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The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

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ICF Quadrennial Conference

DREAMING,
TALKING &
ACTING

2017 Annual Meeting

Marketing Your Church

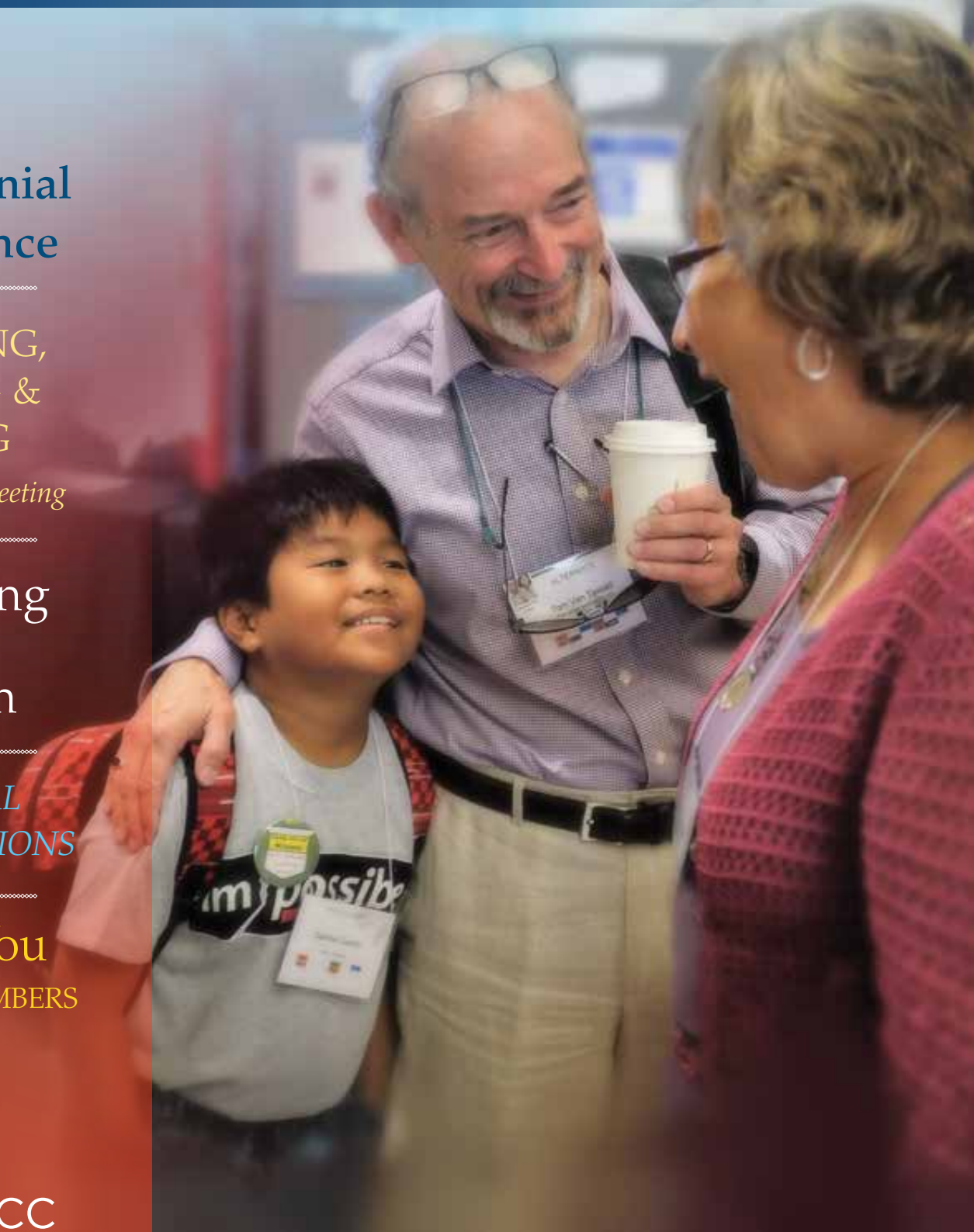
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Rev. Tom Van Tassell and Rev. Dr. Cindy Bacon Hammer enjoy a laugh with Gabriel Castillo, son of Symphony John and Nina Castillo of the National Association of Congregational Churches.

Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

All content in *The Congregationalist* appears by the authority of the editor.

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OUR *Voyage* TOGETHER

Annual Meeting – 2017

Despite having to survive a very “rainy night in Georgia” during the pre-meeting events, the 2017 Annual Meeting was a great one. While you will be reading other articles in this issue that provide more details about the meetings, let me highlight what were, for me, some of the significant parts of our latest Annual Meeting.

- 20,520 meals were prepared during the Mission Event on Monday. This year, we joined with the organization, Rise Against Hunger, to pay for and to assemble meals. The meals consist of a soy protein base, a vitamin packet, dehydrated vegetables, and rice. Adult attendees were joined by NAPF and HOPE attendees to assemble the meals. This was a good and holy thing.
- We recognized two CFTS graduates – Jacob Poindexter and Paul Jackson. Jacob is heading to Anchorage to serve the First Congregational Church as their Senior Minister. Paul will continue to serve the University Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas as an Associate Minister.
- CFTS graduates and alumni and representatives of HOPE and NAPF led us in worship and opened our sessions with prayer. Of special note, Emily Miller-Todd, a CFTS graduate from last year, preached during our Sunday morning worship.
- We welcomed three churches into the NACCC – St. John Church of Idalia, Colorado, Haven Congregational Church of Haven, Kansas, and South Bridgton Congregational Church of Bridgton, Maine – and reinstated the First Congregational Church of Tomahawk, Wisconsin, to active member church status. Please pray for these congregations and reach out to them to add your support.
- Our Congregational Lecture was actually “Congregational Lectures” as five individuals shared “What Congregationalism Means to Me.” J. R. McAliley III, Garry Fisher, Kay Miller-Todd, Julie Johnson Staples, and Martin Hall illustrated some of the diversity that exists within the Congregationalism understood by the NACCC.
- Our Workshop times were highlighted by two nationally recognized experts – Karen Massey presented a workshop on “What Young Parents Are Looking for in a Church,” and Dave Brubacker led a session on “How to Successfully Resolve Church Conflict.”
- Barbara Brown Taylor challenged and inspired us with her insights on the Apostle Peter as one who dreamed, talked, and acted.
- Throughout the meeting, we all were warmly welcomed and ministered to by the great staff of Piedmont College, led by its president, Dr. James Mellichamp, and by the host committee of the Methodist-Congregational Federated Church and its minister, Rev. Joyce Acree.

Good things are still to come for the NACCC.

Grace and Peace, Michael

*By Michael Chittum,
Executive Director*



*Sunday morning worship at
Piedmont College Chapel*

Strangers AND PILGRIMS



*D. L. Moody
(1837-1899)*

Dwight Lyman Moody was born in 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts. In later years, Dwight Moody would say: "The first thing I remember was the death of my father. It was a beautiful day in June when he fell suddenly dead."²²⁷

With eight children to feed, Dwight's mother had to send some of her children off to workhouses. Mrs. Moody still insisted that all her children attend the Unitarian church with her every Sunday. Dwight left Northfield for Boston at age seventeen.

Dwight's uncle gave him a job in his Boston shoe store, with the condition that Dwight attend a Congregational church. Dwight moved to Chicago in 1856, working as a successful and well-known shoe salesman. There, he established a church school for children in the slums in 1858. A non-combatant during the Civil War, Dwight served with the YMCA, accompanying the Union troops throughout the war. After the war, he became the president of the YMCA in Chicago. He was also influential in reviving the Sunday School Union.

Peter Marshall, Jr., reports, "In Chicago, a shoe salesman who had moved there from Boston was astonished when the merchant he was calling on looked at his watch and said he had to go to a prayer meeting. Already converted . . . the shoe salesman went with him . . . Soon the salesman wrote home . . . 'I go to meeting every night. Oh, how I enjoy it! It seems as if God were here Himself. O Mother, pray . . . that this work may go on till every knee is bowed!' . . . Dwight L. Moody would turn in his shoe sample kit

and go into full-time evangelism."²²⁸

Moody and his music leader, Ira Sankey, preached to two and a half million people in Great Britain and to many millions more in the United States.

At the 1889 meeting of the National Council of Congregational Churches, Moody was commended as "the most successful evangelist of our time."²²⁹

Moody preached to the poor with great results, but he also appealed strongly to the middle class because of his solid business background. Webster's Guide to American History tells us, "The substance of his preaching was a simple, conservative, personal Christianity sharply in contrast with the Social Gospel movement of the same period."²³⁰

However, Justo González writes, "He was convinced that the conversion of the masses would lead to better living conditions in the cities, and therefore he had little to say regarding the conditions and structures that led to so much human misery."²³¹ Sydney Ahlstrom describes Moody's style: "Holding aloft his Bible, he assured his hearers that eternal life was theirs for the asking, that they had only to 'come forward and t-a-k-e, TAKE!'"²³²

Moody's evangelistic headquarters was in his hometown of Northfield. There, he established Northfield Seminary for girls in 1879 and Mount Hermon School for boys in 1881. In 1889, Moody founded the Chicago Bible Institute, which continues today as the Moody Bible Institute. The Moody Bible Institute consists of an undergraduate Bible college with branches in several different cities, as well as a seminary, the Mission

Aviation Fellowship, a publishing house, and a radio network with programs on stations all over the United States. In addition, the Institute produces a daily devotional called *Today in the Word*.

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

²²⁷M. Laird Simons, "Dwight Lyman Moody," *Wholesome Words: Christian Biography Resources* <www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biomood.html> (accessed 4 September 2011).

²²⁸Marshall and Manuel, *Trumpet*, 427.

²²⁹Von Rohr, 330-331.

²³⁰Van Doren and McHenry, 1132.

²³¹González, vol. 2, p. 254.

²³²Ahlstrom, 745.

Along THE WAY



PF members from FCC, Portland, MI, build fellowship . . . and a barn.

Building A Link With The Past

On May 20th, about 14 youth and adults, including fourth graders through the Congo Youth Group of the First Congregational Church of Portland, Michigan, met at the home of Charles Leik, former president of the National Alliance of Historic Barn Builders in Portland. Charles led the gathering through lessons on historic barn-building structures and tools. Then it was time to build a quarter scale replica of an historic Dutch barn.

These barns go back to the early days of the colonies when different nationalities and ethnic groups preferred to build barns based on their traditions. This particular style of barn was the favorite of farmers in the Eastern states, particularly New York. The kids and grownups learned about bents, braces, beams, and posts, and learned how to put them together without using anything metal, only wooden pegs. They worked as a team through the day; and, after a couple of intense hours, they witnessed the beautiful structure of a Dutch barn.

Along with the actual learning of how to build the barn, everyone learned first hand the strength and skill the early farmers needed to hone out native woods with axes, so precisely that a notch in one board would match the notch of another. Using fine teamwork and a master craftsman, all came to the conclusion that, while it was labor intensive, the barn was truly a work of art and teamwork. All found it interesting to hear how our forefathers had such a command of math, horticulture, and common sense to build these barns in such a way that many remain in use today.

The Dutch barn had been built and taken down in many different locations across the United States -- from Notre Dame University to Kansas, and Ohio.

The team then disassembled the barn to be packed up for its next stop out west. What an honor to work together, learning about nature, history, and teamwork.

Submitted by Pastor Marilyn Danielson, First Congregational Church, Portland, Michigan

Piedmont College names Butman Chair for Religious Studies

Dr. Carson Webb has been named the Butman Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Piedmont College. Webb, previously the Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Eureka College in Illinois, takes over the position from Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor, who joined Piedmont as the first Butman Professor in 1998 and retired from teaching in May.

Dr. Webb is a graduate of Pepperdine University and earned a master's degree in Philosophical Theology at the University of Nottingham. He holds a

master's degree in Religion from Syracuse University, where he also earned a Ph.D. in 2014. He has previously taught religion and philosophy at Le Moyne College and Syracuse University.



Dr. Carson Webb

The Butman Chair at Piedmont College was created in 1998 and named in honor of the Rev. Harry R. Butman, a founder of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Piedmont is affiliated with the NACCC and the United Church of Christ. Piedmont President Dr. James F. Mellichamp said that following a national search, the college

was pleased to fill the position with a professor of Dr. Webb's caliber.

"The Butman Chair is the keystone for our Department of Religion and Philosophy, which in turn plays a central role in Piedmont's liberal arts curriculum," Mellichamp said.

Mellichamp also thanked Dr. Taylor for her 20 years of teaching as Butman Professor at Piedmont.

"Barbara Taylor has taught and lectured at most of the top universities in the U.S. and abroad," Mellichamp said. "To have her as part of the faculty at Piedmont College for two decades has been an invaluable experience not only for our students but also for all of us at the college."

Submitted by David Price, Piedmont College

Wisconsin Congregational Association Presents Leadership Summit

Congregationalists from throughout Wisconsin convened at North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, for Wisconsin Congregational Association's (WCA) Annual Meeting this past April. The Adaptive Congregation was the focus of keynote speaker, Tim Roberts, pastor of Stuart Congregational Church, Stuart, Florida. Roberts' sessions, "Church for the Future" and "To Bless and Add," identified ways in which churches can seize opportunities for adding vitality by reaching out to their local communities, maintaining cherished traditions while augmenting programs and worship services that appeal to new members.

For a personal perspective on millennial attitudes toward church, WCA presented a panel of three, former members of North Shore Congregational Church – two current students at Marquette University and a recent college graduate. Although all three women are still involved with WCA's annual youth

camp, they agreed that their spiritual needs were currently being met outside the church. The two students noted that Marquette University offers many opportunities for spiritual enrichment. All agreed that the typical schedule of church worship wasn't conducive to their lifestyles.

During the meeting, WCA elected its new slate of officers:

- Moderator – Julie Sheridan Smith*
- Moderator-Elect – Tonia Wallner*
- Past Moderator – Stuart Merkel*
- Secretary – Diane Williams*
- Treasurer -- Andy Forsaith*
- Clergy Ambassador -- Mark McAnlis*
- Lay Ambassador -- Polly Bodjanac*
- Communications Ambassador -- Emily Cambell*
- Camp and Youth Committee -- Abby Cole*
- Youth and Camp Committee (Clergy at Large) -- Cindy Bacon-Hammer*



(L-R) Mark Chojnacki, Lynn Merkel, and Sandy Klompemaker from Faith Community Congregational Church in Franklin led the group in hymn singing. Photo by Martin Hall



The Rev. Dr. Stuart Merkel, moderator, welcomed WCA members to the 2017 Leadership Summit. Photo by Martin Hall



Abby Cole, Jeni Branum and Sara Penno represented the Millennial point of view at the WCA Annual Meeting. Photo by Martin Hall

Gomer Congregational Church Marks 100 Years Of Song

Wales is known as the land of song. When Welsh immigrants founded Gomer Congregational Church in Gomer, Ohio, they brought their voices and beloved hymns with them. This year Gomer Congregational Church is celebrating its 100th Gymanfa Ganu (Ga-mahn-fa Ga-nee), a Welsh festival of song, on Sunday, October 1 at 7pm. In addition to World Communion Sunday, that morning's worship will focus on music.

Mrs. Davis was the first organist at Gomer Congregational Church

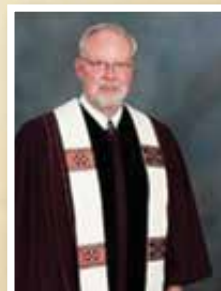
The event coincides with the 100th anniversary of the installation of the church's pipe organ, which has been played continuously for the past century.

Participants sit by parts and sing some great old hymns in the Welsh tradition in four-part harmony. Trefor Williams will direct the program. A native of Wales, Williams is the director of Milwaukee MetroVoices in Wisconsin. Music will be provided by church organist Martha Britt, pianist Joyce Larimore, and guest harpist Nancy Glick. A light lunch will be available beginning at 4pm at the Gomer Welsh Museum directly across from the church. We hope you join us for this celebration!

Submitted by the Rev. Jim Wilder, Gomer Congregational Church

Retirement Announcement

Rev. Cayle Beagle Retires First Congregational Church of Laingsburg Michigan, has announced the retirement of the Reverend Cayle Beagle. Pastor Beagle has faithfully served the fellowship for 16 years with his wife Barbara Beagle. An open house was held to honor his well-deserved retirement.

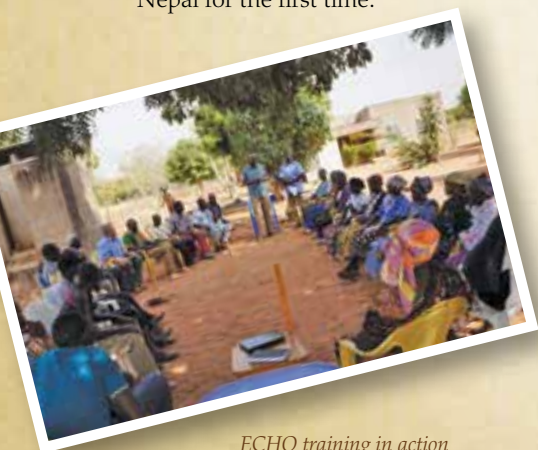


Update from our Missions

Janu Indian Trails Mission, Ariz. is helping to organize their churches in Mexico for a Mexican Convention. It is held every four years. This year, it will be in Colonia Buenos Aires, located south of the historic center of Mexico City, Mexico. They are expecting 12,000 – 15,000 people to attend.

Congregational Church of Myanmar, had a graduation at Chakhai Grace School. They are now ready for the 2016-18 Academic Year. Rev. SaDo is grateful for the support to finish rebuilding one school and the pool with cover to store fresh water for drinking and washing. There are two other school buildings that need repair soon.

ECHO, (Education for Hunger, Org), Fla. does much training throughout the world. They do direct training for small-scale farmer families and organizations who work with them. They are hosting a Sustainable Agriculture and Community Development workshop in Nepal for the first time.



ECHO training in action



Grace School celebrates graduation

Christ to the Villages, Nigeria, received a donation for purchase of another school bus, which will allow easier and safer transport of students.

Margaret Oladele, one of the founders of Christ to the Villages, was in New York this spring for kidney surgery. It was successful, and she is doing very well. Margaret is grateful for your prayers.

Mission School of Hope, Cameroon, recently sent some of its clinic staff for more training on family planning. They have created a unit for this training in their clinic and have received most of the equipment needed to help the villagers plan their families in a healthy and safe way.

Bread of Life Christian Mission, Plant City, Fla., is branching out to Cuba, supporting pastors and missionaries there. Elba Santana is accompanying five other people to Belic, Cuba. They are taking medicine, cell phones, clothing, shoes, and Sunday school material. There is a group of local pastors in Plant City who adopted a pastor in Havana, sending him \$30 dollars monthly. They sent a kit that creates reading glasses from glasses provided by a church in South Carolina. They can make 300 pairs. They also bought a house in Palma de la Cruz for a small church of that has grown to more than 100 members. Donations for this project came from contacts Bread of Life Mission has in Plant City.

Missions

Mission Visits

The Rev. Jim and Cindy Owens, FCC Peterson, Iowa, visited Love Worth Sharing, Haiti, August 7-13. They checked on the three ministry locations in Port-au-Prince. The Owenses also worked at the medical clinics and taught the kids at the Bible camps. Bibles and scripture booklets were distributed.

Julie and Jeff Robie, Missionary Society Alumni, visited Word Alive, Ghana, in June. Julie sent this message from her trip, "Well, I never expected to be in a place where I would be involved first-hand in a situation needing One Great Hour of Sharing funds. It is the rainy season here in both Ghana and the Ivory Coast. We have already been restricted to our hotel twice in the last two days because of severe flooding."



"The Word Alive church in Abidjan needs funds to purchase 35 truckloads of sand and to pay the cost of labor to spread it. The area around the church and just in front of the entry gate flooded, and some flood waters seeped into the church."

Tom and Gisela Chelimsky, North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point, Wisconsin, visited Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina, this summer.

A group of 10 NACCC people traveled to *Happy Life Children's Home*, in

Nairobi, Kenya, after the NACCC Annual Meeting at Piedmont College, Georgia. They then traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, to attend the International Congregational Fellowship Quadrennial with 52 other NACCC members.

In June, *Ozaukee Congregational Church* and *North Shore Congregational Church* in Wisconsin sent 38 people to work with staff from Hosanna Industries, Penn., in Richwood, W.Va. They provided flood relief work.

The Rev. Peter Smith, *First Congregational Church*, Hanson, Mass., visited the Rev. Schott Planning, president, Maine Sea Coast Mission in Maine in April. The area is also one of the most economically impoverished regions of the nation. This mission provides community-building activities, in addition to its focus on food distribution, housing rehabilitation and community services.

Projects in Argentina

Harding Stricker, Director of Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina, says they are working on two new projects. They are in the process of adding and equipping an emergency section within their clinic, but have a long way to go to completion. The second project is installation of a new working sound system at the mission's meeting house. The existing system seldom works well, requiring speakers and the music ensembles to speak / sing very loudly, with resulting sore throats and headaches.

Travancore Church Council Update

One of our longest standing missions, Travancore Church Council, India, is being removed from our Supported Missions list. Due to governmental changes in India, we no longer can send money to them. This is affecting many internationally funded nonprofits through the country. When and if the Indian Government changes their policy, we will welcome Travancore Church Council back into our midst.

Our other mission in India, Indian Community Fellowship, is considered a community development organization and is currently not affected by the government policy.

For more information on any of these missions, or to donate to any of the above projects, please contact Linda Miller at the NACCC Office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618, or lmiller@naccc.org.

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

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

Prayers are Needed

Please keep all the travelers to the different missions in your prayers.



Dreaming, TALKING,

2017 NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference

Getting Together in Georgia

Piedmont College, site of the 2017 NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference, is nestled into the lush, wooded foothills of the Northeast Georgia Mountains near the Chattahoochee National Forest. Buildings emerge like outcroppings among the pines, magnolias, and oaks. In some parts of the campus, one can't see the buildings for the trees. Meeting venues appear unexpectedly just around the bend or over the hill.

In 1897, the dream of establishing a college in the wilds of northeast

Georgia came true with the opening of a small school in the hills. When it ran into financial difficulties early on, Congregational churches provided support. The relationship between the college and Congregationalism has endured. Today, Piedmont College has two campuses and serves well over 2,000 students from the U.S. and 10 countries. The school itself seems to represent the theme of June's meeting – Dreaming, Talking, and Acting.

As Congregationalists watch their congregations dwindle and support

decline, they dream of better days ahead when the future viability of their churches is more secure. The speakers and workshop facilitators featured at this year's conference helped bring some of those dreams into focus, discussed the current landscape, and provided strategies for achieving key goals. The result was a sense of intimacy as Congregationalists from around the country talked about their hopes and dreams for their own churches, the NACCC and Congregationalism itself.



ACTING.



Rev. J.R. McAliley addresses the conference.

Diversity Rooted in Common Ground

Instead of the traditional Congregational Lecture, the planning committee presented a six-person panel including the Rev. Garry Fisher, Community Congregational Church, South Bend, Indiana; the Rev. Julie Johnson Staples, J.D., Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York; the Rev. Kay Miller-Todd, Berwick Congregational Church, Berwick, Iowa; the Rev. Dr. Martin Hall, North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, Wisconsin; and the Rev. J.R. McAliley, III, Center Congregational Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

Panelists were asked to respond to the question, "What does being a Congregationalist mean to me?" Their answers were diverse, yet all were rooted in Congregational history and biblical truth.

A covenant people

The Rev. Kay Miller-Todd noted that Congregationalism "allows us to explore our creativity," as God provides gifts to his people to allow us to carry out his mission in the world. She added that Congregationalism is based on relationships . . . not rules.

"We depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. Not by-laws. Not a hierarchy," said Rev. Miller-Todd.

"A covenant people, we are not meant to grow alone, but in fellowship with one another."

Rev. Miller-Todd also offered a counterpoint to the concern over declining congregations. "A small church should not have an inferiority complex," she said. "The size of the congregation doesn't affect the community and fellowship and life of the church."



Rev. Richard Miller-Todd and Pastor Kay Miller-Todd were joined by their daughter, Rev. Emily Miller-Todd. Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

It's on you

Dr. Martin Hall spoke of the underlying principle of Congregationalism. "As Congregationalists, we're confronted by the reality that, in the end, it's on you," said Dr. Hall. He reminded the audience that we are Congregationalists by choice, not dictate.

"The Pilgrims at Scrooby took it upon themselves to freely live out their lives in Jesus Christ," said Dr. Hall. "The profound

reality is that the fellowship of which we are a part -- locally, regionally, and nationally -- is by choice."

Yet, he added, there was a purpose to that freedom from restriction -- to allow each of us to enter into relationship with God. "It's on you to engage in relationship with God and to use your gifts," he said. "Ours is a way that doesn't give you the luxury of shifting the blame."

The little church is still standing

The Rev. J.R. McAliley, III, discussed his experience as pastor of Center Congregational Church, a small church in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta. Founded in 1890, the church was burned to the ground in 1941 and rebuilt on the same location over a decade later. It has remained a country church amid a highly urbanized, affluent, and commercial area.

Although the membership has waned at times, the church has kept its doors open by staying true to its Congregational roots, still offering a traditional, New England worship service and standing strong against segregation. "The Bible is fundamental and foundational to everything we are," said Rev. McAliley, noting that Congregationalists are meant to restore covenant faith with one another.

"Congregationalists are independent, but we need each other," said Rev. McAliley. "At Center Congregational Church, we call ourselves a 'seed starting' church, helping folks who waver in their faith." ▶



The Rev. Dan Velinga, pastor of First Congregational Church, Marshalltown, IA, at Quiet Day. Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

Dreaming, TALKING,

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Informed by history

John Robinson, pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, is famously known for saying “I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word.” Those words inspire the Rev. Julie Johnson Staples to continue seeking truth in Scripture. She reminds us that it is through the Bible that we come to know God, citing Ephesians 1:17, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him better.”

Rev. Johnson Staples recommends that we “lean closely into the freedom that Congregationalism gives us.” She reminded the audience that freedom informed the founding of this country, and that men and women of the Congregational Way extended this freedom beyond church walls by recognizing the spiritual equality of men, women, Indians, and blacks.

“The truth of liberation and freedom is no less urgent than it was then,” said Rev. Johnson Staples.

She offered that the covenant we share and conviction we hold is the promise to embrace and encourage one another on our faith journey.

Reaffirming our covenant

The Rev. Garry Fisher continued the conversation regarding Congregationalists’ freedom and shared covenant. Rev.

Fisher was raised in the Lutheran tradition. “There was a party line,” he said, “and we were expected to toe the party line.”

He noted that Congregationalists, on the other hand, don’t control one another. “We are independent,” said Rev. Fisher. “We rely on the spirit of God for guidance, as expressed through our covenant with one another.”

Where we are today

When asked about Congregationalism in today’s world, the answers were equally diverse yet fundamentally connected by the principle of freedom of faith: Since every Congregationalist possesses full liberty of conscience in interpreting the Gospel, we are a diverse group of people united under Christ. Or, as Rev. Hall put it: “We don’t have to agree with one another to be in relationship.”

Acknowledging that differences in thinking can be source of contention, Rev. Julie Johnson Staples identified a “crisis in our civic exchanges.” She encouraged the audience to set the standard for relating to others of different stripes. “We need to live up to the Congregational Way and be a model,” said Rev. Johnson Staples. “Let’s not talk about it. Let’s live it.”

Several panelists reminded the audience that the answers to today’s questions are in the Bible and inherent in the Congregational Way.

“Going deeply into our roots connects us,” said Rev. Johnson Staples. “We must understand our history and how it was informed. Start internally with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Rev. McAliley agreed: “People need to look at the basic issues of their faith . . . what do we basically agree on. Grace, salvation and faith.”

The divisiveness apparent in our current society provides an opportunity for Congregationalism to lead us in a better direction, according to Rev. Miller-Todd. “We lack community,” she said. “We need a place where we are loved for who we are and accepted for who we are.” Expanding the definition of church community, Rev. Miller-Todd suggested that “we need to realize that church is ‘outside’ its walls.”

Rev. Miller-Todd reminded the audience that Christ left the communion as his remembrance. “Ours is a tiny, little church,” she said. “We’ve had the opportunity to start a food co-op one night a week. We pick up the leftovers from Panera Bread, and offer it to the community.” The benefits of this outreach into the community are many, according to Rev. Miller-Todd, such as having conversations with people they never expected to reach. She urged churches to find out what the community needs, and said that her church’s food pantry shows the community that they do care.

Rev. Garry Fisher agreed. “We need to be more than a ‘store that makes signs,” he said. “We need to make bread.”

“Many, many churches become focused internally,” said Rev. Johnson-Staples. “There is no model for having an internal focus in the Bible.” She warned that an internal focus drives us further away from what we are called to do. “People get very attached to their privilege. We need to remember that we stand on the shoulders of other people, and should be a walking sermon.”

Referring to future church membership, Rev. Johnson Staples suggested that the traditional

membership structure many not work for the future. She noted that those seeking a church community in the future may not join formally, but that shouldn't stop congregations from welcoming them.

Rev. Miller-Todd added that her church doesn't pressure people to join formally. She suggested that churches return to the original Congregational structure of "followers."

Rev. Hall said that Congregational polity frees Congregational churches from denominational hierarchy and structure, allowing them to be extraordinarily responsive to their local community. He cautioned, however, that many Congregational churches have replaced hierarchy with tradition, and need to move past those traditions to respond to their communities.

Working the Workshops

For most churches, several real-life obstacles stand in the way of realizing their dreams.

The most common are an aging congregation, declining membership, internal conflict, and struggling financial health. The NACCC organized a program of workshops for this year's conference that offered strategies and tools for overcoming today's challenges.

Why you should consider becoming an ambassador to NACCC churches Presenter: Rev. Dr. Michael Chittum, Executive Director, NACCC

The NACCC is an important resource to member churches, helping them take advantage of opportunities and mitigate threats. To better deliver that support to NACCC churches, the association has established the Ambassador Program, which trains individuals to provide a personal link to each of the association's member churches. The Ambassador Program is recruiting a network of around 70 men and women to visit neighboring NACCC churches, with

greetings and assistance. On average, each ambassador will be responsible for contacting and visiting five churches.

During the workshop, the Rev. Michael Chittum, NACCC Executive Director, explained the goals of the program and encouraged audience members to volunteer. ▶



Rev. Michael and Vicki Chittum share a smile.

Greg Jurewicz was front and center during one of the popular hymn sings between sessions.



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Reimagining Church

Presenter: Rev Tim Garvin-Leighton, Piedmont College, Campus Minister

According to Rev. Garvin-Leighton, Congregational churches need to understand the current environment if they are to achieve their dreams for the future. He likened today's Millennials and the even younger Generation Z to the Athenians encountered by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:22-30 -- religious, but praying to an unknown god. Rev. Garvin-Leighton said that churches are responsible for providing younger generations with "the language and knowledge about the God of creation."

Millennials and Generation Z account for almost 50 percent of the U.S. population and, therefore, are key to the future vitality of Congregational churches. Rev. Garvin-Leighton warned that churches are accustomed to talking to people who were brought up in church. Today's younger generations, for the most part, have grown up outside the church, with little or no knowledge of the Bible. "To reach young people," said Rev. Garvin-Leighton, "we need to develop entirely new language and re-focus the church."

What Millennials Want

Presenter: Karen Gwynn Massey, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Faith Development, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, Atlanta, GA

During this year's conference, Millennials were, debatably, the "elephant in the room." Dr. Karen Massey suggested that any church concerned about its ability to survive in the future must consider its outreach to Millennials.

She acknowledged that, with as many as five generations sitting in the pews on any given Sunday, churches must deal with a great many opinions about what a church is and what it should do.

Dr. Massey combined primary research with responses gleaned from her own students to create a profile of the Millennial generation, focusing on young adults (born between 1981 and the early 2000s) -- single and married with young children. She painted a profile of the combined Millennial and Generation Z groups and what they tend to look for in a church.

For example, young adults want churches to be relational -- a place for intergenerational conversation and fellowship. They want to be valued for their own specific gifts and welcomed into the life of the church -- not treated as a separate group. This extends to their children, whom they prefer to keep in worship service with them. They expect the church to teach their children the traditions of the faith, and their children to feel God in the love and acceptance of the church members.

Contrary to popular perception, these tech-savvy young people yearn for a loving, authentic and inclusive experience -- not a high-tech presentation with lots of flash. The worst thing a church can do, according to Dr. Massey, is attempt to look "cool."

Especially important is the fact that ethnic and racial diversity is an integral part of Millennials' culture and context. They want and expect to see people of color, women, gays, and lesbians in leadership roles. Community-minded, they also appreciate interfaith activities,

as well as opportunities to provide community service.

Dr. Massey said that, ultimately, Millennials are looking for a church that supports their faith formation and offers them fellowship. Churches that look at Millennials as mere numbers to add to their membership rolls will turn them away.



Mary Brooks Prendergast, Pomona, CA, was named honorary princess.
Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

Small, Medium, or Large – Thriving congregations come in all sizes

Presenters: The Rev. Sarah Gladstone, First Congregational Church, Saugatuck, Michigan; the Rev. Les Wicker, First Congregational Church, Naples, Florida; the Rev. Bill Trump, First Congregational Church, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

The three-person panel discussed programs and activities they considered especially successful at their own churches.

Rev. Gladstone, representing a small church, pointed to her church's community involvement, specifically, simple acts of service that make the church known to its neighbors. For example, church teams participate in local charity races. This echoes the sentiment expressed in other workshops that Millennials and Generation Z are community-minded and appreciate opportunities to participate in community-targeted service projects.

Rev. Wicker, who serves a medium-size church, discussed the success he's had

in applying private-sector marketing techniques, such as direct mail programs. (See Rev. Wicker's article, "Marketing Your Church," in this issue.)

Rev. Trump, senior minister at a large church, pointed to the church's ASP (Appalachia Service Project) Mission Program. He noted that the ASP program creates intergenerational bonding as church members work together to raise funds, train the PF students for their mission, and act as chaperones and mentors during their trip.

"Helping people in need makes our youth realize how blessed they are in their own lives," said Rev. Trump.

The church has also developed a reputation for the quality of its music program. In addition to the music provided during worship, First Congregational Church presents three, public concerts each year that feature professional musicians from the area.

The consensus, it seems, is that almost all good ideas can be applied to a church of any size, if it can be adapted to fit the available financial and people resources.

Being a First Responder: How to identify and encourage gifts for ministry in the local church

A look at the Pastorates & Pulpits section this magazine is evidence that Congregational churches aren't having an easy time filling their pulpits. The workshop reminded the audience that Congregationalists have a unique opportunity to cultivate ministers from their own congregations.

Moderator for the discussion was the Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Director of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS), senior minister of Pine Hill Congregational Church, Bloomfield, Michigan, and adjunct professor at Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. The Rev. Dr. Barry Szymanski, the Rev. William Trump, CFTS Fellows Joel Boyd and Tesha Urban, and recent CFTS graduates the Rev. Paul Jackson and the Rev. Jacob Poindexter comprised the panel.

CFTS supports seminary students who are preparing for ministry in NACCC member churches. Rev. Packer encouraged the audience to promote the importance of CFTS to their local churches, regional and state associations. Rev. Szymanski and Rev. Trump, who were involved in Joel Boyd's and Tesha Urban's decision to go into ministry, agreed that ministers can encourage young people by providing them with leadership opportunities, such as preaching, leading Bible studies, and liturgy. They encouraged other ministers and church leaders to listen and be a sounding board, being available to all those who demonstrate a special ▶



Rev. Sarah Gladstone, Saugatuck, MI; Ian Macdonald and Greg Abbott, Sherman Oaks, CA smile for the camera. Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

Rev. Michael Fales encourages churches to serve their communities and beyond

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interest in Christian service, adding that not all are young. Many are pursuing the ministry as a second career. Attendees were urged, also, not to neglect lay ministry as a career opportunity.

"Awakening through vocation comes through community," said CFTS Fellow Tesha Urban. She noted that church leaders can start the conversation by asking the individual about his or her interests, while facilitating collegiality and communication. She added that, providing information about CFTS offers a formalized path to the ministry.

CFTS fellow Joel Boyd concurred that the local church fellowship is important, and that church leaders should be open to discussing ministry and providing encouragement. He added that churches should not ignore prospects who grew up outside the Congregational Way. Joel has found support in his involvement with the state association and ministers' association.

CFTS graduate, the Rev. Paul Jackson, associate minister at the University Congregational Church in Wichita, said

he "had to meet the Holy Spirit halfway," and that individuals with an interest in Christian service must "recognize stirrings for what they are." He thanked the Rev. Dr. Don Olsen, senior minister at Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita, Kansas, for his role as chief mentor. Jackson added that the support of CFTS and the NACCC made his journey to the ministry financially feasible.

"It was important for me to step outside my normal existence," said Jacob Poindexter, a recent CFTS graduate who is now senior minister at First Congregational Church in Anchorage, Alaska. A former member of Plymouth Congregational Church of Wichita, he, too, acknowledged Dr. Olsen for advising him on what to do and what to expect while preparing for the ministry. Rev. Poindexter said his discussions with lay leaders helped him to clarify what he wanted.

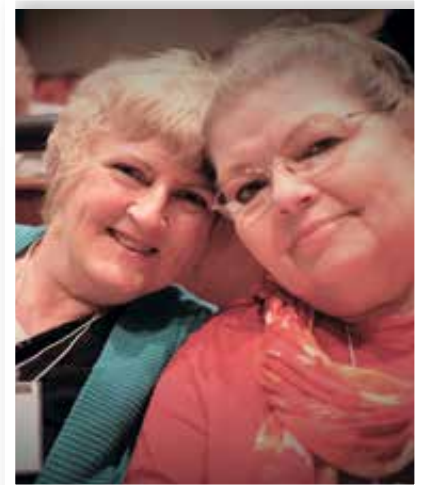
The need for encouragement doesn't end when the individual begins seminary, he explained, suggesting that churches need to "plant seeds along the way."

Communicating your faith

Writers received special encouragement at the conference. "Preaching with Imagination: preaching that keeps the preacher's soul alive," was presented by the Rev. Brett Younger, senior minister at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York. He coached an audience of ministers on the preparation and delivery of "fresh and lively" sermons. "Write it Right and Write It Now," a workshop hosted by Pastor Carol Taylor and Terry Bobzien as a project of the Growth Ministry Council, offered tips and subject ideas designed to motivate prospective ministers and laypeople to write a devotion for Advent and Lenten devotional booklets produced by the NACCC. To submit a devotional, email your Advent piece to naccadvent17devo@gmail.com or your Lenten piece to nacclent18devo@gmail.com.



(l-r) Charles Packer, Jacob Poindexter, Paul Jackson, Joel Boyd, Barry Szymanski, Bill Trump and Tesha Urban



Vulcan mind meld? Pastor Carol Taylor and Rev. Dawn Carlson
Photo by Barry W. Szymanski

ACTING. (CONTINUED)

Reaching out

“Faith that doesn’t lead us to good works is dead,” said the Rev. Michael Fales, presenter of the workshop, “How your congregation can better serve, and make a difference in its community.” Rev. Fales is Director of Service Learning and Campus Ministries, Olivet College, Olivet, Michigan. His reference was to James 2:14-17, citing James as the most socially conscious writer in the New Testament.

Rev. Fales encouraged the audience to see the needs of others as we see our own, suggesting that every church should have an international, a national and a local mission. Some churches worry that their congregation can’t afford to support an international mission. Rev. Fales said that the strength of the U.S. dollar overseas allows even small congregations to make a big impact with a limited amount of money. He offered, as an example, that the Kenyan shilling is worth seven cents against the U.S. dollar.

Rev. Fales also discussed the many ways a robust social service ministry not only reflects the gospel values, but also helps strengthen and revitalize a church.

The workshop was sponsored by the Washington Gladden Society, which presents a social gospel themed workshop every year. The society honors the memory of the Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden, by applying the insights of the Social Gospel Movement to the important, controversial ethical and theological issues of our own times, and serving as a forum among Christians and local churches in the Congregationalist tradition.

How to sponsor a mission

A panel discussion acquainted the

audience with the NACCC’s national and international mission partners. Churches were encouraged to sponsor a mission by participating in One Great Hour of Sharing, making special donations, and creating their own support activities. For more information contact Linda Miller at the NACCC Office, 800-262-1620, ext. 1618 or lmiller@naccc.org.

Transforming conflict in your church

Presenter: David R. Brubaker, Director of the MBA and OLS Programs and Associate Professor of Organizational Studies, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Churches are in a time of change, and change often results in conflict. According to presenter David Brubaker, our environment is the major source of conflict inside our churches. During the workshop, he advocated a systems approach to change and conflict that recognizes the interconnectedness of the social and emotional aspects of the congregation, and their impact on church structure, leadership, and culture. Outside forces often threaten to upset that balance. According to Brubaker, “congregations that fail to adapt to a changing environment will be selected out.” Structural clarity is important, because it offers a formal process for responding to change.



David Brubaker with Vice-Moderator Jim Waechter

The role of church leadership is crucial to resolving church conflict. “Leaders best serve their congregations if they move toward conflict instead of backing away,” said Brubaker. This requires leaders to avoid becoming partisan and reactive.



Marty Hall, Fox Point, WI; Sharon Jenks, New Braunfels, TX; Tim Chappell, Clarkston, MI

Brubaker said leaders must understand the culture of the organization by listening to what members have to say; and not becoming anxious when conflict arises.

Brubaker emphasized that, to adapt, churches do not need to change their values and beliefs – only their practices. He suggested churches consider how they can use the prevailing culture to support adaptive change. ▶



Moderator Laura Hamby ran a smooth meeting.
Photo by David Price. © Piedmont College, 2017.

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Security in a changed environment

Tragedies such as the fatal shootings at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, have created a new anxiety among churches regarding their own safety and security. The NACCC Growth Ministry Council facilitated a workshop in which it made a case for having a security plan. The workshop also identified the components that should be included in the plan.

"The Church and Law Enforcement," was presented by Mary Brooks Prendergast, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, California; and Rev. Dr. Patrick Hunt, pastor, Heritage Congregational Church, Berea, Ohio.

Mary Prendergast discussed ways that churches can actively improve the relationship between law enforcement and the community. She said there are "many ways that churches, and individual church members can assist in supporting their local law enforcement." She offered Pomona, California, a diverse city of about 150,000 people, as an example. The Pomona police chief has started a clergy group that meets with him to get out the word when there is a need to discuss what is happening within the community. Churches can offer to bring together different faith groups with law enforcement for discussion. "Coffee with a Cop" is another great way to bring the community together with law enforcement. The church hosts the event,

provides the coffee, or partners with a local coffee shop or restaurant. These get-togethers can have a huge impact on law enforcement-community understanding, with the added benefit of helping the church reach out to and maintain a relationship with its neighbors.

Dr. Hunt was asked by the mayor of Berea to join the city in formulating a unit of the police department called the Community Engagement Unit (CEU). He noted that the effort has four goals: 1) Help the police understand the community that they serve. 2) Help the community understand police work. 3) Engage police and the community in joint activities. 4) Help provide for physical and mental officer wellness.

"From these objectives, the CEU has had officers engaged, in particular, with African-American and Latino youth -- both in the school and in the community -- with discussion units and partnering with organizations serving that population," said Dr. Hunt. "We have engaged the church community in asking churches to provide opportunities for officers to come in and have dialogue with members, as well as having listening sessions in which the police department has the leaders discuss and evaluate police operations, both past and present."

Dr. Hunt added that the CEU has developed a Chaplains program that serves both the department and the community. Other CEU programs include a drug response program called "Safe Passages."

Congregationists In Action

*"If you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise
in the darkness and
your gloom be like the noonday."
Isaiah 58:10*

This year's event in Demorest included an all-conference mission project. The AMC and the NAPF/HOPE conference coordinated with Rise Against Hunger, an organization committed to ending world hunger, to package nutritional meal packets.

The NACCC Missions and Outreach Ministry Council kicked off the donations, and the 2017 host committee donated the offering from the Sunday morning worship service at the Piedmont College Chapel to pay for the food and materials provided by Rise Against Hunger.

On Sunday afternoon, an intergenerational group formed two, highly efficient assembly lines and, against an energizing background of rock and pop music, packaged 20,520 meals! There were high fives all around.



Rev. Jacob Poindexter and son partnered to pack meals for overseas.
Photo by David Price. © Piedmont College, 2017

ACTING. (CONTINUED)



Barbara and Rev. Don Mullen display her BOD Citation

Moving Forward

CFTS Director, the Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, was pleased to introduce two new CFTS graduates.

The Rev. Paul Ellis Jackson is a graduate of Phillips Theological Seminary in Oklahoma. He is now serving as associate pastor at University Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas. He was awarded the John W. Claxon Award.

The Rev. Jacob Poindexter is a graduate of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He recently became senior minister at First Congregational Church in Anchorage, Alaska. He was awarded the Alfred D. Grey Award.

Honoring Exemplars

NACCC takes advantage of the Annual Meeting and Conference to honor individuals who have distinguished themselves through their service.

The Charles Rush Award was presented by the Mission Outreach Council to the Rev. Charles Oma Sagay, director and founder of Mission School of Hope, Cameroon, Africa. The award is given to a minority individual who works toward social and personal goals in the spirit of educator and minister Charles Rush.



Rev. Charles Sagay

Harry R. Butman Award was given by the Vitality Ministry Council to the Rev. Dr. Dewey E. Gierke, pastor of First Congregational Church, Cape Coral, Florida. This award acknowledges a minister with at least 10 years of

service in an NACCC Church who demonstrates a personal commitment to Congregationalism.

The Jeanette R. Butman Award, also a Vitality Ministry Council honor, was presented to Cynthia Gray, wife of the Rev. Doug Gray, pastor at First Church Squantum Congregational in Squantum, Massachusetts. The award is given to the spouse of an ordained Congregational minister who has served NACCC churches for at least a decade and has been of help and support to his or her spouse.

This year's J.J. Russell Sermon Award went to Carol Taylor, Licensed Lay Minister and pastor of United Church of Beloit in Beloit, Wisconsin. This preaching award is given every other year for the best sermon submitted by an active pastor of an NACCC member church with fewer than 400 members. The sermon must address some aspect of the relationship of classical Congregationalism to contemporary American life.

Barbara Mullen was recipient of the 2017 Board of Directors Citation for her remarkable service as church volunteer, NACCC leader, friend, wife of retired Congregational minister, Rev. Don Mullen, mother, and grandmother. Over the years, Barbara Mullen has served on the NACCC Executive Committee, the Division for Ministry, and twice on the Nominating Committee. She was instrumental as a member of the teams involved in the restructuring and transition of the association.

Leading into the Future

A highlight of the business meeting was the installation of the NACCC leadership team:

Moderator – Laura Hamby,
Congregational Church of Soquel, California
Vice Moderator – Jim Waechter,
Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York
Secretary – Judy Campbell, North
Congregational Church, Farmington Hills, MI
Treasurer – Jeffrey H. Dillon,
Faith Community Church, Franklin, WI
Historian – Rev. William C. Lange, member,
First Congregational Church of Detroit, MI
Youth Representative, Leadership Council –
Patrick Stewart, LaMoille Congregational
Community Church, Marshalltown, IA

Ministry Council Representatives Serving on the Leadership Board

Growth Ministry – Mary Brooks, Pilgrim
Congregational Church, Pomona, CA; Pastor
Carol Taylor, United Church of Beloit, Beloit, WI
Mission and Outreach Ministry Council –
Joelle Sommers, Heritage Congregational
Church, Madison, WI; Janet Wilson, Grace
Congregational Church, Greenville, IA
Vitality Ministry Council –
Rev. Dr. Irvan A. Gammon,
Florence Congregational Church,
Florence, MA
Member at Large, Leadership Council –
Pastor Kay Miller-Todd,
Berwick Congregational Church, Berwick, IA

Board of Directors

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall, Sr. Minister, North Shore
Congregational Church, Fox Point, WI
Congregational Foundation Representative --
Rev. Ashley Cleere, Methodist Congregational
Federated Church, Demorest, GA
Continuing Board members-- Rev. Julie Johnson
Staples, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY
Miriam Bryan, First Congregational Church,
Marshalltown, IA
Rev. Dr. Donald Olsen, Plymouth
Congregational Church, Wichita, KS

Growth Ministry Council

Rev. Dr. John Tamilio, III, Congregational
Church of Canton, Beverly, MA
Mary Brooks, Pilgrim Congregational Church,
Pomona, CA
Continuing members -- Rev. Patrick F. Hunt,
Heritage Congregational Church, Berea, OH
Pastor Carol P. Taylor, Second Congregational
Church of Beloit, Beloit, WI
Curt Schmidt, Congregational Church of
Bound Brook, Bound Brook, NJ

Ministry and Outreach Ministry Council

Rev. Jamie Bonnema, Maple Hill Community
Congregational Church, Maple Hill, KS (3yr)
Dr. Barbara Dabul, Congregational Church of
Sun City, Sun City, AZ
Continuing members -- Rev. Peter Smith,
First Congregational Church, Hanson, MA
Joelle Sommers, Heritage Congregational
Church, Madison, WI
Janet Wilson, Grace Congregational Church,
Greenville, IA.

Vitality Ministry Council

Rev. Sarah Gladstone, First Congregational
Church of Saugatuck, Saugatuck, MI
Justin Nierer, Sandstone Congregational
Church, Jackson, MI

Continuing members:

Rev. Dr. Irvan A. Gammon, Florence
Congregational Church, Florence, MA
Rev. Doug Gray, First Church of
Squantum, Quincy, MA

Photo by Barry W. Szumanski





Always Somebody's Peter

Reflections on the 2017 Bible Lecture

By Rev. Dr. John Tamilio, III, with Marianne King

Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia was the site of the 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Association of Congregational Churches. It was, until recently, also the academic home of the Rev. Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor. A New York Times best-selling author, Dr. Brown Taylor was Butman Professor of Religious Studies (named after the NACCC's Harry Butman) at Piedmont College between 1998 and 2017. Her first memoir, *Leaving Church*, won a 2006 Author of the Year award from the Georgia Writers' Association. Her latest book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, was featured on the cover of TIME magazine. She has been a guest speaker at Emory, Duke, Princeton, and Yale universities, as well as a guest on SuperSoul Sunday with Oprah Winfrey.

Dr. Taylor chose the Apostle Simon Peter as the subject for her three-part lecture. The inspiration for her choice, according to Dr. Taylor, resulted from her writing the conference theme — *Dreaming, Talking, and Acting* — on a scrap of paper and tucking it in between the pages of her Bible one evening before she put pen to paper.

Peter taught thousands who Jesus was, said Dr. Taylor. He is referred to over 200 times in the New Testament, more than anyone else other than Jesus. He is the only disciple Jesus refers to by name in all four Gospels. Yet, Peter is known by what others say about him. Unlike Paul, who is revealed through his own letters, there is no single, consistent narrative to tell the world who Peter is. He is, according to Dr. Taylor, "always somebody's Peter."

The perspectives of the four gospel

writers, Dr. Taylor noted, are embedded in their portrayal of Peter. In Matthew, Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build his church: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Peter is considered the source for Mark's gospel and is, therefore, the living witness to the life of Christ — as Dr. Taylor puts it, "a living bridge between the time before Jesus' death and after." Dr. Taylor characterizes the Peter depicted in Luke as the "trailblazing convert who baptized the first Gentiles." Then there is the Gospel of John, in which Peter is seen, conversely, as rival or second to the "beloved disciple," as well as the disciple that Jesus instructs to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

Following Jesus, Peter is the most prominent figure of the New Testament. Even so, as Dr. Taylor points out, it is impossible to separate Peter from the person writing about him. She suggests that to understand Peter one must develop critical as well as devotional skills.

"We wouldn't have been given four gospels if the Apostolic Fathers thought we couldn't handle it," said Dr. Taylor.

Dr. Taylor offered that, without any writings from Peter, he has been written into later Christian history. She said that, in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter becomes defender of the apostolic faith, a miracle worker, healer, and, in confronting Simon Magus, he becomes the hero.

The challenge, according to Dr. Taylor, is whether we can deal with divergent witnesses.

"If we can embrace these differences, we may be better equipped to deal with contention between Christians today," said Dr. Taylor. She added that God is "interested in the business of making Christians one — not alike." Put another way, God is less interested in our having the right view than he is in our having the right relationships.

Dr. Taylor suggested that we are the "somebodies" attached to the figure of Peter, projecting on Peter what we need him to be. In the same way, we try to create God in our own image. Dr. Taylor asked that we free God, Jesus, and Peter from serving our own needs.

"Our redemption depends on upending our dreams," she said.

The relatable disciple

Dr. Taylor calls Peter "the apostle of the second chance," noting that "Peter believed he was more of a hero than he turned out to be." Peter wanted to be as close to Jesus as possible, and yet, Peter frequently falls short. When Jesus walks on the water, Peter attempts to follow and immediately sinks when his faith wavers (Matt. 14:28-29). Peter rebukes Jesus when he speaks of his own death, and Jesus reprimands him for this (Matt. 16:22). Jesus rebukes Peter for drawing his sword and cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). Worst of all, Peter boasts that he would never deny Jesus, which he does three times in the courtyard following Jesus' arrest (Matt. 26:33).

Despite his weaknesses, Jesus never gives up on Peter, and Dr. Taylor maintains that it is this truth that makes us identify with him. If Jesus can stick

with Peter, there is certainly hope for the rest of us.

Dr. Taylor refers to Peter as an “example of how to be fruitfully humiliated.” After denying Christ in the courtyard, “Peter went out and wept.” Dr. Taylor wondered if these were “tears of remorse, or repentance.” She preferred the latter, noting that “every time Peter acts he learns something he couldn’t have learned any other way.” By the Book of Acts, Peter has gone through a major transformation. He is the living link between Jesus as a living person and the Jesus that people have only heard about.

Peter may be impetuous, but he is doing something. Dr. Taylor noted that at the Last Supper Jesus instructed his disciples’ to “do this in remembrance of me.” Christ gave them a remembrance that required a physical action on their part. Dr. Taylor said we are called to action: “If you never make a mistake you don’t take enough risks.”


Dr. Taylor maintains that Peter’s witness has been kept alive because people have taken them into their own time. She doesn’t object to this. “If ancient witnesses saw Peter through their own lenses, then aren’t we allowed to do the same thing?” She presents an argument for “theological humility,” adding that “sometimes we need to talk our way to the truth.”

In fact, Dr. Taylor maintained that both thinking and action are necessary if, like Peter, we are to be changed. “A sacred text is not much good unless it is read,” she said. She appealed to her audience to read and think about the Bible, quoting the Rev. William Barber: “How do you take two or three scriptures and make a theology out of it?”

The New Testament offers us divergent and diverse views of the Apostle Peter, and that can be disconcerting. But, Dr. Taylor suggests that we seek “emotional, not empirical, truth” from Scripture.



Simon Peter was the topic for Barbara Brown Taylor's Bible Lecture. Photo by David Price.



LIFE: Stepping Past Fear and False Peace

A Sermon on Matthew 10:24-39
Rev. Emily Miller-Todd

The following is excerpted from the sermon delivered by Rev. Emily Miller-Todd at the Sunday worship service, Piedmont College Chapel, on June 25, 2017.

When I was looking at the lectionary texts for this Sunday and decided to focus on the text from Matthew, I ended up reading the passage to my family during a moment of brainstorming. I got to the part where Jesus says he did not come to bring peace, but a sword--to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother--you could hear crickets on the other end of the phone. The silence was deafening. I thought, Jesus, preaching on this passage just might be that sword.

The passage from Matthew is a lot to take in. Aspects of it even sound cruel. But I believe that there is fruit and good news when we wrestle with it in the context of the life Jesus led.

Jesus, here in the middle of Matthew's gospel, is sending the 12 disciples out to minister and spread the good news to the house of Israel. He instructs them to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. He tells them they are going out as sheep among wolves. Sometimes they will be welcomed and they will enjoy peace-filled hospitality. Other times, Jesus warns them, they will need to recognize when to walk away; they will need to trust God to speak through them in the face of persecution, and they will need to flee some hostile situations entirely.

This leads up to our gospel reading this morning. Jesus warns the disciples that if they follow him, they can expect to receive the kind of slander that Jesus

has received. It is a heavy message, and Jesus tells them not to be afraid. He tells them not to let their voices be silenced by people who have no power over the soul. *He tells them not to let fear stop them from dreaming, speaking, acting!* God, who loves all of creation down to the sparrows, and God who has the hairs on their heads numbered, is the one who holds their soul. Jesus says, in light of this deep, pervading love, acknowledge me. Boldly be my hands and feet of love. Don't let your fear make you ashamed to carry my name and my love.

Jesus continues. He adds, *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."* Jesus is startling here—he tells them that he has come to turn family members against each other; he asks his followers to love him more than their family, and he instructs his followers to take up their cross and follow him. Today's reading ends with Jesus saying: *"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."*

The final couple of verses are familiar to our ears, but I am not sure we often let ourselves hear Jesus say that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword. That he came to turn family members against each other. Where is the good news here?! What happened to the commandment to honor our father and mother? What happened to the beatitude earlier in the gospel where Jesus blesses the peacemakers, saying they will be children of God?

It may help to read this passage in the context of the life Jesus lived. Jesus, speaking here, is still the same one who blessed the peacemakers, the same one

who will cross the boundary of religious law to heal and show love on the Sabbath, the same one who lifts up those who have been labeled as sinners and the outcasts. He welcomes the children, seeks the lost sheep, and broadens our understanding of family. When Jesus says he has not come to bring peace but a sword, he is the same man that will later scold the disciple who draws a sword at his arrest—not understanding that violence is not part of the mission of Jesus.

Jesus is a peacemaker. He works for a deep, radical peace that carries love across the secured boundaries of the religious tradition. Ironically, it is the radical love that Jesus brings that produces the sword of broken relationships. Jesus is not the one who seeks broken relationships—it is those who are too afraid to let go of their power, their security, their familiar structures. The religious leaders in power are blinded by their security and what they have always known, and they do not see the love of God in the flesh before them. They initiate the rejection and slander of Jesus out of their fear of change.

~~~~~  
*Jesus tells the disciples  
and us that life is  
found in service to  
God's love—a love  
that enables us to  
step beyond fear and  
beyond false peace  
sometimes as well.*  
~~~~~

Jesus, the love of God become flesh, did not serve fear or the false peace of the familiar way things had always been. Jesus was not afraid to shake up the status quo to serve and love a neighbor in need.



Rev. Emily Miller-Todd



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Pastoral Conversations **LISTEN!**

By Rev. Dr. Michael W. Glidden

The Rev. Michael Glidden, D.Min has been the senior pastor of the Sebago Lake Congregational Church in Standish, Maine since 2012. He has been pastoring since 1993. Rev. Glidden earned his Master of Divinity Degree in 1995 from Bangor Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2002. He was ordained in 2000. Mike lives in Saco, Maine, with his wife Rhonda .

It dawned on me one day that I've been out of high school for 31 years. I decided to take an old look at my yearbook of the class of 1986 at Calais High School and to see how much I've changed. Thumbing through the old photos and sayings, I noticed one quote from a teacher that seemed to just echo in my heart and soul. I hadn't read her quote for many long years. In fact, it really wasn't a quote technically but one lonely yet powerful word. She wrote the word "listen!" right where she knew that I would see it in my yearbook. I wonder if she had the gift of foresight! I guess I wasn't a great listener in school but her word of advice would echo in me through my 24 years of pastoral ministry. Listening for me became a subtle but developing art a few years ago when I took clinical pastoral education. Just a side note:, I advise anyone who is in ministry to take CPE! The 400 hours of clinical and didactic teaching is worth every minute. CPE teaches one the value of deep listening. I was blessed in my two years of CPE!

It was an encounter with a patient that instilled within my heart and soul the value of listening in all of our pastoral

conversations. When we deeply listen to another soul, we help that person find meaning in their life.

I was doing my rounds when I got to visit one particular man. He was an older gentleman roughly in his late 70's. He was talking to me about his hospital stay, which had been for several days. He spoke to me about his family and life, but kept coming back to the imagery of helicopters. Outside the hospital and just beyond his room was a landing pad with helicopters that were coming and going all through the night. He would insert a reference to the helicopter throughout our visit. I had my ears "on" and heard the word "listen." My old teacher spoke to me. I knew that I needed to probe a bit deeper. He continued by telling me of his experience as a soldier during the Vietnam War and seeing the "copters" coming to rescue the "boys" and whisking them off to safety. The helicopter was a visible sign of safety. I asked him if he desired for the helicopters to take him away. He sat and looked at me in a moment of silence. By the look on his face, I knew that I had come close to home. It was then, with a big smile, that he opened up and shared with me some of the most intimate details of his life and that he was ready to go home to see his maker. In this moment, I felt the presence of God in a powerful way. The two of us could make a connection between the helicopters and the angels of heaven transporting a soul to a new home. He was longing for his ultimate destination... heaven. He was getting the closure that he needed and rediscovered the meanings in his life. I sat and bore witness to his story. At the end of the

visit, I held up his story and offered it to God.

Pastoral ministry includes the art of listening in all of our pastoral conversations. This isn't just an art form for clergy but laity as well. We are called to deeply listen to each other. To deeply listen to another soul is an act of intimacy and an extending of grace to that person. Listening means to make one's self-available and to set aside assumptions in a pastoral visit. Listening means being fully engaged with the other. It means listening with full intent and asking the proper reflective questions.

Some people haven't looked at their yearbooks in many years. I say to dust off the covers and take a peek. There may be a quote or solitary word waiting for you to see.

.....
*Maybe God
will say something.
Maybe He is saying
"LISTEN."*
.....



The Problem with Congreg

A BIOGRAPHER'S COMPLAINT

Lloyd C. Douglas

Lloyd C. Douglas was a bestselling novelist during the 1930s and 40s, but before he became famous he was a Congregationalist minister. For more than a decade, I've been studying his private papers at the University of Michigan in preparation for a book about him. Douglas's ideas took shape over a number of years, and he tried them out on each of his congregations, making adjustments as he went along. Those congregations served as sounding boards for him. The people in the pews helped him formulate his thinking just by the way they reacted to his sermons.

Naturally, my research led me to study the histories of each of those churches, but especially that of the First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor, where the most obvious changes in his thinking took place. I wanted to reconstruct the faces that looked back at Douglas when he presented his message from the pulpit. I wanted to know who these people were, the principles they most deeply cherished, and how they lived out those principles.

Ann Arbor's First Congregational Church published not one but two histories, in 1947 and in 1976; and, although they were written with great care, they were just like every other congregational history I've ever read. Primarily, they recited the story of how the building was erected, paid for, and remodeled over time. Secondarily, they provided a thumbnail sketch of

the ministry of each of the pastors. And finally, they detailed the various committees and named some of the individuals who served on them. The story of the people themselves was absent from both records.

I ended up finding what I needed in other ways, but this is just one instance of a problem that's worth thinking about, especially for those who are committed to "the Congregational Way." The truth is, congregational histories are not written in a way that is even remotely "congregational."

The Problem

On the surface, it would seem like the problem is historiographical: when centennial committees (for example) begin selecting topics to write about, they're limited by the source materials available to them; and what tends to be available is information about the building, the pastors, and the committees. But there's a deeper reason why this happens, and it's a philosophical one: when it comes to saving information for posterity, even Congregationalists do not think in the Congregational Way.

I suppose there's a practical reason for this: most of us don't consider ourselves historical characters; and, therefore, we aren't systematic about telling future generations who we are. So, when those later generations are called upon to write our history, they gather up whatever fragments we've left of ourselves, and that happens to be meeting minutes. But the deeper philosophical problem is in play even here, because if we did have the proper appreciation of ourselves as congregations, then we would think of ourselves as historical characters—at

least in the aggregate, if not individually.

Take the First Church of Ann Arbor, for example. What would it have looked like if the members of that congregation had thought of themselves as a congregation during the years Lloyd Douglas was pastor there (1915-1921)? There are many possible answers to this question, but here's one scenario: they would have saved information about the members themselves, their activities, their beliefs, and their hopes.

For example...

Shirley Smith was chairman of the Board of Trustees when Douglas became pastor. There were still some men with the name of "Shirley" in those days, but not many, and Smith was somewhat sensitive about it; but he didn't let that stop him. Around the University of Michigan, "Shirley W. Smith" was an important name. He was Secretary to the President, and a wide variety of problems came across his desk. Having come to the university from the world of business, he brought great administrative skill to his roles at both the school and the church. Like Douglas, he also had a brush with fame later on: the film, *It Happens Every Spring*, was based on one of his story ideas.

Theophil (Ted) Hildebrandt was the organist when Douglas arrived, but he also taught mathematics at the university. He had been a child prodigy, attending the University of Illinois while others his age were still in high school. In a moment of honesty, however, he admitted to his sister that he didn't think of his work in mathematics as his vocation, although he was good at it. His heart was more in his work

Ronald R. Johnson is author of *What Does God Do from 9 to 5?* He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Saint Louis University and teaches extension courses for Spring Arbor University in Michigan. He is writing a biography of Lloyd C. Douglas.



ational Histories:

as an organist, even though he knew there were better musicians around. He always felt a little uncomfortable about that—doubting whether he was good enough. But when the Great War started and everybody in the congregation got on the bandwagon about “beating the Hun,” Ted felt even more out of sync, for he was a young German-American; and he worried that the members of his congregation were acting very much like the enemy they so hated. He ended up leaving to become the organist and choir director at a German-speaking church: what is now the Bethlehem United Church of Christ in Ann Arbor.

Although many members of the congregation were affiliated with the university as faculty, administrators, or students, there were others who had important positions of influence within the town itself. Frank Allmendinger was a leader in the congregation and was prominent in both the business community and political circles. Hal Seeley was the owner of a company that produced windshields for automobiles. And so on.

Everything I’ve told you is true, but it’s still not enough for us to compile a truly congregational history. It’s dominated by males, for one thing. But it’s also skewed in favor of individuals whose accomplishments were heralded in newspapers or in alumni newsletters, which is precisely why I’m able to tell you about them. A truly congregational history would tell about the congregation’s unsung heroes—saints who gave tirelessly of themselves to the life of the church without worrying about recognition. The point isn’t to reward them posthumously, for their true reward

is not ours to give. Rather, the point is for us to gain a greater appreciation of what it means to be “congregational.”

Wish List

Someday I’d like to see someone write a congregational history that focuses on the people in the pews. Yes, it would talk about the pastors and the work of the various committees, but it would tie them into a larger story: that of the congregation itself and of the symbiotic relationship between clergy and laity. In order for such a book to be written in the future, we would have to furnish the materials now. Imagine starting a small group at your church called “The Story Collectors.” Some of its members would be good at interviewing, while others might excel in making videos, or in writing. Together, they would collect the stories of the people in the congregation, with emphasis on the ways in which their lives are interrelated.

Here are some fictitious examples. Tara and Tim Knight met at a college in Pennsylvania, but after they were married they moved here to Nebraska (let’s say) and started a discussion group just like the one they had back in Philadelphia. That group attracted, among other people, Sandra Ross, who had been a member of the church for a number of years, but had never formed a vital connection. Within this discussion group, Sandra found a way to express herself, and as others got to know her, they realized they had many things in common with her. Several lifelong friendships developed.

Or perhaps the congregation recently sponsored a refugee family from Afghanistan, and the Story Collectors

gather material about how the project impacted the lives of the church’s members. The Davises and the Stahls have warm memories of tutoring the family in English. The Catrons and Brunners tell about the ups and downs of helping them find employment. Lots of lessons were learned, both by the family and by their church family. A truly congregational history would bring to life all the people involved.

The Dangers of Such a Project

There would be pitfalls, of course, in such a venture. For one thing, a history of this kind would be incredibly diffuse. It would lead in so many directions at once, the writers would be unsure how to organize their material, and readers could easily become confused. And there’s a thin line between a people-oriented history and a chronicle of church gossip. Even if a clear demarcation can be found, how can we write such a history while preserving the privacy of the subjects involved?

These are all valid worries, and they would have to be taken seriously by both the Story Collectors and the people whose stories they’re collecting. But almost any worthwhile venture has inherent dangers. Any good deed can easily become excessive or wrongheaded. We would have to go into it with our eyes wide open, recognizing the risks and taking steps to minimize them.

When is your church’s next big milestone? When that time comes, wouldn’t it be great if someone wrote a truly congregational history to mark the occasion? Why not make it easier for them? Why not find ways to start collecting those stories now?

MARKETING *Your Church*

By Dr. Les Wicker



The folks on Madison Avenue do not have the inside track on marketing, but we can learn a great deal from them, and in fact, grow our churches by applying those same techniques --approaches that make us want whatever product they are peddling. Marketing is not a new term for the church, although we are reluctant to think of growing the church in terms of "marketing."

But we all market our church at some level, whether just speaking well of it, or having an intentional plan to grow church membership through a diversified approach, including the use of media in whatever form.

I firmly believe every church can grow its membership, whether rural or urban, large, or small, traditional or contemporary. It is only a matter of applying certain principles which are time-proven.

Question: Why do you buy a certain product and possibly pay more for it than another product of equal value, and perhaps at less cost? Why do the New York Yankees have such a following

of fans? Why is there a waiting list to obtain a seat in Lambeau Field to watch the Green Bay Packers? It is all the same basic reason. Marketing plants a thought in our heads that one product is superior to another, and people like to follow winning teams. Both the teams we root for and the products we buy are reflections of who we see ourselves to be. It's a lot about our self-image in purchasing a product or rooting for a team that makes us feel good about ourselves.

While we may not want to admit it, the same principle is true of why people are attracted to one church over another. Our church is an extension of who we see ourselves to be; and while we want to believe there are more virtuous reasons for choosing a particular church, our self-image and what we have been led to believe about a particular church, do come into play, far more than we might wish to admit.

So why market your church? First, you are marketing the church to its own membership. Whatever form of marketing a church chooses to promote

its programs, it will discover the very first group to receive the message is the congregation. Marketing is a stimulus that energizes people and gets them excited about themselves and their own church. When the energy starts flowing, good things begin to happen. Members get on board and begin to promote their church. When the energy flow starts streaming, people feel it. Just like the products we buy or the winning teams we like to identify with, church folk will get excited about their church. Truth is: If the members of a church are not excited, who will be?

Second, marketing draws attention. Period. Exclamation point! We never think about the media that is flowing into our living rooms or dens, or that is on the air waves every day. We are not even conscious we are being influenced by the marketing gurus, but the subliminal message is being planted. When we go to a store, consider buying a car, or pull for a team, we are already programmed to go in a certain direction, and we don't even know it. The same principle works in growing a church. People do not come to you. You must go to them. You must develop a plan and stick to it. It's a guarantee: a pro-active church that "markets its wares" will always grow.

Over the years I have taken many approaches to marketing: radio spots, billboards, newspaper ads, televising the services, impact cards, newsletters, electronic newsletters, attendance campaigns, free "stuff," visitations, press releases (free), Constant Contact, email blasts, free food, a "Thought for the Day," and every possible approach

I could think of to get the church's name out in front of the people. What I have found is what I have shared with you. It works at whatever level. It gets people excited and it grows the church. Such a simple thing as mailing out unused bulletins to members who may not have shown up on Sunday is worth far more than the effort.

Newsletters should always be exciting positive, and upbeat.... a lot less copy and a lot more pictures of people involved in ministry. People love to get newsletters from their church, but more than just "getting a newsletter," they love to hear the exciting things that are happening. After all, since it is "their" church, it is "them," who they are. The homebound especially read newsletters "word for word." Constant Contact and email blasts are inexpensive ways to get messages out. Grow those lists! Just go to ConstantContact.com and you will be on the way to staying in touch on a weekly basis at a nominal cost.

Impact cards are a way of reaching thousands of people with a personal message about your church on a colorful 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" post card. There are companies that create and mail these to any zip code you choose.

Finally, remember: "Beginning is half the job." By the time you take it through every committee and board of the church, it might take six months or longer and people lose their enthusiasm.

Also remember:
"Every person is a prospect." Just do it! Make it happen and you'll be glad.



Dr. Les Wicker is a graduate of the Divinity School of Duke University and holds a PhD from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has conducted numerous seminars on church growth. UCC churches he served in North Carolina and Florida each grew from memberships of 500 to over 800. His latest pastorate has been First Congregational Church of Naples, a new church plant in 2004 that now has over 200 members.

We Are PILGRIMS ON A JOURNEY

By Lawrence H. Balleine

We are Pilgrims on a journey
Trav'ling not to shores unknown.
Going to a land of promise
That we call our heavenly home.

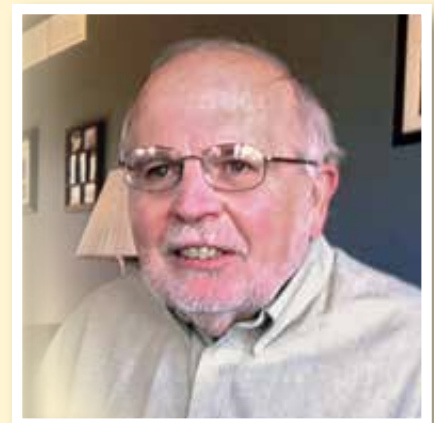
God creator, You have blessed us
Like our ancestors of old
Gifts abundant, grace unfailing
As we travel down the road.

Faith and freedom, friends and fam'ly
And for all our daily food
We bring now our praises to You
And express our gratitude.

May our lives present a witness
Bringing hope and meeting needs
As we care and share with others
From the blessings we've received

So we join the great procession
Of the faithful of the Lord
Off'ring You our glad thanksgiving
Evermore and evermore.

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



Necrology 2017



Steven S. Hoth (1941 – 2017)

Steven Sergey Hoth, 76, of Burlington, Iowa, passed away May 17, 2017, at Great River Medical Center.

Steve was a graduate of Grinnell College and University of Iowa Law School. He taught in Africa for a year prior to the start of his law career. In addition to his private practice, Steve clerked for the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, served as Des Moines County Attorney, and was a member of the American Bar Association for 50 years. Steve found time to serve as president of the Burlington School Board, and was involved in the Crystal Lake Club, Burlington Rotary Club, and Numismatic Association. He started the Burlington Junction Railroad and continued to manage the family farms.

Steve was a member of First Congregational Church in Burlington for over 50 years. He was very active in the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC), and was moderator from 1992-1993. He also served on the Missionary Society, Program Committee, Executive Committee, Division for Ministry, and the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies.

Survivors include his wife, Dr. JoEllen Hoth of Burlington; two sons, Andrew (Katherine) Hoth of Burlington and Peter (Karin) Hoth of Iowa City; six grandchildren, and one sister, Sandra Hoth of Port Wing, Wisconsin. He was preceded in death by his parents.

A memorial in Steve's name has been established for First Congregational Church, Burlington, Iowa.

64th

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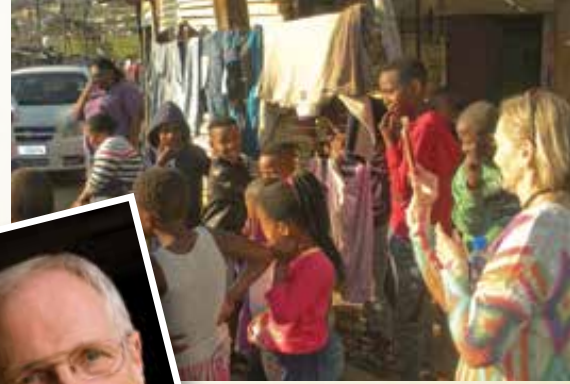
UNLEASHED!

...and you shall be My witnesses
Acts 1:8



ICF Quadrennial Conference: CALLED TO FREEDOM

by Larry F. Sommers



Conference attendees visit a black township near Stellenbosch. Photo by Larry F. Sommers

More than 80 Congregationalists from around the world, including many Americans, converged on the charming university town of Stellenbosch, near Cape Town, South Africa, for the Eleventh Quadrennial Conference of the International Congregational Fellowship, July 6-11, 2017.

The Rev. Dr. Geraint Tudur of Wales presided until Sunday, July 9, when the new moderator, Rev. Dr. Bruce Theron of South Africa, was installed in an evening worship service.

Conference participants shared fellowship and exchanged views on the theme: “Many people from many lands and many cultures, CALLED TO FREEDOM through one Lord, Jesus Christ.” This theme was parsed into three aspects: Freedom in Worship, Freedom of Mind, and Freedom to Serve. Each aspect was explored in a brief keynote speech, followed by breakout sessions emphasizing Bible study, experiential learning, and “learning by doing.”

Discussion leaders for “Freedom in Worship” were Dr. Coenie Burger, keynoter, plus Mr. Gwilym Tudur and

Ms. Sharon Binger. For “Freedom of Mind” it was Prof. Xolile Simon, keynoter, plus Rev. Dr. Janet Wootton and Rev. Mike Fales. And “Freedom to Serve” was explored by Rev. Leon Klate, keynoter, plus Rev. Christopher Gilham, Ms. Kathryn Young, and Rev. Wendy Van Tassell.

The Rev. Dr. John W. de Gruchy, noted South African theologian, gave a lecture on Congregationalism which was a highlight of the conference.

The participants—about 55 from North America and 25 from the United Kingdom and other countries—also shared many moments of fellowship around food and special events. They attended Sunday worship at nearby Congregational churches and traveled on outings to visit a former slave church; a vibrant black township; Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela and other opponents of South Africa’s now-discarded apartheid policy of racial segregation were imprisoned; and the breathtaking scenery of Table Mountain, overlooking Cape Town.

The International Congregational Fellowship was formed in 1975 at Chislehurst, England. Its first quadrennia l

conference was held in London in 1977, and since then a conference has been held every four years, at various locations around the world.

In addition, the fellowship 20 years ago formed a Theological Commission, which has sponsored 19 symposia thus far, in various countries—aimed at encouraging existing Congregational church movements in those countries. The Theological Commission also publishes the *International Congregational Journal*, an academic-style journal edited by the Rev. Dr. Janet Wootton and printed twice a year.

The next full conference of the ICF will be held in the U.S. only three years from now—an exception to the normal “quadrennial” interval, so as to coincide with the 400th anniversary of Congregationalism in America. Details will be announced, as plans are further developed, on the ICF website, www.internationalcongregationalfellowship.org.

In the meantime, interested Congregationalists can avail themselves of the lively contents of the *International Congregational Journal* by sending \$30 for a one-year subscription to Ms. Debbie Fillebrown at ICFTC Journal, PO Box 4965, Louisville, KY 40204. Any questions may be addressed to Debbie at BeeNobleDEF.df@gmail.com. Proceedings of the Eleventh Quadrennial Conference will be published in the next issue.



Sparks Mliwana, once a political prisoner at Robben Island and now a tour guide at the former prison, which once housed Nelson Mandela, explains the harsh conditions of detention at the site. Photo by Larry F. Sommers



New ICF officers are commissioned during evening worship at the Eleventh Quadrennial Conference of the International Congregational Fellowship, July 6-11, 2017, at Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa. Photo by Larry F. Sommers

Ordinations



Donna Kay Clifton, a previously ordained independent Congregational minister, was ordained in a private ceremony at the NACCC church, *South Vigo Congregational Church, West Terre Haute, Indiana*, on Friday, July 5, 2017.

University Congregational Church, Wichita, Kan. ordained the *Rev. Paul Jackson*, with concurrence of a vicinage council, June 11, 2017.

Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita, Kan. ordained the *Rev. Jacob Poindexter*, with concurrence of a vicinage council, June 18, 2017.

Recent Calls

First Church of Christ, Lynn, Mass. has called the *Rev. John Swanson* as Pastor.

First Congregational Church, Anchorage, Alaska has called the *Rev. Jacob Poindexter* as Pastor

In Search Senior Minister

Chiltonville Congregational Church, Plymouth, Mass.
Duluth Congregational Church, Duluth, Minn.
El Dorado Community Church, Eldorado, Calif.
First Congregational Church, Ashland, Neb.
First Congregational Church, Emporia, Kan.
First Congregational Church, Interlachen, Fla.
First Congregational Church, Laingsburg, Mich.
First congregational Church, Marshfield, Mass.
First Congregational Church, Portland, Mich.
First Congregational Church, Terre Haute, Ind.
First Congregational (Road) Church, Stonington, Conn.
Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Mayflower Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio
Olivet Congregational Church, Olivet, Mich.
Orthodox Congregational Church, Petersham, Mass.
Ozaukee Congregational Church, Grafton, Wisc.
Second Congregational Church, Jewett City, Conn.
St. Johns Church, Idalia, Colo.

Associate/Assistant Minister

United Church of Marco Island, Marco Island, Fla.

Non-NACCC Church

Epping Community Church, Epping, NH

Re: J.R. McAliley's letter in the June 2017 edition

In response to J.R. MacAliley's letter criticizing my example of a "convicted, unrepentant child abuser" in "Turf Battles: Boundaries Within the Church" (March 2017), let me say that I don't think Rev. McAliley and I have any real disagreement. It would have been clearer if I had used "subsequently convicted" because the debate in the church occurred mostly after this man's arrest but prior to his conviction. His conviction basically settled the matter for the church. The offender, however, never did admit wrongdoing. By withdrawing from the church, he forfeited the greatest gift the church had to offer – repenting of his sins and seeking God's forgiveness.

It must also be pointed out, however, that churches cannot rely entirely on the criminal justice system to resolve issues regarding bad actors. This case, as many, might easily have ended in an acquittal due to many factors – the passage of time, witness intimidation, the refusal of some victims to testify, the troubled history of the primary witness, and the age, ill-health, and prominent status of the accused. Acquittal would have created sufficient "reasonable doubt" in the minds of some church members that cheap grace or "forgiveness" in the sense Rev. McAliley rightly criticizes as just letting things go would seem appropriate. A contentious and divisive church battle would have been in the offing, as it was prior to conviction.

In many cases churches have to summon up the courage to act on "the preponderance of the evidence," a lower standard than the criminal justice system's "beyond a reasonable doubt." Combine that with the tendency of many church members to be "forgiving" and anxious to avoid conflict, division among members and turf battles are inevitable.

Correction:

Please accept our apologies for the typo on the June cover of *The Congregationalist*. The correct spelling is FCC Ceredo.

2017 CALENDAR

OCTOBER 9

General copy deadline for The Congregationalist December 2017 issue. Contact Marianne King, editor, Marianne.kingwi@gmail.com or 800-262-1620, ext. 1624

OCTOBER 23-25

Silent Retreat

Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center, Donaldson, IN.
Led by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Richard
Contact Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Chaplain-Director of the Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides, at 734-755-4131 or drcapacker@gmail.com



Save The Date: June 23 – 26, 2018

64th Annual Meeting & Conference

of the National Association of Congregational Churches

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Copy deadline for each issue is noted in the previous issue's "Calendar" section.

Letters to the Editor are welcome. All letters may be edited for clarity and length. We regret we cannot publish or respond to all letters.

The NACCC reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

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