinations as autonomous churches. So far, our arrangement is working for all of us. It works because our church is healthy. We respect each other and our roles. The church, the current minister, and the retiree (me) have engaged in an intentional process.

Clergy retirement is like anyone else's, but there are some unique circumstances. Concerns about mind, body, and spirit need to be addressed and kept in balance.

Leaving the Pastorate

Retirement requires consideration for both the church and the minister. We have all heard about the minister who stayed too long or the one who left the church with massive financial issues or other dire situations. It is essential to be honest with yourself as you seek to define any future relationship. Some relationships are best terminated, while others can be negotiated.

Enable your congregation to celebrate retirement with you and to focus on what is best for you and the church. Once you retire, the church deserves to have the final word. Give them time to adjust to the idea of your departure. Because the minister is often the one who knows the process best, articulate the process of farewell and new call, to prepare the church to move beyond your time with them. Consider an "unfinished business" list. Share resources the church can access for guidance when you are gone. Nacc.org is a great place to begin.

Both the church and the minister must ask, “*What will be the future relationship of the retired minister to the church?*” A retired minister can be drawn into doing pastoral duties, taking sides, and offering opinions about church matters. This can be a burden for the clergy and the church. A new pastor cannot bond with and serve the congregation until there is a separation from what has gone on before. A contract between the retiree and the church, concerning obligations and responsibilities, should be set up before retirement and reviewed from time to time.

Entering the Pew

You have led worship for decades; suddenly, you find yourself in the pew. It can be a big adjustment, no matter where you worship. You may notice there are too many announcements. You may wonder if the hymns have always been that long.

Remember that others may have wondered these things for years. Then know that you never noticed flaws in the worship experience because *you did it your way*. Allow others the freedom to do things their way.

Once, I overheard a Russian Orthodox bishop say to a young priest, “Remember, Father Matthew, not everything is of ultimate concern.” The same is true in Congregational churches! If we find ourselves constantly frustrated as retired ministers, we should seize the opportunity to move on. In my six months of absence, I attended many other churches and concluded that if it could be made to work I still preferred to worship at North Church.

Caring for Your Spouse

If you were to retire from a corporation, nonprofit, or government agency, you might be offered a retirement workshop for you and for your spouse. In the ministry we often say the marriage partner is not hired by the church, but in fact that person is often very much involved in the ministry. Our spouses often have close friends in the church. Departure from the church is a large life change for the clergy spouse. Make certain both of you are included in all retirement plans. Do everything you can do to enable a good experience for each of you.

Discovering the New You

A wise, newly-retired church moderator said to me, “Be ready to be on the sidelines; you will be nobody’s boss, or minister, and you won’t represent any organization.” While we know that some see us as forever ministers, we need to find our new identity. All too often we believe we are what we do for work.

When the phone stops ringing and the work goes away, it is time to discover the patterns of this new stage of life and identity.

We need to find out, and at last have the opportunity to find out, who we are as retired persons. List the activities that you enjoy and do those: Travel, read for pleasure, help with grandchildren, volunteer. A retired Methodist minister said, after moving to a cabin on Lake Superior, “Now I can sing in the choir, get active in politics, and hike all day.”

At the same time, know that what you like to do will change. If you don’t want to work, or wish to have a completely different kind of job, do it. Learn to say “No, thank you.” Interviewing for one full-time interim pastorate, I said I could only do part time. Then I drove home worried that they might call and convince me to do full-time! If there are committees with more meetings and conference calls than you could endure, just say, “No, thank you.”

Going to rebuild New Orleans, tutoring, and serving on community committees are important ways to use your skills to serve God, too. Finding out who you want to be is a learning process! One book I found enjoyable and helpful is *How to Retire Happy, Wild, and Free*, by Ernie J. Zelinski (Visions International Publishing, \$12.29 paperback, Amazon).

Church Ministry for The Retired

Interim, transitional, or part-time ministry, as well as pulpit supply, are all possibilities for the retired minister. The Interim Ministry Network (imnedu.org) offers training on the nature and work of transitional ministry. Such courses also benefit those about to retire with valuable lessons that serve you and the church as you depart from full-time ministry. The sessions are generally in five-day or three-day blocks and are conducted around the country. There is a cost, but sometimes, recognizing the benefit to the church you are leaving, the cost can be covered. The minute you decide to retire you and your church are in a transitional ministry.

The Alban Institute also offers courses, such as “Finishing Strong, Ending Well: Fashioning the Culminating Chapter of Your Ministry” on July 29-31, 2014, in Chaska, Minn. (Details at alban.org).

Both the network and the institute have books that are helpful, even without the courses. *Temporary Shepherds* by Roger Nicholson and *Beginning Ministry Together*, by Roy Oswald provide guidance for better ending and beginning ministries. Supply preaching while others are on vacation can be a joy.

One caution is that the ideal ministry may not always be available for retirees and making a living as a supply preacher is a remote possibility. Sometimes, however, the reward for filling in is more than monetary.

Life Support

We read that our bodies are “the temple of the Lord.” Author Ernie Zelinski said, “If you don’t take care of your body, where do you intend to live?” Though a complete physical regimen is beyond the scope of this article, remember that healthy patterns of diet, exercise, and sleep are vitally important. This is as true for clergy as for anyone retiring from any occupation.

Another universal concern of retirees is finances. Building treasures in heaven doesn’t preclude planning and action so that we are set for the journey, and it’s no secret that ministers have special concerns in this area. It took four decades of ministry for the first church person to ask if I was doing something so I would be okay in retirement. Another person said, “We just know that you will take care of yourself.”

In all practicality, clergy must take it on ourselves to examine the life we want to live and the income sources that will permit

such a life. We must know what we can have available now and do something about any gaps. If you haven’t done this kind of planning yet, now is the time! We are never too young or too old to do something constructive.

Retirement can be enjoyable and satisfying; good planning is a key to bringing your best mind, body and spirit into this new stage of life.



THE REV. DR. MARK JENSEN is a CFTS graduate, ordained at Plymouth Congregational Church of Minneapolis in 1970. He served churches in Pittsburgh and Boston and was senior minister of North Congregational Church, Farmington Hills, Mich., for 31 years. He has served the NACCC in many capacities, including as moderator in 1999. Since retirement, he spends his time with his wife Liane, their children and grandchildren, and in travel, running with friends, volunteer work, reading, serving Olivet College as a trustee emeritus, occasionally filling in at NACCC churches, and playing with his old red Mustang convertible.

Congregational Library and Archives

Brown Bag Lunches - *Making History Matter*



Upcoming Brown Bag Lunches

March 19, 2014

Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith
Scott Couper, Development Manager
Inanda Seminary, South Africa

April 24, 2014

**Everyone’s Saint: St. Francis of Assisi’
In American Spirituality**
Patricia Appelbaum, Independent Scholar
Author Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist
Culture Between World War I and the Vietnam Era

May 14, 2014

**Seat of Empire: Reinterpreting
Boston’s Historic Council Chamber**
Nathaniel Sheidley, Director of Public History,
Bostonian Society

June 18, 2014

More than a Likeness: Portrait of Increase Mather
Linda Johnson, Independent Scholar and Curator

www.congregationallibrary.org

May 14, 2014

Life in 17th Century Boston
Ellen Berkland, Archaeologist, Massachusetts
Department of Conservation and Recreation
In cooperation with the Partnership for Historic Boston





NEWS

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING UPDATE

The Mission and Outreach Ministry Council has received \$46,000 in One Great Hour of Sharing funds for the Philippine relief efforts. Of that, \$35,000 has already been disbursed, mostly to our two missions in the Philippines, Christian Mission in the Far East and National Association of Congregational Churches. The Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand also received \$1,000 for their churches in the Philippines.

\$2,500 was collected for the flooding in Colorado and these funds were sent to the Old Stone Church in Lyons, Colo.

PHILIPPINES UPDATE

CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE FAR EAST



Christmas Party



Youth Fellowship

A note from the Rev. Jaime Julian: “Your generous giving will not only help our brethren devastated by Typhoon Haiyan but will encouraged us that in times like this we have God and wonderful people ever ready to help us. All the five churches in Iloilo were all totally damaged. The brethren are still in the evacuation center. Please continue to pray for them for they lost everything; home, clothes, food and their living. In some places like Samar and Leyte where Typhoon Haiyan have the most damage, the government is building temporary shelter for the homeless families but many of the finished units are defective. Again thank you everyone and surely God will bless.

“There was a Christmas party in Hillside and they celebrated with thanksgiving. Despite the destruction, the people are thankful that their lives were spared by the Lord and they were able to rise again because of your help. They say **SALAMAT** or **THANK YOU**.”

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

A note from Symphony John Castillo: “Thanks for all your

help and efforts. The relief and rehab efforts in Leyte continue through our church in Hinunangan, and through our pastor and family, Pastor Nelson Baliad.



Ground Breaking Blessing at the site of a new church

“We have provided three-pronged assistance, the immediate, the medium term, and the longer range.

IMMEDIATE: Relief goods/food packs distribution; feeding; reconstruction of the church; set up two water pumps—water was cut off for many weeks.

MEDIUM TERM: Feeding program for children, three times a week; lunch meal/fellowship to children and adults alike after church services.

MEDIUM and LONG-TERM: Setting up of a livelihood opportunity—duck raising/duck-egg production—we have 300 ducks and employ at least three church persons. The eggs will be sold by church members.

“God bless you all and **BIG** thanks!”

OTHER UPDATES

Seafarer’s Friend (Massachusetts): The new interim director, Ted Coats, reports that despite a reduction in staff and dramatic cuts in expenses, the mission has been able to maintain a presence on the waterfront. In December, their operations actually increased. They have eliminated layers of administration and paperwork, and refocused efforts upon their core mission. As a result, they are not only more efficient, but are more effective. This bodes well for the future.

Indian Community Fellowship (India): The Rev. Philip Malakar and his wife, Sheila, attended an ECHO (Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization) conference in Thailand in October, with the help of the NACCC Magee Scholarship. Philip explains, “The conference was not like other Christian conferences, i.e., worship, preaching and teaching from the word of God, but we felt the presence of unity in Christ during our stay. The conference was about agriculture and its utilization for evangelism. The ECHO work connects to our vision to reach the unreached in Northern and North Eastern India including Bhutan through farming.”

“We have never heard much information about the utilization of farming that was told during the conference before. The way people are using the available resources is



Rev Stan Doer (ECHO) with Philip and Sheila Malakar

commendable. Since our congregation are also dependent upon farming, this information will definitely work. We are trying to implement these teachings gradually. We believe we will see results.”

Visiting Missionaries: Now is the time to plan to have one of our visiting missionaries come to your church in May, June,

NEEDS

PRAYER REQUESTS

Matthew Oladele, **Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)**, has been in the hospital with malaria and typhoid fever.

or July. The Rev. Charles Nyane of **Word Alive (Ghana)** will be our International Missions invited guest for the Annual Meeting and Conference in Omaha this year. The Rev. Charles Sagay, **Mission School of Hope (Cameroon)**, will also be available to visit churches.

Congregational Church of Myanmar (Myanmar): Congregational Bible College in Myanmar celebrated its third graduation of five students. The Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan, general secretary of the Council for World Mission, was the speaker.



Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan, center left unrobed, with Rev. Sa Do, center right, and faculty members in front row pose with the five new graduates, standing in back row.

Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches (Bulgaria): In order to provide a balanced budget and due to lack of communication from Bulgaria, the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council has decided to no longer support the *Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches in Bulgaria*. We have valued our relationship with this mission since the 1980s. We pray that the work they do with their churches will continue.

Thank you for your support!

For more information on any of these missions; or to make a donation to any of the above projects; please contact Linda Milller at the NACCC office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618.

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.”

FASCINATED BY HISTORY

I enjoyed the historical articles in the December 2013 issue and hope the authors will have a chance to amplify some of their points. For Robert Hellam's article on the Half-Way Covenant an issue is the declining relevance of the "born again" idea to generations born and raised in New England and therefore knowing God, Jesus, and good living in the proper way from birth. Many not proceeding to full church membership could neither identify an instant in which they had turned completely around nor a past that required renouncing. The eventual Orthodox/Unitarian split illustrates the seriousness of this issue, as does Horace Bushnell's classic book, *Christian Nurture*.

Richard Boles' article on Black Congregationalists is fascinating but leaves unanswered the relationship to other related trends. The time period he discusses closely parallels the rise of free black society (and churches) in the North, the discrediting of the idea of deporting liberated slaves to colonies in Africa, and the rise of Abolitionism within the same Congregationalism that was becoming less attractive to its Black members. Oh, too, the Unitarian split was under way as well as large-scale emigration to western New York and the Ohio Valley. These things were all related.

Many ... could not identify ... a past that required renouncing.

It would also be good to know whether blacks were enslaved in New England on the indentured servant basis of early Virginia or on the chattel slavery basis of the Deep South. Much of the growing free black society in the northern and middle states resulted from black indentured servants working off their time.

ARLIN LARSON
Searsport, Maine

DR. BOLES RESPONDS—Dr. Larson is correct that my article does not fully connect the history of African-Americans in Congregational churches to several other related 19th century religious and political developments. I hope to elaborate on these sorts of connections in future works.

As to the status of African-Americans in New England between 1730 and 1780, those who were not free were overwhelmingly held as chattel slaves for life, with children's status following that of the mother. Wherever in the article I used the terms slave or enslaved, I meant chattel slavery. In 1784, Rhode Island and Connecticut passed gradual emancipation laws that made children subsequently born to enslaved women into indentured servants who would eventually be free; but adolescent and adult slaves at that time remained unfree.

MORE ON THE HALF-WAY COVENANT

The Half-Way Covenant was provided to permit infants to be baptized whose grandparents were members of the Church but whose parents were not. Still, the parents (unable to profess a regenerating experience in their lives) were obliged to assent to a covenant [that required] "from your Heart professing a serious belief of the Christian Religion ... [and] carefully and sincerely labor[ing] after those more positive and increased Evidences of Regeneration, which may further encourage you to seek an Admission unto the Table of the Lord" (from the archives of the Old North Church in Boston).

The expanded eligibility for baptism in Stoddard's Northampton Church did indeed open the sacrament to "morally sincere" adults and their children, provided the applicant could also make a profession of Christian faith (John von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*, p. 128).

"Stoddardeanism" did open the Table to "visible Saints, though Unconverted" in the belief that the sacramental participation would be beneficial toward salvation and conversion. Those who practiced under this theory [were] always a minority of the Churches of the time.

It would be centuries before non-believers would be invited to Communion in a Congregational Church, and that remains the exception [to this day]. The notion that all those in proximity to the Meeting House were Church Members has, to my knowledge, never had any credibility in Congregational polity.

LLOYD M. HALL JR.
Waterford, Mich.

DR. HELLAM RESPONDS—“I am quite sure Dr. Hall knows what he’s talking about. The short pieces in my book were given originally as informal talks during our church service, and the need for brevity occasionally gave rise to some oversimplification.”

“FOLLOWING JESUS” ARTICLE DISCOUNTS CHRIST’S ATONEMENT

I had hopes that Douglas Lobb’s article, “Following Jesus” (December 2013, pp. 21-23), would be insightful; but my hopes were dashed in the second paragraph when Lobb said that Jesus never told us what to believe from “the limited number of words ... Jesus actually spoke.” This is false propaganda generated by the Jesus Seminar and scholars like John Dominic Crossan and John Shelby Spong. Their mantra regarding much of the Gospels is, “We don’t believe it, therefore it’s not true.”

A God who would let us destroy ourselves is not a God of love at all.

In the fourth and fifth paragraphs it gets worse when Lobb claims that just a few decades after Jesus’ death and especially after the fourth century, the Church stopped “doing,” and is no longer “healing, aiding, feeding . . . and embracing all people with the love of God.” Church history stamps this statement as false.

Furthermore, I’m a member of the NACCC because we—the many churches which make up our fellowship, including my own—give thousands of dollars, time, and effort in doing exactly what Lobb claims we are not doing.

Lobb ridicules the death of Jesus for the sins of humanity. He has it backwards. A God who would let us destroy ourselves is not a God of love at all. Jesus died for our sins and rose from dead because God loves us all and wants us to spend eternity with him.

WARREN R. ANGEL
Oceanside, Calif.

FOLLOWING IMMANUEL

I was disappointed to read Doug Lobb’s statement in the

December issue of our magazine!—“not one word about believing” in the Sermon on the Mount. One can agree, perhaps, with the technical accuracy. But it begs the question: Is the Sermon on the Mount the only source for human behavior? Must we cast aside all of His other teachings? Must we disregard (for example) Luke 24:25? “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” Must we cast aside that remarkable passage in Isaiah 53 about the divine suffering servant? In fact, if we believe in the Trinity, Yahshua/Jesus was revealed throughout Old and New Testament scriptures as God’s living message incarnate. Immanuel.

HARVEY LORD
South Paris, Maine

WHOLE BIBLE IS DIVINELY INSPIRED

While I have grown to appreciate the “Congregational way” of local autonomy with respect to Church polity and practice, that distinct privilege of our makeup can also be a hazard when a body has no delineated articles of faith.

Coming from Wesleyan heritage, I heartily agree with Rev. Dr. Lobb that true faith and a true follower of Jesus is more than words and carefully crafted statements. However,

The “Congregational way” of local autonomy with respect to Church polity and practice ... can also be a hazard when a body has no delineated articles of faith.

I do take umbrage with his absolute assertion that “Sound scholarship cites the Bible *as a very human document*” (italics mine). Coming from what I believe to be equally “sound scholarship” I would lift the historic (and Biblical, see I Tim. 1:15) truth that the Bible is “*a divinely inspired*” human document.

Continued on pg. 30

My main angst comes from the assertion that Jesus would never have been sent into the world by “a loving God” to die for anyone else, claiming that this is “an image that Jesus never embraced.” I will only cite the events of Jesus’ life and teaching included in the synoptic Gospels from His time with the disciples at Caesarea-Philippi (Matt. 16:13-28; Mk. 8:27-9:1; Lk. 9:18-27), where He teaches about His role in completing the Covenant of Grace established by God the Father. Without the atoning death of Christ, known and even spiritually accomplished before creation itself (I Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8), there could be no atonement for my sin. Having experienced that rebirth I (and all who share in this gift) are now “stewards of God’s grace” (Eph. 3:2) to our world, through word and deed (washing each other’s feet, John 13:12-16).

Some of us hold to the entire Bible, and my tradition teaches a Quadrilateral of Scripture, Tradition, Experience and Reason—but the Scripture overrules them all. I find that we do need to sift out the human misuses of God’s Word, hence our Protestant Reformation and all the other reassessing movements of Christian history. However, we have an accurate historical lineage of the Scriptures in the original languages and utilizing the *whole* Word of God we have more than enough guidance for honestly “Following Jesus.”

J.R. McALILEY III

Atlanta, Ga.

DOCTRINE AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Years ago Steve Peay told me that people who say doctrine isn’t important are usually making very complex theological assumptions. This came to mind after reading Doug Lobb’s piece in the last issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, where he

People who say doctrine isn't important are usually making very complex theological assumptions.

follows a familiar line of “cafeteria religion,” namely: (1) Home in on your favorite Bible passages of Jesus, (2) develop

a hermeneutic to rule out the authority of passages you don’t like, and (3) interpret the remaining verses to craft a Jesus who lives and thinks just like you do. So it’s not surprising that Lobb, who de-emphasizes doctrine, has a Jesus who is just like him. And now he is here to correct the rest of us.

Some basic points of Christian and biblical history:

1. Jesus, so far as we know, did not leave any written works behind. This is because He trusted in the movement of the Spirit among His followers to carry His teaching beyond His worldly lifetime (e.g. Luke 17:20-21, John 14:25-26). He was correct, and the New Testament is in good continuity with His teaching.

Jesus calls us to transformation. It does not help us to create a god or a Jesus in our own image.

2. The four gospels are the earliest available accounts of Jesus’ life and teaching and are more accurate than any alternate recasting of history by modern scholars. There is nothing wrong with listening to these scholars, but it should not be done uncritically.
3. The word “Christ” is a Greek way of referring to the Messiah, which was a core part of Jesus’ self-concept in His earliest teachings (e.g. Mark 12:1-11). It is not a later projection.
4. Grace is central to the most basic teachings of Jesus, particularly in His parables (e.g. Luke 15:1-32). Anything that dismisses it in favor of works-righteousness is an aberration.
5. Jesus calls us to transformation. It does not help us to create a god or a Jesus in our own image. As Elbert Hubbard said, “If your religion does not change you, then you had better change your religion.”

ANDREW MCHENRY

Emporia, Kan.

Pastorates and Pulpits

RECENT CALLS

First Congregational Church of Searsport, Mass., has called the Rev. Debra Arnold as senior minister.

First Congregational Church of Rochester, Mass., has called the Rev. Robert Ripley as senior minister.

First Congregational Church of Porterville, Calif., has called the Rev. Justin Dryden as senior minister.

Bethany Union Congregational Church of Chicago, Ill., has called the Rev. Dr. Lawrence Cameron as senior minister.

First Congregational Church, Durand, Mich., has called the Rev. Steve Wood as senior minister.

First Congregational Church, Marshalltown, Iowa, has called the Rev. Dan Vellinga as senior minister.

First Congregational Church of Ceredo, W.V., has called the Rev. F. Martin Gute as senior minister.

Congregational Christian Church of LaFayette, Ohio, has called the Rev. Charles Moeller as Senior Minister.

IN SEARCH

SENIOR MINISTERS

Ashby Congregational Church,
Ashby, Neb.

Church of Christ Congregational,
Stony Creek, Conn.

Congregational Christian Church,
LaFayette, Ohio

El Dorado Community Church,
El Dorado, Calif.

First Congregational Church,
Albany, N.Y.

First Congregational Church,
Greenville, Mich.

First Congregational Church,
Wayne, Mich.

First Congregational Church of Barkhamsted,
Pleasant Valley, Conn.

Ingle Chapel Congregational Church,
Milton-Freewater, Ore.

LaMoille Congregational Community Church,
Marshalltown, Iowa

Oneonta Congregational Church,
South Pasadena, Calif.

United Church of Beloit,
Beloit, Wis.

PART-TIME MINISTERS

Second Congregational Church,
Jewett City, Conn.

ASSOCIATE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

First Congregational Church
Nantucket, Mass.

Calendar

April 21

General copy deadline for

THE CONGREGATIONALIST June 2014 issue

Contact Larry Sommers, larrysommers@gmail.com or 608-238-7731.

June 19-26

Short-term Mission Experience

—*Misión Mazahua, Mexico*

Contact Jack Brown, pilgrim_pastor@hotmail.com or 269-749-2631.

April 28-May 1

Annual Ministers Convocation

—*Adrian, Michigan*

Contact Marie Steele, msteele@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1614.

June 28-July 1

NACCC 60th Annual Meeting and Conference

—*Omaha, Nebraska*

Contact Carrie Dahm, cdahm@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1612.