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The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

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Reflections

from the
64th Annual Meeting of the NACCC

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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

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

We reserve freedom of expression to our authors and freedom of opinion to our readers.

Except for service information clearly sponsored by the **National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC)** or its component parts, content does not necessarily reflect policies and opinions of the NACCC.

Neither *The Congregationalist* nor the NACCC has a creed or holds positions on social or theological issues; but we recognize the authority of each local church to do so for itself, if and as it wishes, and we encourage thoughtful and respectful discussion of our agreements and differences.



OUR Voyage TOGETHER

Mission and Vision AT THE 2018 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2018 Annual Meeting in San Diego can be described by many things. There was great fellowship; there were great times of worship; we were all enriched by the workshops, the Bible Lectures, and the Congregational Lecture. One very important thing about the 2018 Annual Meeting, though, could have passed by without much notice. The delegate body approved a new NACCC Mission Statement and a new NACCC Vision Statement. Here are the texts of these new guiding statements for the Association.

NACCC Mission Statement

To nurture fellowship among Congregational Christian Churches and to support ministries of the local church in its community and to the world, all in the name of Christ.

NACCC Vision Statement

Vital and healthy Congregational churches, sharing the love of Jesus the Christ.

I would like to “unpack” these statements a bit from my perspective.

The Mission Statement speaks to the current purposes of the NACCC as an entity. It closely parallels the purposes we defined for ourselves in the Bylaws that were adopted at the Annual Meeting in 2017. In contrast to some of the previous mission statements of the NACCC, this one is more actively oriented in speaking of the mission of the NA. Further, the emphasis in this statement moves from the NA, the national level, to the local church, as it should. The NACCC does not exist for its own benefit. The NACCC exists to support and to help strengthen the ministry work of the local congregation.

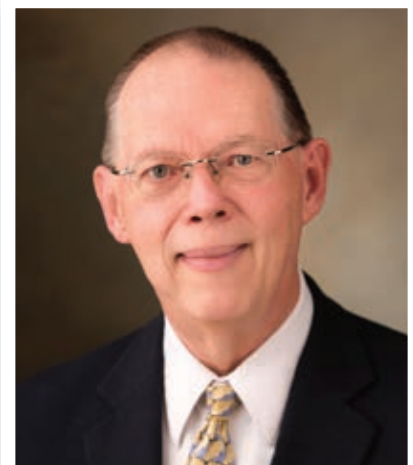
The Vision Statement points us to the hope or the dream of what we want to become in the future. The hope of the NACCC is for our member churches to become vital and healthy local congregations. The vitality of the local church points more to its external focus. The health of the local church points more internally. It is our dream that all of our member churches will be moving to greater vitality and health, with the NACCC providing needed and asked for support.

In these statements, in fact, I see the central foundational tenets of the NACCC expressed. Our faith is seen in our assertion that we do what we do in the name of Christ – as God’s people – and we share the love of Christ as we have experienced it. I can

see our freedom in the reality that the way the churches choose to do ministry or to define their external or internal focus is not dictated by the NACCC. Our fellowship is nurtured as we come together in associational or national gatherings and as we join together in the work for God’s Kingdom.

These two statements will be our roadmap and used to evaluate the work and projects of the NACCC staff, Leadership Boards, and the Ministry Councils. They will also be our guide to help chart what things the NACCC as an entity should be doing to support the ministries of our member churches. I look forward to hearing from you about ways that I can make that happen.

Grace and Peace,
Michael



*By Michael Chittum,
Executive Director*



Strangers AND PILGRIMS



Reverend Dwight Hunt

WESTWARD HO! Congregationalism's Expansion into California

The Reverend Dr. Lowell W. Linden delivered the Congregational Lecture in a humor-laced narrative style that completely engaged his audience at the 64th Annual Meeting and Conference in San Diego. Linden, Minister Emeritus at Redlands First Congregational Church in California, was tour guide for a rollicking journey through the first 25 years of Congregationalism in California.

In 1801, Congregationalists and Presbyterians created the Plan of Union, an agreement between the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the Connecticut General Association of Congregational Churches. It "allowed Congregational and Presbyterian congregations to decide which they wanted to be when they gathered and let their ministers go back and forth between the two."

Beginning in the 1830s tension began to mount between Old School Presbyterians on one side with New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists on the other. The Old School Presbyterians were concerned about purity of doctrine. The others realized there were some inconsistencies between doctrine and practice, but they were concerned about reaching unsaved people with the Gospel and the gathering of churches as populations moved west. In 1837, an official division occurred, with slavery and revival meetings being two unresolved issues.

As soon as California became a United States territory in 1848, plans were made to bring the gospel to California. Rev. John Douglas and Rev. Samuel Willey were the first missionaries commissioned by the American Home Missionary

Society to go to California. They left Boston in November 1849, before the news arrived that gold had been discovered. Surprisingly, the news of gold having been discovered in California arrived in Hawaii before it reached New England. Rev. Dwight Hunt was dispatched from Hawaii and arrived the same month as the other two were leaving Boston. Rev. Hunt preached the first sermon in California delivered by a Congregationalist. The title of the sermon was: "The Love of God in the Gift of Jesus Christ." He was also the founding pastor of the First Congregational Church of San Francisco, the first Congregational church in the state.

Linden said it was "ghastly hot, teeming with mosquitos and there had been three murders the day before" when Joseph Benton, another early Congregationalist, arrived in Sacramento in 1849. Benton gathered the First Congregational Church in Sacramento and is sometimes called the "father of California Congregationalism." Benton's vision was for a California remade in the image of New England so that Congregationalism would have a presence on both the east and west coasts of the nation.

Linden said that, by 1849, there was one Baptist, three Congregationalist, one New School Presbyterian, two Methodist Episcopal, two Old School Presbyterian

Continued on next page>



Strangers AND PILGRIMS

and two Protestant Episcopal full-time Christian ministers. There were also a number of local and lay preachers.

In 1849, Benton, Willey and Hunt began planning a newspaper. The first issue of the *Pacific* was published in 1851. During the early days of the *Pacific* it reported two very significant events. It reported an attempt by some to divide California into two states – north and south. This would enable the state in the south to become a slave state. Benton and others lobbied vigorously against the initiative and, as we know, it was defeated.

The other major news article reported in the *Pacific* concerned a matter of law and order. There was very little of either in those early days. A publisher of another newspaper was shot and killed on Montgomery Street, the principle street in San Francisco. The culprit went quickly to jail where he knew he would be safe. But the Vigilance Committee led by some Congregationalists insisted that the man be given over to them. He was then taken to a pre-arranged location. A quick trial was held and he was hanged along with an accomplice. Some have been critical of Congregational involvement, but the event resulted in several political and local businessmen deciding it was a good idea to flee the city.

In 1849, Willey and Hunt marched over one hundred school age children up Montgomery Street and demonstrated the need for a public school. In 1851, the first public school system in California was established in San Francisco. They were also responsible for the first public library in the state.

Henry Durant, a Congregational minister, arrived in 1853 and established

the Contra Coast Academy in Oakland. In 1855, it became the College of California. Durant, along with the Hunt, Douglas, Willey, and Benton started planning for a public university that would rival Harvard and Yale. In 1858, the University of California was established on land that had been given to the state by the Congregationalists. The first three presidents were Congregational ministers.

In 1859 the first students gathered at the Pacific School of Religion, the first theological seminary on the west coast. There was one professor and four students.

In 1853, the American Home Missionary Society sent eight young ministers and their families to San Francisco. Two continued on to Oregon, one stayed in San Francisco and the other five went to mining towns in the Sierra Nevada mountains east of Sacramento.

They all declared, "The gospel and the gospel only is our errand in California. We preach Christ and Him crucified." They gathered churches and they attempted to meet the spiritual needs of the people. It was not an easy task. Everything was very expensive. Housing was difficult to find. There were few medical facilities.

There were those who were glad the church was present, but they never planned to attend worship services. Most were men between the ages of twenty and forty and they were interested only in finding gold. For the most part they did not plan to stay in California. They would look for gold, strike it rich and return home. Of course, it seldom happened that way.

William Pond spent four years in San Francisco before going to Downieville. The town was located at the north fork of the Yuba River. Linden stated that he and two Presbyterian ministers spent several vacations panning for gold in the Yuba River. They found gold, but the operation was "of marginal success."

After ten years in Downieville, where William Pond's wife died and where he married his wife's sister, he returned to San Francisco. He served the Third Congregational Church. It was located near a shoe factory and a woolen mill. There were many Chinese immigrants working in these two places and they desired to learn English. Pond recalled his time in Downieville when he would walk by the tents of the Chinese and say to himself, "Close by me yet as far off practically as though they were in China, souls for whom Christ died." In the process of learning English, in a program sponsored by the church, there were those who confessed their faith in Jesus Christ. When Rev. Pond concluded that these Chinese immigrants were not going to be welcomed into the church he resigned.

With the help of the American Missionary Association, which was founded in 1846 in the east, he formed Bethany Congregational Church. He remained as the pastor for thirty-two years. The church, today, is located on the west side of Portsmouth Square in San Francisco.

Linden said southern California was a difficult and different story. He noted that John Douglas traveled south to Los Angeles in 1851. Douglas said he found "a few straggly Indians and a

*The Reverend Dr. Lowell Linden has served over 50 years in the Christian Ministry. He is a graduate of UCLA, Fuller Theological seminary, and the California Graduate School of Theology. He received his D.D. from Piedmont College. Linden joined the NACCC in 1973, serving churches in Anaheim and Redlands, California. Now retired he is Minister Emeritus at the Redlands First Congregational Church, having served as Senior Minister for 38 years. He is a recipient of the NACCC Harry R. Butman Award. Linden has published two books: *Through the Stained Glass Window* and *A People at Prayer*.*



bunch of Romanists” and after a year he returned north. There was no missionary activity until after the Civil War. In 1865, J.H. Warren, the Superintendent of the General Association of Congregational Churches in California which had been founded in 1858, made his first trip to southern California. He was successful in establishing, in 1867, three churches. There was the First Congregational Church of San Bernardino, of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. They were all very weak churches for a number of years, barely able to remain viable. In 1869, a church was gathered in Ventura, and, in 1873, another was gathered in Riverside. It was not until the railroad came

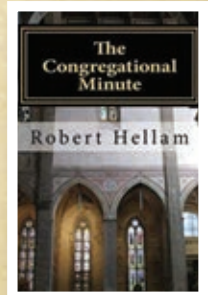
to southern California in 1875 and the citrus industry became of age that the churches in southern California came into their own. It is a fascinating story that goes a bit beyond the scope of this study.

Henry Jewett, in an article he wrote several years later stated, referring to the first missionaries to California, “But there was a very strong belief in what they were doing. How could they not be here when there were so many people living and dying without the knowing of Christ? But they were under orders. God had decreed for them a missionary calling. They willingly gave themselves in obedience to the call.”



First Congregational church of California 1890

For several years, “Strangers and Pilgrims” has featured snapshots of important Congregationalists. These lively bios were adapted from Robert Hellam’s wonderful book, *The Congregational Minute*, available on amazon.com. In addition to its portraits of Congregationalism’s leading lights, *The Congregational Minute* takes the reader on an entertaining and informative journey through our history and polity. It was a sad day when I came to the entry for Harry R. Butman (June 2018) and realized I was at the end of the road. Thank you, Bob, for your marvelous contribution to



The Congregationalist all these years.

Marianne King, editor

Celebrating 50 Years as Organist and Choirmaster

In 2018-19, Philip Brunelle celebrates his 50th year as organist and choirmaster at Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis.

Philip is also celebrating his half-century mark as founder and artistic director of VocalEssence, a Twin Cities choral group. He served on the American Guild of Organists National Council (1986–1992) and was program chair for the 2008 national

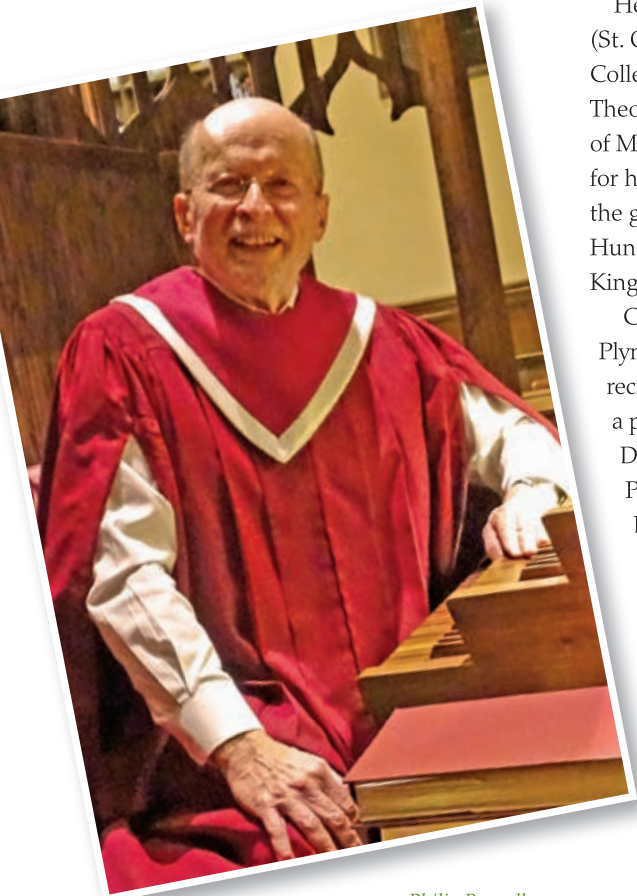
convention held in the Twin Cities. He also served on the International Federation for Choral Music board (2003–2017), the Chorus America Board for 18 years and the St. Olaf College Board of Regent for 12 years.

Philip is editor of two choral series for Boosey & Hawkes and chairs the review committee for Walton Music.

Philip's organ studies were with Arthur B. Jennings, his predecessor at Plymouth Church.

He holds five honorary doctorates (St. Olaf College, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. John's University, United Theological Seminary, and the University of Minnesota) and has been recognized for his commitment to choral music by the governments of Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Mexico, and the United Kingdom.

Celebrations during his 50th year at Plymouth Church include his organ recital and hymn sing on September 30; a performance of Honegger's "King David" with the combined choirs of Plymouth Church and St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, with soloists and orchestra, on November 18; an all-Bach piano recital by Angela Hewitt on January 31; an organ recital by Daniel Roth on February 10; a recital by Plymouth's solo quintet on April 7; and a Sunday morning celebration on May 12 that includes the debut of a new hymn—words by James Gertmenian (former senior minister) and music by David Evan Thomas.



Philip Brunelle



WCA Features Chris Rygh at Leadership Summit

This past April, the Wisconsin Congregational Association held its 2018 Leadership Summit at First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa. Chris Rygh, associate pastor and pastor of multi-site ministries at Prairie Lakes Church in Iowa, was keynote speaker for the two-day event. Chris, who is involved in the development of satellite church campuses around the state, offered strategies for developing a healthy church – from rooting your team in prayer, creating a new perspective, developing and implementing a successful action plan.

To honor his wife, Carolyn Brunelle—the only member Plymouth's Choir to have sung for all 50 years—Brunelle has commissioned new anthems from six, women composers, Carolyn's friends: Carol Barnett (September), Libby Larsen (October), Jocelyn Hagen (December), Melanie DeMore (February), Judith Bingham (March) and Cecilia McDowall (April).

Plans for his 51st season are already in the works!

Submitted by
Allison Campbell Jensen

Historic Meeting House at Risk

The meeting house of the Central Congregational Church at Galesburg, Illinois, has been included in Landmarks Illinois' 2018 Most Endangered Sites listing:

<http://www.landmarks.org/preservation-programs/most-endangered-historic-places-in-illinois/>

I was raised in an NACCC church and was active in the Illinois Pilgrim Youth Fellowship (PYF) program for years. The Central Congregational church hosted several memorable youth rallies, has historic ties to Knox College, and several of its members were influential in instilling the Congregational Way of Life into my Christian theology.

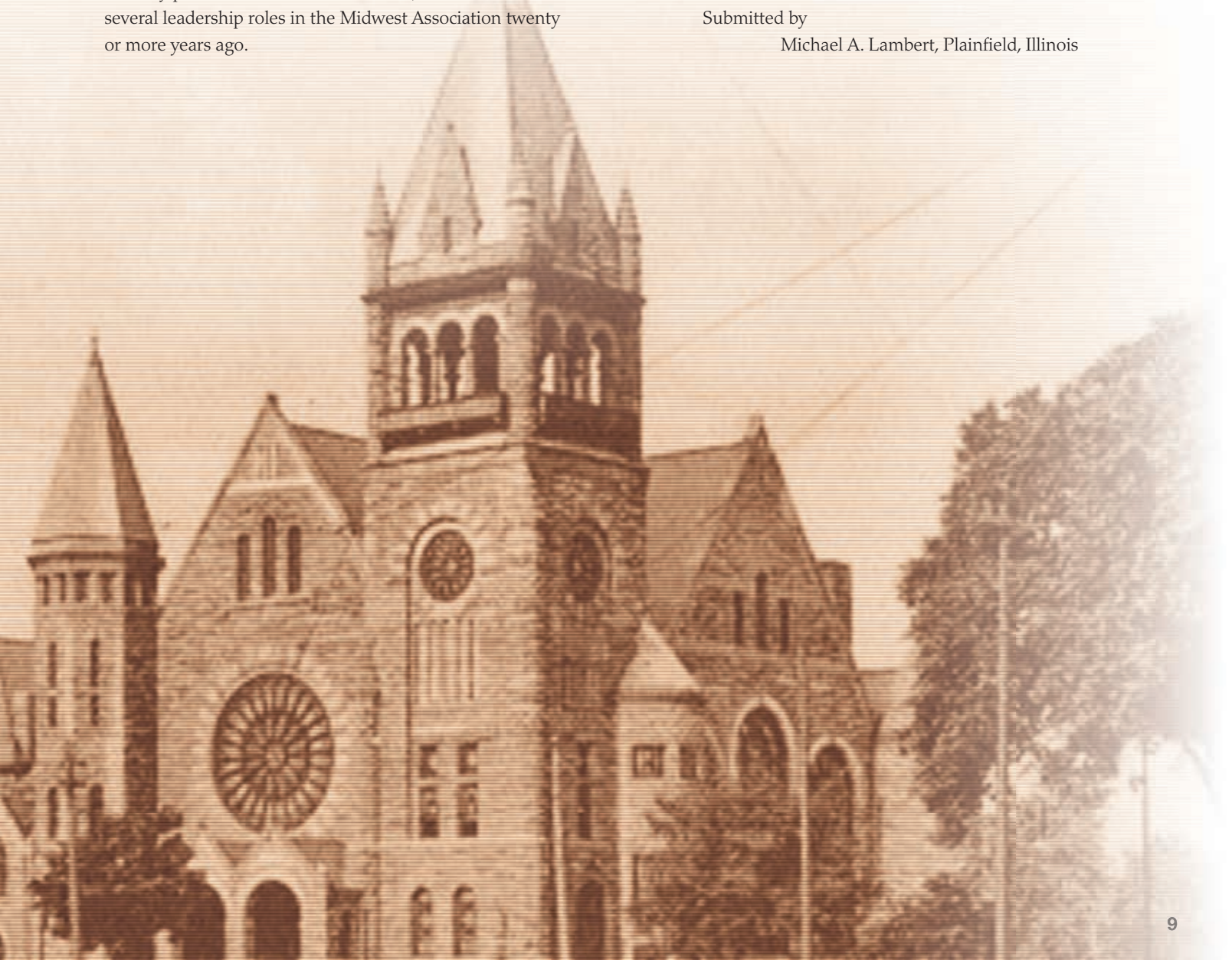
As an adult, I attended many national meetings of the NACCC during the 1980s and 1990s (but attended others with my parents in the 1960s and 1970s). I also served in several leadership roles in the Midwest Association twenty or more years ago.

The many historic churches of our Midwest and National Associations—including the 1850 meeting house I attended at Plainfield, Illinois—definitely impacted my nearly 40-year career as a historian, architect, college educator and, now, preservation planner in a Chicago suburb. It saddens me to see these beautiful edifices deteriorating as the congregations of many mainline denominations dwindle. Numerous churches that were vibrant in my youth have closed or struggle to meet the needs of their small congregations.

Although I now worship with a UCC congregation, I value the Congregational Way and these historic church buildings. I continue to look forward to reading *The Congregationalist* and pray that it may continue to reach those within and beyond the NACCC fold for years to come.

Submitted by

Michael A. Lambert, Plainfield, Illinois



News AND NEEDS of OUR Missions

NEWS FROM THE MISSIONS

Lisa Cortes from Mission Mazahua, Mexico, reports that she and Norberto are gradually withdrawing from the actual operation and executive decisions. The young couple of Victor and Araceli Monroy are stepping up in leadership. Their older son, Gerson, has been helping with Pastoral Ministries, as well.



Norberto and Lisa Cortes

Bread of Life Ministries, Florida, currently is running two year-round programs. Christ Community Café, which operates on Fridays, serves an average of 85 people every week. There are about 20 servers, six cooks and kitchen helpers, with a total 420 people involved in this ministry every month. The second program, the After School Tutoring Program, operates twice a week and serves approximately 500 kids monthly.

During the summer, Bread of Life Ministries runs a three-day vacation Bible school every night for about 100 kids. There are around 50 helpers and teachers. The Back to School Supplies program helps 20-25 children with book bags and school supplies. During Christmas, the Mission gives food and gifts to 20 families. Lately they have been helping four pastors in Cuba with their monthly salary.

Cook Native American Ministries, Arizona, has funded many projects since it became a foundation. Here are a few of their present projects:

- Duet Partners in Health and Aging, Phoenix – "Bridging Faith and Health" provides faith community nurses who bring personalized health care to vulnerable populations, concentrating on wellness promotion, healing, and disease prevention.

- Three Precious Miracles, Sacaton, Arizona – "Blanket Project" volunteers create custom embroidered blankets for Native American foster children to acknowledge their culture and heritage to promote spiritual, mental, and physical health.

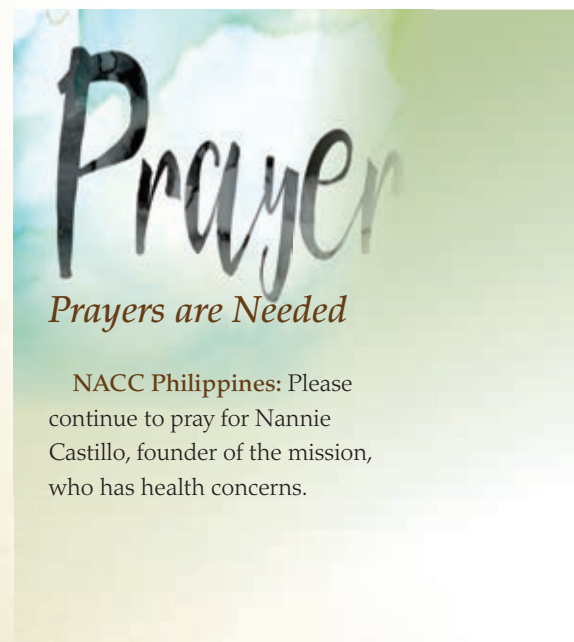
- Native Grace Intertribal Fellowship, Cortez, Colorado – "Bible Study and Vacation Bible School" prepares native adults and young adults in Native Bible Studies to become leaders and role models within the community.

Needs of the Missions

The missions that work with children can always use school supplies, such as: backpacks, school supplies, art supplies, etc. Bread of Life Mission, Menaul School, Maine Sea Coast Mission, Morgan Scott Project, and Panamerican Institute are a few of the missions that have programs for children.

In Gratitude

Grateful thanks to the Racine Dominicans, Racine, Wisconsin, for the \$4,000 in grant money to Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregation in Argentina.



NACC Philippines: Please continue to pray for Nannie Castillo, founder of the mission, who has health concerns.



Workshop members in Nigeria

Ministries Continue to Serve

In December, the Rev. Matthew Oladele and his wife Mary at **Christ to the Villages, Nigeria**, attended a 10-day training on Christ Centered Education. (CCE). They look forward to implementing in their schools the new ideas they learned during training. There is urgent need for education to be Christ-centered and not just religious doctrines. The responsibility of training a child has been shifted more to the school because the parents are so busy just trying to make ends meet.

Matthew also attended an ECHO workshop on Nigeria Sustainable Agriculture Networking forum in Ibadan. The forum was geared toward facilitating networking about alleviating hunger and poverty among those serving Africa's poor.

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**

Fishers of Men, Mexico, continues to spread the love and light of Jesus Christ through its two ministries: Evangelistic Medical Mission Crusades and Refuge Ranch. Eleven medical crusades are scheduled for 2018, during which they take free medical and dental care to numerous communities throughout Mexico. The Good News of Jesus Christ is shared with each patient who attends the crusades. Fishers of Men also partners with the local church so that the new believers may join a faith community. The team recently ministered to a unique and little-known population in Mexico, a German Mennonite community.

The Spanish-speaking volunteers used German translators to communicate with the patients!

Founder Julie Zaragoza encountered a Mennonite woman who explained, through tears, that she had hated Christians because her religious heritage had provided a cultural framework for her life, but no room for a personal, saving relationship with Christ. After attending the crusade, she said she couldn't understand what that group of doctors had but she had never been treated with such love and kindness. Now, she wants what they have . . . the love of Jesus.

At Refuge Ranch, Fishers of Men trusts

the Lord for the funds and volunteers to continue the building of the main house, which would allow them to better meet the needs of their current 10 children and open their home to many more.



Members of Mexico's Mennonite community

The clinic at **Ministerio Vida, Honduras**, has grown. Currently they are seeing 50 to 60 patients every day, at a cost of \$2.50 per patient. Pastors and those who cannot pay are treated for free. There were 8,333 medical visits this past January alone, and in the first three months of the year they saw 28,802 patients.

In three years, Ministerio Vida has established 22 medical teams in very poor locations, offering free medical

attention, medications, clothing, food, and eyeglasses. They serve an average 300 people in each location, for a total of 6,600 people.

A group from the mission dug two water wells in very poor communities. Once a month, they take 350 plates of food to the people who work in the city garbage dump. The mission also supports the Arms of Jesus School attended by the children of the garbage workers.



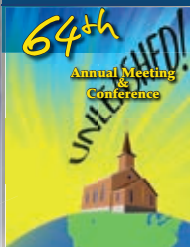
Rev. Dr. Josue Hernandez



The Reverend John Tamilio III, Ph.D., is the pastor of the Congregational Church in Canton (Massachusetts), a member of the NACCC. Dr. John (as his parishioners call him) is also a Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Salem State University.

UNLEASHED^{to}

Reflections from the 64th Annual Meeting of the NACCC



by John Tamilio III

I was inspired by the Congregational Lecture, the two-part Bible Lecture, and the homily offered by Rev. Fa’afouina Solomona at this year’s Annual Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches in San Diego. My personal devotions have found me perusing the Acts of the Apostles lately, and so the Conference theme (gleaned from Acts 1:8) struck a chord: “...and you shall be My witnesses.”

Although many attendees held fast to the overarching theme (“Unleashed!”), I ruminated on the aforementioned verse and kept asking myself “What does it mean to be a witness for Christ?” throughout the Conference — and have throughout the days since.

I must confess: I am an Evangelical at heart. However, I do not use that word the way it is bandied about in political circles, nor do my “Evangelical” beliefs align with those on the Religious Right, who use that term as a clenched fist ready to dislodge the jaw of the unbeliever, as opposed to an open hand that wants to share the grace of God joyfully in deed as much as word. To me, being an Evangelical means being totally transformed by Jesus and the biblical witness. When it comes to proselytizing, I

agree with St. Francis of Assisi, whom Christian midrash claims said, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and, if necessary, use words.”

But there is also a place for words, especially when it comes to the Word made flesh, which brings us back to being a witness.

The word “witness” immediately makes one think of a person who saw something that really happened and is either willing or compelled to come forward to testify. The witness places his or her hand upon the Bible and swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, or face the wrath of Perry Mason, Jack McCoy, or any number of equally shrewd TV attorneys.

But there is an implicit assumption: what the witness saw actually occurred. We need witnesses to tell us about what we didn’t see and to solve life’s greatest mysteries. We wouldn’t have to worry if the butler committed the murder with a candlestick holder in the study in the game Clue, or one of the many Sherlock Holmes mysteries, if a credible person saw what happened and came forward to tell us. P.T. Barnum may be right in saying that “a sucker is born every minute,” but I also love that line by Donald Sutherland as the mysterious informant “X” in Oliver Stone’s *JFK*: “Remember, fundamentally, people are suckers for the truth.”

We are suckers for the truth. That’s why we need witnesses. Actually, that is why we need to be witnesses.

Entomologists claim that the word “witness,” as we currently use it, came

from either Middle or Old English and means “knowledge” or “understanding.” The Greek use of the term is what Luke used in Acts. That word is *mártyras*, which has the same root as the word “martyr.”

Witnesses to the Christ-event were sometimes martyred. We know this. The pages of Church history are stained with the blood of men and women who gave their lives for the Gospel: from Stephen in the Book of Acts, to the second century theologian Justin, to Joan of Arc, to Father Jacques Hamel who was killed in the Normandy church attack just last year. Giving your life for anything means you truly believe in it. These people did just that.

Being a Christian is not a call to become a martyr, necessarily. (If that were the case, there wouldn’t be any of us left!) We are called to be witnesses, though — to share our knowledge and understanding of Christ. What might that look like?

One way is to realize that we are not engaged in this mission alone. God is already at work among us. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (43:19a). In 2007, D. Mark Davis wrote *Talking About Evangelism: A Congregational Response*. Davis takes a novel approach to spreading the Gospel. He does not suggest that we stand on street corners distributing tracts, nor does he recommend that we go door-to-door asking people if they have found Jesus. (Remember Forrest Gump’s response to Lieutenant Dan when asked about the latter: “I didn’t know I was supposed to be looking for him, sir!”)

Witness:

Davis claims that God will provide us with seekers and sojourners. Remember the parable of the sower in Matthew 13? Remember First Corinthians, in which Paul declares, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (3:6)? God will send people through our doors. Getting them to stay is our job.

I have experienced this myself at the Congregational Church of Canton. We receive guests on an almost weekly basis. Maybe we are in a unique position being one of the only mainline Protestant churches in town. Maybe it is the large cross on the front of our building that attracts them. Maybe it is the sign out front that reads, “Christ-Centered, Biblically-Based, All Are Welcome.” Who knows? The point is, they are walking through our doors. The question that Davis would ask is: what do you do once they arrive?

Denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, have invested a great deal of time, energy, and money advertising themselves as a welcoming church. Their “God is still speaking” campaign, released in 2008, touted “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” The focus was to welcome LGBT folks — people who traditionally have been ostracized by the church. The United Methodist Church embarked on a similar campaign shortly afterwards called “Rethink Church: Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.”

Such endeavors are needed — and I applaud them — but the real question is what do we do once visitors show up?

Clever advertising slogans may get them through the doors, but what happens once they cross the threshold?

I know what people say in response to this question: we need to be friendly; we need to roll out the red carpet; we need to follow up with all visitors. Yes. Yes. And yes. But the real question is why do we? What lies behind such practices? What informs hospitality?

The answer? Being a witness for the living Jesus Christ.

Again, we may not have been there two millennia ago when Jesus walked the earth, but the great cloud of witnesses has bequeathed us a legacy and a task. The Way (a term that Congregationalists use for themselves — a designation that was first used by the early Church in the Book of Acts) is to share the Good News that fills our hearts with all people. That Good News is that we have been saved from sin and death by Jesus Christ. The atonement (what the recently deceased Congregationalist theologian Gabriel Fackre called the at-one-ment, i.e. the way we become more aligned with God) was wrought through everything that Jesus did for us: his incarnation, his teachings, his healings, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and the promise of his return at the end of history to make all things new. If this does not fill every corpuscule of our being with a burning, overflowing desire to share that joy with others (friends as well as strangers), then I struggle to grasp what would.

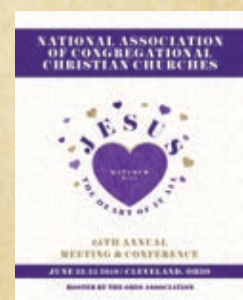
The people who influenced me the most are those who had a passion for what they did. I think of Robert Dunn, my English teacher when I was a senior

in high school. I think of Sal DeSimone, one of my philosophy professors in college. I think of my former brother-in-law who played guitar in a rock band in the 1970s and ‘80s. I think of Jack Lynes who was a Conference Minister in New Hampshire when I entered the ministry. And there are a host of others. Passion is addicting. We see the people who have it and we want to feel the same way. Furthermore, we think that whatever they are passionate about must be worth it.

We can live a life that is simply routine, if not hum drum, or we can seize the day — *carpe diem*, as the poets wrote. Christ offers us the latter. We are filled with more of that joy the more we share it.

People are hungry for this. They want such witnesses to the truth, because they want to be witnesses themselves. This is what God offers us through Jesus Christ. We get to see God in the flesh! If the world experiences that, then the world will come to believe — and the world will be transformed. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to tell the world that story so that it can take root in the hearts of all people.

May such passion take hold of you and your church so that the NACCC truly becomes unleashed to witness to the living Christ!



A VISIT *In The Night*

by Bernadette Butler

The following poem was written by Bernadette Butler during Quiet Day at the 64th Annual Meeting & Conference in San Diego, who writes, "I attended my first Silent Retreat in 2017. The Retreat continues to reinforce and encourage me to seek God and listen. There is peace in this and I can feel and hear Him near me."

I pray the Lord my soul to keep as I lay down to
sleep.
Trying to release the thoughts, the sounds and actions
of the day,
My eyes began to droop, and sleep gathers
me away.
To my surprise I was awoken by a touch and
gentle voice.
It was soothing to my soul and comforting.
With no reply from me,
He said, "It is your time."
Am I awake or asleep?
My mind could not comprehend or fathom
the mystery.
No person did I see,
like the burning bush that was not consumed,
these words were perplexing to me.
That burning question continues inside of me,
My time for what?
It is your time to follow me!
You've been hiding in the shadows between the door,
let your heart be completely receptive,
of me, do not ignore.
It is time for you to move in my truth of the plans
that I sang over your life before
your existence came to be.
What marvelous wonders I desire to show you concerning
Me.
It is a story of Me that I am revealing in a
dream.
It may seem a dream to you, but
My plan is to awaken you, to the truth of how much
I love and cherish you.
He bent over and kissed me on my cheek and
said no more.
I opened my eyes to a new
day.
May my feet slip into your shoes of peace and
Your breastplate of righteousness,
Place me in your shield and gird me with your
belt of truth.
I am surrounded by your love and care.
In God's plan those dreams really do come
true!



Bernadette Butler, a wife, mother, and grandmother, lives in Berea, Ohio, where she attends Heritage Congregational Church, (Pastor Patrick Hunt). Writes Bernadette, "The Lord blessed me with interesting careers -- data entry, school board member, flight attendant, and crossing guard."

Bernadette began to write poetry again when she stopped flying and says she "was able to sit quietly and read scripture. That is when The Holy Spirit began to share the poetic words with me." Her first book, Words of Praise, Joy and Love, was published in 2016. Her second work, Living with Autism: God, Me, and Melvin, was just released. Both books are available from Amazon.

Awakened AND UNLEASHED:

A Reflection on the NACCC Quiet Day

*Sleep.
Dream.
Awaken.*

This pattern of our lives is integral to both our bodily health as well as to our personal spirituality. The Reverend Dr. Charles Packer, our retreat guide, explored these concepts during the Quiet Day preceding our NACCC Conference in San Diego. He reminded us that one-third of our lives is spent sleeping. And while we rest, the Psalmist reminds us, God does not rest. We explored the Gospel stories of Jesus resting, and the importance of rest. There are many scripture passages which address resting and sleeping in Psalms 13, 44, 90 and 121, as well as in Job, Genesis, and Mark. What is important is that there are different phases of sleep, and only in one do we dream. We visualize. We imagine. And God's Holy Spirit is active during this time. Joseph, Daniel, and Jacob, we are told in Genesis, all dreamt. Young Samuel dreamt, as was recorded in the Hebrew Testament. Our guide led us to the importance of dreams and what they can reveal to us about who we are, who God is, and our past, present, future--and the intertwining of all.

Rev. Packer suggested that when we have a perplexing question on our mind, then the last thing we should think about before we drift off to sleep is that matter. Then, we, with a notepad and pen on our

by Barry Szymanski

nightstand, should immediately write down what we remember of our dreams as soon as we awaken. We may have insight. Discovery. Clarity. Dreams could be divine gifts of disclosure.

But we are awake two-thirds of our lives. Christianity offers an awakening. Every day is a new chance at living. In our lives we go from bodily birth to spiritual birth to resurrection. And what we realize is that there is Truth beyond our senses. When Jesus spoke about death, he used the term sleep. When he turned to the twelve-year-old girl, he said, "Awake." And when he stated he was traveling to get to his friend, Lazarus, he stated he was on his way to awaken him.

Sleep. Dream. Awaken. These are our confrontations of mortality and death every day – but also of resurrection. Dreams can transform us as they transformed so many as recorded in scripture.



One of the questions that Rev. Packer asked was evocative: What did Jesus dream, what did he discover, in his three-day submission in the tomb?

We were left to ponder by the Pacific Ocean and in silence: What are our



The Reverend Dr. Barry Szymanski is Minister of Pastoral Care at First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. A second career minister, he graduated from Marquette University Law School in 1973 and from seminary in 2006. Rev. Szymanski is a member of the Congregational Retreat Society, the Wisconsin Congregational Association, and the International Congregational Fellowship. In 2012 and 2016, he preached at the Minister's Classical Retreats.

fears? Our reluctances? What is our own resurrection? As spouses, parents, pastors, employees, and God's children, what are our roles? What do we do? And what don't we do? What does Jesus do in our lives? And what doesn't he do? Where are the rubs, the problems, the chafes in our lives? In our relationships?

In the time for prayer, Rev. Don Mullen recalled what Pentecost means for us, as the Holy Spirit's time for vision, for dreams to come true, a time to awaken. A time for individual gifts to flourish with God's power. A time for churches to be unleashed.

(Group photo, left to right) Rev. Dan Vellinga, Rev. Wendy Van Tassell, Sharon Higgins, Shirley Coy, Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Miriam Bryant, Margery Briggs, Constance Hellam, Rev. Dr. Robert Hellam, Bernadette Butler, Rev. Donald Mullen, and Rev. Dr. Barry Szymanski gather outside the Spiritual Ministry Center.

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The Business OF SAN DIEGO

NACCC 64TH ANNUAL MEETING

*But you will receive
power when the
Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses
in Jerusalem, and in
all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.*

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

This past June, over 200 people gathered in fellowship at San Diego's Mission Valley Marriott. The 64th Annual Meeting & Conference of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) was a reminder that, as followers of Christ, we can witness our faith to the world around us through our words and actions.

The idea that, through faith in Christ, we are unleashed to pay witness to God's love surged like an electric current through every aspect of the meeting and conference, energizing speakers, workshop presenters, NACCC leadership and attendees alike.

The conference came together from the creativity, and hard work of many, including the NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference Planning Committee and the hosts, the California and Western States (CAL/WEST) Association of Congregational Churches. A total of 96 churches from 23 states were represented at the event.

The meeting is NACCC's opportunity to share with member churches its goals and achievements in the past year and to take care of the business of the Association.

In particular, the Reverend Dr. Michael Chittum, Executive Director, presented the new NACCC Mission Statement, which describes what the Association does, and Vision Statement, which describes what the Association aspires to achieve. During the business meeting, the Board of Directors approved the adoption of the proposed Mission Statement and Vision Statement:

NACCC Mission Statement

*To nurture fellowship among
Congregational Christian
Churches and to support
ministries of the local church in
its community and to
the world, all in the name
of Christ.*

NACCC Vision Statement

*Vital and healthy Congregational
churches, sharing the love of
Jesus the Christ.*

The Vision Task Team, under the auspices of the Association's Leadership Council, met this past May to produce the new Mission and Vision statements.



Capturing the essence of the NACCC

The NACCC Board of Governors also shared its Case for Support, a seven-page document prepared by the Board and Debra Fulton, Director of Development and Communications. The Case for Support was developed to communicate to donors, leadership, member churches and other constituents the NACCC's history, mission member church services and the importance of donor support. It helps Year Round Delegates and other liaisons to the NACCC discuss the significance of the Association's role and responsibility to its member churches. The Case for Support will serve as the guide in creating more specific, targeted brochures and flyers which will be used in presentations and solicitations.

Mission to serve

Over the last fiscal year, the Mission and Outreach Ministry Council provided over \$57,250 to NACCC-supported missions and facilitated pass-through donations of almost \$44,704 from NACCC member churches and individual donors. This year's One Great Hour of Sharing raised \$138,471. The money was sent as disaster relief to Texas and Florida, which were still reeling from Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma, respectively, as well as Puerto Rico, still struggling to recover from Hurricane Maria.

Michael Chittum, Executive Director

Performers from First Samoan Congregational Christian Church



MEETING & CONFERENCE



Sole Hope brings hearts and hands together

Thousands of children in Uganda suffer from a crippling foot parasite called jiggers. Annual Meeting and Conference attendees joined National Association of Pilgrim Fellowship (NAPF) and Heritage of Pilgrim Endeavor (HOPE) to turn old jeans into life-saving shoes. The Sole Hope Shoe Party was this year's all-conference mission project. Working side-by-side, folks of all ages cut out 213 pairs of denim uppers for shoes. Later, NAPF/HOPE cut out an addition 101 pairs. In addition, \$3,235 to cover the cost of shipping the shoes to Uganda and to pay for the local assembly and distribution of the shoes. Special thanks go to Sharon Jenks, North Congregational Church in Farmington Hills, Minnesota, for personally delivering the pre-cut denim shoe uppers to the Sole Hope organization in North Carolina.



Jim Larson and Jodee Lord took their shoe cutting seriously.

Music in the air

The challenge of the NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference is to take advantage of all it has to offer – from the Bible Lecture and Congregational Lecture to the powerful workshops, receptions, encounters with representatives from NACCC-supported international and U.S. missions, hymn sings, and so much more. Despite the jam-packed agenda, attendees at the San Diego conference were treated to three, engaging musical performances.

San Diego is home to the First Samoan Congregational Christian Church, established in 1955 by military families of Samoan descent. On Saturday evening, members of the Samoan congregation presented "Samoa, A Journey of Culture and Faith," which combined traditional music and dance to tell their story of culture and devotion to Christ.



Members of the San Diego Concert Band

and professional skills. The students performed an energetic program of ethnic dance.

The 64th Annual Meeting & Conference ended with great fanfare – literally – when the San Diego Concert Band, under the baton of Director Roy Anthony, Jr., took the stage. The 70-piece band brought the crowd to its feet with stirring renditions of patriotic favorites from the American songbook.



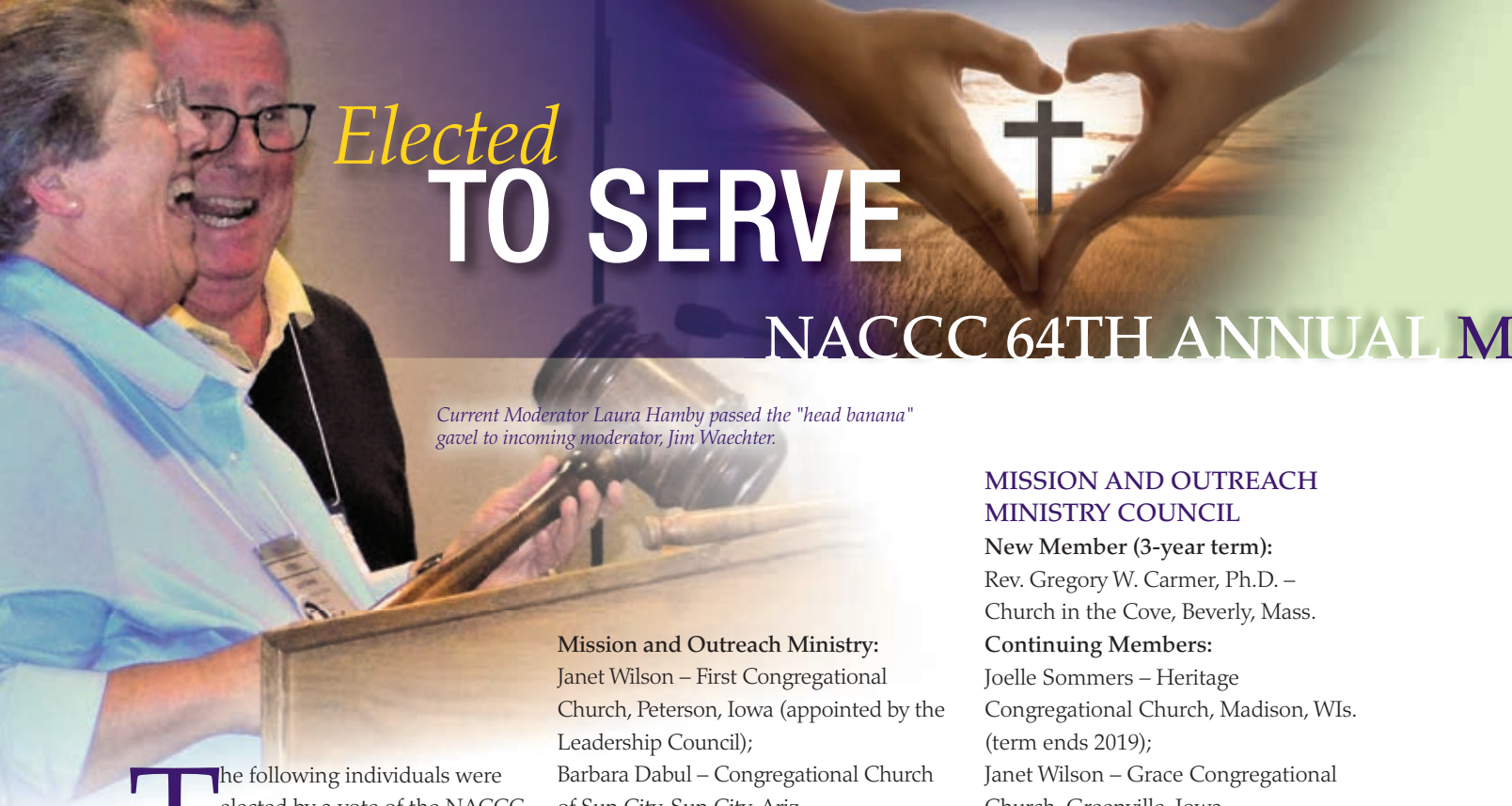
Students from Panamerican Institute showed their Mexican dance skills.

The following evening's entertainment offered a troupe of young teenage boys and girls from the NACCC-supported Panamerican Institute in Tijuana, Mexico. The fully accredited technical secondary school provides academic education as well as job training. The teaching staff is composed, primarily, of Institute graduates who volunteer their time

Three Churches Join NACCC

The 64th Annual Meeting and Conference welcomed new members to the NACCC:

- *Cheney Congregational Church, Cheney, Washington*
- *Gate of Heaven International Worship Center, Westville, New Jersey*
- *St. Paul's Liberty Ridge Church, Lancaster, Wisconsin*



Elected

TO SERVE

NACCC 64TH ANNUAL M

Current Moderator Laura Hamby passed the "head banana" gavel to incoming moderator, Jim Waechter.

The following individuals were elected by a vote of the NACCC member church delegates: or subsequently appointed to open/vacated positions.

Moderator (2-year term):

James Waechter –Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY

Vice Moderator (2-year term):

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bacon Hammer – Heritage Congregational Church, Madison, Wis.

Secretary (1-year term):

Judy Campbell – North Congregational Church, Farmington Hills, Mich.

Treasurer (1-year term): Jeffrey H.

Dillon –Faith Community Church, Franklin, Wis.

Historian (1-year-term): Rev. William C. Lange – First Congregational Church of Detroit, Detroit, Mich.

MINISTRY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES SERVING ON THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

(1-year terms)

Growth Ministry:

Mary Prendergast—Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif.; Pastor Carol Taylor – United Church of Beloit, Beloit, Wis.

Mission and Outreach Ministry:

Janet Wilson – First Congregational Church, Peterson, Iowa (appointed by the Leadership Council);

Barbara Dabul – Congregational Church of Sun City, Sun City, Ariz.

Vitality Ministry: Rev. Justin Nierer–

Sandstone Congregational Church, Jackson, Mich. (appointed by the Leadership Council);

Rev. Dr. Irvan A. Gammon – Florence Congregational Church, Florence, Mass.

Youth Representative

(1-year term): Patrick Stewart – Lamoille Congregational Community Church, Marshalltown, Iowa

GROWTH MINISTRY COUNCIL

New Council Member

(3-year term):

Rev. Dr. Patrick F. Hunt – Heritage Congregational Church, Berea, Ohio

Continuing Members:

Pastor Carol P. Taylor –United Congregational Church of Beloit, Beloit, Wis. (term ends 2019);

Curt Schmidt – Congregational Church of Bound Brook, Bound Brook, N.J. (term ends 2019);

Rev. Dr. John Tamilio III– Congregational Church of Canton, Canton, Mass. (term ends 2020);

Mary Prendergast – Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif. (term ends 2020).

MISSION AND OUTREACH MINISTRY COUNCIL

New Member (3-year term):

Rev. Gregory W. Carmer, Ph.D. – Church in the Cove, Beverly, Mass.

Continuing Members:

Joelle Sommers – Heritage Congregational Church, Madison, WIs. (term ends 2019);

Janet Wilson – Grace Congregational Church, Greenville, Iowa (term ends 2019);

Barbara Dabul – Congregational Church of Sun City, Sun City, Ariz. (term ends 2020);

Rev. Jamie Bonnema – Maple Hill Community Congregational Church, Maple Hill, Kan. (term ends 2020)

VITALITY MINISTRY COUNCIL

New Member (3-year term):

Rev. Ian Macdonald, M.Div. – New Church Sherman Oaks, Sherman Oaks, Calif.

Continuing Members:

Rev. Dr. Irvan A. Gammon – Florence Congregational Church, Florence, Mass. (term ends 2019);

Rev. Doug Gray – First Church of Squantum, Quincy, Mass. (term ends 2019);

Rev. Sarah Gladstone – First Congregational Church, Saugatuck, Mich. (term ends 2020);

Rev. Justin Nierer – Sandstone Congregational Church, Jackson, Mich. (term ends 2020)

Phil Jackson (right) and Justin Nierer (right)



Joy Eng-Matos

Sherry Glab

Carrie Dahm

Shirley and Laura Hamby



Linda Miller and Sharon Higgins

MEETING & CONFERENCE

ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:

Member At-Large (3-year term):
Rev. Arthur Ritter --Meadowbrook Congregational Church, Novi, Mich.

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Board of Directors (4-year term):
Jodee Lord, Oakwood Heights Community Church, Staten Island, NY

Congregational Foundation Representative (1-year term):
Rev. Ashley Cleere – Methodist Congregational Federated Church, Demorest, Ga.

Continuing Members:
Miriam Bryant – First Congregational Church, Marshalltown, Iowa (term ends 2019);
Rev. Dr. Donald Olsen – Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita, Kan. (term ends 2020); Rev. Dr. Marty Hall – North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, Wis. (term ends 2021)

Time for Accolades

A high point of the NACCC Annual Meeting is the presentation of awards to men and women who have distinguished themselves in their commitment to Congregationalism and their faith.

The Vitality Ministry Council presented the Harry R. Butman Award the Reverend Phil Jackson, Senior Minister at First Congregational Church of Yarmouth, Yarmouth, Massachusetts. The award acknowledges a minister with at least 10 years of service in an NACCC

Church who demonstrates a personal commitment to Congregationalism.

The Reverend Joy Eng-Matos was awarded the Charles Rush Award. The Award is given to a minority person working toward worthwhile social and personal goals and who exemplifies the excellent spirit of the Reverend Rush. Eng-Matos is Senior Minister of New Day Quincy, a new church which partners with Quincy's Asian Resources, Inc. to serve the special needs of an ethnically diverse neighborhood.

A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to Linda Miller, Missions Coordinator and State & Regional Associations Liaison for the NACCC, for "11 years of loving service." Linda will be retiring at the end of the year. Well known for her enthusiastic support of the international and domestic missions supported by NACCC, Linda keeps member churches informed through her newsletter.

The Board of Directors presented a Citation for Outstanding Leadership to Sherry Glab, a member of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Pomona, California, for her services to NACCC. Over the years, Glab has served as moderator, member of the Executive Committee, and parliamentarian. She was also noted for her many contributions to the Pomona community and Pilgrim Congregational Church.

Laura Hamby, a member of the Congregational Church of Soquel, California, received a Certificate of

Appreciation for her leadership during the last four years, including two years as moderator and two years as vice moderator. She was thanked for her leadership, enthusiasm for the Congregational Way, and her role in the planning and facilitation of NACCC's Annual Meeting & Conference.

Shirley Linden, a member of First Congregational Church of Redlands, California, was recognized for her hard work and creativity as Chair of the 64th Annual Meeting and Conference Host Committee, which included Rev. Dr. Lowell Linden, Rev. Alicia Riedy and Rev. Dr. Jim Schibsted. Carrie Dahm, NACCC Assistant to Executive Director and Meeting Planner, was recognized for handling the registration, facilities planning and arrangements, logistics, and details for the event.



AWAKENINGS

in Congregational History,

AT THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF MARSHALLTOWN, IOWA

by Charles Packer



*Eric Elnes,
keynote speaker*

The Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States were profound movements that generated heightened religious fervor, emphasis on individual spirituality, and concern with personal morality. Marked by periods of revivalism, the Great Awakenings impacted the course of many established traditions, including Congregationalism. Congregationalists responded to the Awakenings in different ways, with embrace and critique.

**Awakenings Congregational
Symposium is October 11-13
at First Congregational Church
in Marshalltown, Iowa.**

Papers and presentations cover the influence of the Great Awakenings on Congregationalism, Congregationalism's engagement with these movements, and the potential emergence of a new Awakening in the 21st century. Pastors, scholars, and students of the Awakenings will gather to appreciate these chapters in Congregationalism's history and envision possibilities for its future.

The Reverend. Eric Elnes, Ph.D., keynote speaker, is a biblical scholar and a leading spokesperson for Convergence Christianity. He is senior minister of Countryside Community Church (UCC) in Omaha -- a partner in the Tri-Faith Initiative, in which a synagogue, church, and mosque are co-locating in a shared, 35-acre common space. Elnes has authored several works about the 21st century church, most recently, *Gifts of the Dark Wood: Seven Blessings for Spiritual Skeptics (and Other Wanderers)*. Elnes' keynote address is "Can You Hear Me Now? 5G Faith in a Pluralistic World," which takes on the notion of Christian exclusivism founded in a particular interpretation of John 14:6 ('I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'). Elnes offers a different interpretation that "opens up new possibilities for bridging the divides between Christians and between Christianity and other faiths." He will also lead a workshop on postmodern worship, "Incarnational Worship for the 21st Century."

Papers will be presented in three broad categories: Awakenings in History, Awakenings in Spirit, and Awakening to New Dreams.

Awakenings in History will consider the historic Awakenings and how they challenged and changed Congregationalism. The Reverend Norm Erlendson, M.A. in History and M.A. in Theology and Ethics, will examine "the spiritual vitality of New England churches and society before and after the Great Awakening," asking the question, "greatly awakened from what?"

Looking at the diversity of reactions within Congregationalism to the First Great Awakening, the Reverend Emily Miller-Todd will offer "An Analysis of Congregational Clergy and Congregant Responses During the First Great Awakening," drawing from historical materials to illuminate how this period produced great "polarization and change in Christian experience and expression." Miller-Todd is associate pastor of the First Congregational Church of Anaheim, California.

Traveling farthest to take part in the symposium, Gwilym Tudur will argue that Jonathan Edwards, the chief Congregationalist theologian of the First Great Awakening in America, had a dynamic influence on the trajectory of Welsh Congregational theology through the theological writings of Edward Williams of Rotherham in his paper, "The Theology of the Great Awakening in America and Wales: Jonathan Edwards' Influence on Edward Williams of Rotherham." Tudur is a candidate for the ministry for the Union of Welsh Independents in Wales, UK, and is pursuing theology at Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford.

The second set of papers, "Awakenings

Spirituality, and Vision



Emily Miller-Todd,
presenter



Mary Biedron,
presenter



Wendy Van Tassell,
presenter



Jacob Poindexter,
presenter



Gwilym Tudur,
presenter



Norm Erlendson,
presenter



Cynthia Bacon
Hammer, presenter



Rev. Daniel Vellinga, host

in Spirit," will explore historic and contemporary ways in which new forms of worship, spiritual practice, and music result from periods of religious intensity such as the Great Awakenings. The Reverend Dr. Cynthia Bacon Hammer questions whether the Church is at the beginning of a spiritual awakening in her work, "Mutuality, Integration, and Collaboration: A Spiritual Awakening for the 21st Century." Bacon Hammer writes, "In the form of mission work, both locally and abroad, as well as use of the prophetic imagination and intergenerational focus, the church is being molded into a new reality." She has served the Heritage Congregational Church in Madison,

Wisconsin, for 16 years and is active in the leadership of the Wisconsin Congregational Association.

The Reverend Wendy G. Van Tassell, graduate of the Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and co-pastor of the First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, will present her paper, "Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord: Awakening Perception of God in the 21st Century." Van Tassell asks, "In a world where we are constantly bombarded by stimulating images... how can we reclaim a way of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and knowing that awakens us to God's spirit and presence?" She will "provide some practical ways to invite God's people into a deeper relationship with God, with others, and themselves."

The third and final section, "Awakening to New Dreams," will investigate how Congregationalism is uniquely poised to re-imagine Church in a number of ways in the 21st century context. The Reverend Dr. Mary E. Biedron, senior minister of North Congregational Church in Farmington Hills, Michigan, will suggest helpful ways in which churches of the Congregational

Way might do intentional preparation for important decision-making in her paper, "New Paths for Discernment in the Congregational Tradition." Biedron's work has been the focus of retreats, workshops, and programs throughout the country.

"The Environment of Awakening: Dream Incubation, Spiritual Maturation, and the Local Church" is a paper by the Reverend Dr. Charles A. Packer, affirming the capacity of the local church to create contexts in which spiritual awakenings might take place and calls to service and ministry might be nurtured. Drawing on ancient and contemporary sources, Packer proposes that Congregationalism's emphasis on the primacy of the local church situates the tradition in a healthy place to encourage awakening to both general and particularly Christian vocation. Packer is Dean of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS); Senior Minister of the Pine Hill Congregational Church in West Bloomfield, Michigan; Adjunct Professor at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit; and Chaplain-Director of the Congregational Retreat Society.

Continued>

AWAKENINGS

CONTINUED

in Congregational History, Spirituality, and Vision



Charles Packer, presenter

In the concluding paper of the Symposium, "Learning to Imagine and Move," the Reverend Jacob Poindexter states that, "Dreams become reality through faithful practice and communal action . . . we do not maintain final control of what is created or transformed, we do participate in the dreaming mission of God." Poindexter maintains that learning how to dream within community leads to acting in community. Poindexter, senior minister of the First Congregational Church of Anchorage, Alaska, is a recent graduate of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, with a Master of Divinity, and the CFTS program. In addition to Poindexter, presenters Bacon Hammer, Biedron, Miller-Todd, Packer, and Van Tassell are all former Fellows of CFTS.

The Reverend Daniel Vellinga and the people of the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, gracious hosts for the symposium, are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the church. In addition to the presentations, there will be opportunities for small group discussion and conversation with the speakers; prayer and worship; meals together; a reception at the historic

Mowry House; and a musical concert.

Reduced rates for lodging have been secured at the Baymont Inn and Suites and Best Western Regency Inn in Marshalltown. The cost for meals and registration is \$130 for early registration through September 10, and \$150 thereafter. Limited transportation is available to and from the airport if indicated on the registration forms. Forms along with the Awakenings Symposium brochure are available on the NACCC website by clicking on the "Now Trending" icon and scrolling down.

All are invited to come to the heartland October 11-13, 2018 and be awakened to the best of hospitality, scholarship, and spiritual vitality among the churches of the Congregational Way!

The Awakenings Symposium Planning Committee thanks the Iowa-Nebraska Association of Congregational Christian Churches, the Michigan Conference of Congregational Christian Churches, and the Fellowship of Northeast Congregational Christian Churches for their support of this gathering.

For more information, please contact
Rev. Dr. Charles Packer
at drcapacker@gmail.com.

**Awakenings Congregational Symposium is October 11-13
at First Congregational Church in Marshalltown, Iowa.**

Necrology 2018



REV. THOMAS V. HEATHER

The Reverend Thomas Heather, age 81, died at home on March 17, 2018. A native of Naperville, Illinois, he attended North Central College and Evangelical Theological Seminary in Naperville. While a seminary student in the 1960s, he briefly participated in the Civil Rights demonstrations in Selma, Alabama. He later helped with voter registration in Mississippi.

Heather enlisted in the U.S. Army where he was trained as a linguist but spent most of his tour of duty in Germany where he played for the Army's basketball team.

He finished college following the Army and entered seminary, becoming ordained as a minister in the United Methodist Church. In 1966 he entered the Air Force as a chaplain, retiring in 1993. He and wife Cynthia moved many times to bases both stateside and overseas. They have two children and three grandchildren.

Beginning in 1993, Heather was pastor of Central Congregational Church, Galesburg, Illinois, for five years, followed by five years as Cottage Hospital Chaplain.

Donations may be made to International Rescue Committee and Doctors Without Borders.



REV. DR. GARD LINWOOD ROWE

The Reverend Dr. Gard Rowe died on July 14, 2018, at age 96. He graduated from the New England School of Theology and Andover-Newton Theological School and earned his doctorate at Drew Divinity School.

Rowe served churches in Whitman and Lynn, Massachusetts, and in Monson, Maine. He then followed pastorates at the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Richmond Hills, Queens, the Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church in Brooklyn, and the Point Lookout Community Church in Long Island, NY. His final pastorate was at Oakwood Heights Congregational Church on Staten Island. Ordained by the Advent Christian denomination in 1945, Rowe served churches within the United Church of Christ and the National Association of Congregational Churches for most of his life. Throughout his pastoral ministry Rowe maintained a strong commitment to social justice, especially in the areas of civil rights, peace, and the needs of the poor. In 1965, he participated in the Selma to Montgomery march. He worked tirelessly in ecumenical and interfaith circles to build bridges with Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.

Rowe and his late wife Astrid have four children, six grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Memorial gifts may be made to Friends of Christ in India, 1045 Old Academy Road, Fairfield, Conn. 06824; Pilgrim Congregational Church, 102-35 89 Avenue, Richmond Hill NY 11418; or the Norwegian Christian Home, 1250 67th Street, Brooklyn NY 11219.

Letters TO THE EDITOR

Just had to tell you how much I enjoyed the article "Strangers and Pilgrims" in this month's issue of The Congregationalist. Of course we feel a special affinity toward Harry Butman here for reasons obvious. In all the years, and after all the stories I have heard about this iconic figure, I never before heard mention of the phrase "Odium Theologicum." Oh my – I thought I might split a side laughing over that. And then, it dawned on me that the moniker is even more fitting today than 40 years ago when Harry penned it. Thanks for making my day!

James F. Mellichamp, Mus. Doc.
President Piedmont College

I commend you for publishing two articles that address "root causes." "Take Heed" expresses exactly what I observed twenty years ago when I was first introduced to the NACCC. "What is a Congregational Church?" addresses the same concern when it asks "If 'Congregational' can mean virtually everything, does it mean anything? In Derry, NH, 15 +/- years ago, someone bravely asked us "Are we who we say we are?"

W. David Thomas, Kingston, NH

1st Congregational Church of Crown Point



Pastoral Vacancy
*This is an opportunity to pastor
this Adirondack Faith Community.*

CONTACT COREY JAMES
PO Box 532 CROWN POINT NY 12928

"Come Journey with Us into the Future"

Picture of Health: CHURCH VITALITY

“UNLEASHED,”

the theme of the 64th Annual Meeting & Conference, was interpreted in many ways during the event, but a single leitmotif could be heard within the diverse workshops – a healthy church has God’s Word at its foundation. In the flurry to reinvent our churches, attract people to our services, and communicate to a younger audience it is easy to lose sight of our goal as Christians – to serve as witness to God’s love made manifest by Jesus Christ.

And let it begin with me . . .

Peacemaking was the subject of Sister LaVern Olberding’s workshop, sponsored by the Washington Gladden Society. Sister LaVern, member of the Peace Resource Center of San Diego, pointed out that the directions for peacemaking are in the Scriptures. Most significantly, Jesus taught us to change ourselves, not others. The quest for peace requires Christians turn inward and work on

themselves first. We are created in God’s image, but do we reflect the face of God to the world? Are we witnessing to God’s limitless love in our relationships with our neighbors? We disconnect from God when we try to separate what we think about the world from what is happening in the world. Sister LaVern suggested that it is when our thinking impacts what’s happening that we can stop judging, begin forgiving and give permission for healing. “We have all the love of the Triune God,” said Sister LaVern. “The Triune God is always with us, a truth beyond one’s own perception . . . We must tell ourselves, ‘I am already wired for everything I need.’”

A church model for the 21st century

The concept of *bless and add* is dramatically changing the way today’s churches approach growth. Workshop presenter, the Reverend Dr. Mark McAnlis, is a true believer. Pastor at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin, McAnlis explained that the *bless and add* approach encourages church leaders to “bless traditional churches, their beauty, liturgy, hymns and reverence,” while recognizing the change in our communities and the different needs of younger generations. Cherish traditional worship, while considering what an alternative service for new generations might look like. McAnlis advised that, above all else, remember that God is in charge. He encouraged his audience to be unleashed -- “release ourselves from our epistemology to embrace relationships with the Triune God.”

“It isn’t the Congregational Way that draws people into the church,” McAnlis said, “it’s the belief in Christ.”

McAnlis offered the ministry of Rufus Anderson as a lesson for today’s churches. A Congregational missionary toward the end of the 19th century, Anderson believed that “missions are instituted for the spread of a scriptural self-propagating Christianity.” Anderson established churches around the world by creating core groups of believers, organizing them into churches, providing them with a local ministry, and leading them to independence and self-propagation. McAnlis noted that the apostle Paul did essentially the same thing in the first century.

McAnlis advised church leaders to identify, support and encourage church members who can relate to younger folks and have a mission to reach out to peers in the community. “Give them the tools they need to facilitate their ideas and get out of their way,” said McAnlis.

Church without Walls

Christ told his disciples they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. God’s love has no boundaries. According



Mark McAnlis digs deeper into church growth



Sister LaVern discusses peacemaking

rooted in God

to the Reverend Dawn Carlson and the Reverend Ian Macdonald, neither does church.

Carlson is the force behind Phoenix Congregational Fellowship, which uses a web site and Facebook to reach followers with Christ's message. Sermons, prayers, and other resources are easily accessible to anyone anywhere. Macdonald is pastor of New Church Sherman Oaks, an online home church. He live streams a worship service from his backyard every Sunday.

Carlson takes her ministry, a Christian fellowship without walls, across the country through the Phoenix Congregational Fellowship Facebook page -- facebook.com/ThePhoenixFellowship. She said the Phoenix is especially designed for people "who don't have a Congregational church nearby, have scheduling issues, have been hurt by a church, or otherwise seek a worship experience beyond the traditional."

Macdonald said New Church "spreads God's love across the internet." Virtual worship services are broadcast live and archived at www.newchurchshermanoaks.org.

The workshop was sponsored by the NACCC Growth Ministry Council, which is working to provide member churches with the tools they need to revitalize. "To create a healthy church, we must take it from where it currently is to where God wants it to be," said Carlson. Macdonald added that we must reframe our thinking, reminding his audience that Jesus went to the people.

Preaching on the edge of a cliff

In her workshop, the Reverend Dawn

Carlson said that church revitalization requires bold preaching. The Reverend Dr. Brett Younger voiced a similar



Dawn Carlson and Ian Macdonald discuss church revitalization

sentiment during his presentation, "Prophetic Preaching." Younger, who is senior minister at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, encouraged ministers to step out of their comfort zone. "How can preachers preach the truth," he asked, "without commenting on what's going on in the world?" It's a difficult question in our politically and religiously polarized society. Younger acknowledged that simply preaching the word of Christ can be perceived as political by some church members. He warned, however, that not referencing what's going on in the world could make it look like you're "asleep in the pulpit."

"Ministers who don't say what they believe to be true, based on their understanding of Scripture, essentially tell their congregation that the Gospels have nothing to say in today's world," said Younger. Younger challenged ministers to be unleashed -- to love God and their congregation enough



Dr. Brett Younger talks prophetic preaching

to figure out how to take chances. "If a minister is exactly where the congregation is then he or she isn't doing his or her job," he added. Younger did not suggest that ministers preach politics. Younger's message is that ministers have a responsibility to approach Scripture honestly: "Above all, ministers must approach current issues with humility and no political agenda," he said. "If you're unable to see how faith speaks to the question, then you're just offering an opinion."

The Reverend Dr. Elizabeth Bingham, a member of the audience, offered this suggestion: "Get to the underpinnings of where God and the Gospels are resting before addressing an issue."

The Reverend Dr. Younger will be the Bible Lecturer at the NACCC 65th Annual Meeting and Conference next June in Cleveland, Ohio.

Communicating with our neighbors

Combined, Christianity and Islam represent over 50% of the world's current population. For that reason alone, understanding between the two faiths is vital to peace on earth. The Reverend Joel Boyd, who presented "Approaching

Continued>

Picture of Health: CHURCH VITALITY

Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Local Church”, has been involved in interfaith dialogue in Milwaukee for two years, collaborating with Imam Noman Hussain of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee (ISM). Boyd’s interfaith dialogue has been both one-on-one with Imam Noman and on a group level between ISM and St. Jacobi Congregational Church in Richfield where he was pastor. Boyd deepened his understanding of the issue during an intercultural immersion trip to the Sultanate of Oman, where he focused on Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue in the Middle East.

Boyd believes we are called to live in relationship with all people, and said interfaith experiences help us see more of the humanity in one another. He offered suggestions to approaching interfaith dialogue with our Muslim neighbors, beginning with prayer. Churches should, for example, consider the challenges they will face in trying to develop such a relationship and set ground rules for dialogue. He recommended that Christians approach their Muslim neighbors

with love, adding that people must get to know each other to determine what kind of dialogue is acceptable. “The dialogue will end if your Muslim contact senses you have an agenda to convert him to Christianity,” Boyd cautioned.

Communicating effectively with other members of the community was the topic of “Communicating Across Cultural, Socio-Economic Lines,” presented by the Reverend Dr. Patrick F. Hunt, pastor at Heritage Congregational Church in Berea.

“Often, we misunderstand the words and actions of people who live in a very different cultural context from us,” said Hunt. “This misunderstanding happens because we use words and actions coming from our own cultural understanding and impose that understanding upon people whose experience teaches them that our words and actions have a different meaning.”

The orientation to the word *future*, for example, might be very different depending on which of three socio-economic cultures -- poverty, middle class, and wealth – an individual belongs. In an impoverished culture, future is what happens today. That individual’s orientation says, “it is difficult to talk about going to college when I am not sure whether I will survive today.”

Hunt said the middle class is future-focused in planning for career, education, business and so on. In wealth, however, family tradition and history are more likely to determine who we are or what we do.

Hunt explained that problems encountered in poverty are interlocking. If one doesn’t have a reliable car, then

he must rely on someone else to get him to where he needs to go. That makes the individual dependent upon the availability of someone else, which, in turn, leads to another set of problems. Therefore, in poverty relationships are key. In the middle class, the individual has the resources to overcome a problem without becoming dependent and is better able to contain it.

Using the same words in different cultural contexts may result in misunderstanding. To establish effective communications with all members of our community, Hunt encouraged his audience to learn how to communicate with those whose cultural, social, and economic orientation and context are different from our own. He cited two sources for his presentation: First Responder Edition of *Tactical Communication: Mastering effective interactions with citizens from diverse economic backgrounds* by Jodi R. Pfarr, and the Third Edition of *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World*, by Philip E. DeVol.



Patrick Hunt encourage cross-cultural communications

Boyd was recently called to pastor First Congregational Church, Marshfield, Mass.



rooted in God CONTINUED

Three churches take different paths to success

With a healthy church as the shared vision, three ministers discussed successes at their home churches, which range in size from small to medium to large. The Reverend Ron Toliver, First Congregational Church, Toulon, Illinois; the Reverend Jacob Poindexter, First Congregational Church, Anchorage, Alaska; and the Reverend Erica Cooper, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York comprised the panel.

Small

The Reverend Toliver described ways in which his small congregation is reimagining and refocusing on the reenergizing of First Congregational Church in Toulon. The community, with a population just over 1,200, is very rural. Church initiatives build community within and outside church walls.

For example, to build relationships, church members open their homes and host dinner for others in the congregation. People enjoy the fellowship and informality of these get-togethers and the hospitality offered by the host.

Other activities reach out to the community, with the Toulon church becoming a gathering place for its neighbors. During "Trunk or Treat," volunteers from the congregation decorate their vehicles for Halloween and park them adjacent to the church. Along with candy, they hand out information regarding First Congregational Church. Trick or treaters, typically numbering 200, are then invited inside the church for hot dogs, chips and treats. Toliver said that this safe and family-oriented event has

changed the way the town approaches trick or treating. The community is also welcome to the church's quarterly Family Fun Night, which features games of all types and a pizza supper. Toulon Night Out (based on the National Night Out) is another open-door event with family games, prizes and treats.

The Christmas Tour at First Congregational Church is a ticketed event involving a sit-down meal and display of creches. Toliver said First Congregational Church joins the local Baptist and Methodist churches at Christmas to provide gift baskets for people in need. They purchase enough food and hygiene products to last a family for a week.

That First Congregational Church has embraced both congregation and community is apparent in its new logo, "A place for you."



A PLACE FOR YOU

Medium

In his first year at First Congregational Church in Anchorage, the Reverend Jacob Poindexter took stock of the creativity that members of his congregation brought to the table and helped them find ways to connect that creativity to the needs of the church.

"We meet Thursday mornings to brainstorm ideas," said Poindexter.

The first batch came up with ideas for knitting prayer shawls, creating new member bags, and knitting chemo caps for the hospital. The second wave of meetings decided to deliver prayer shawls on pastoral visits, make blankets for the hospital's Neonatal Care Unit, craft quilted prayer mats, and hold a book sale in the church basement. One of the church members built bookshelves for the sale, which is especially designed for non-members who use the church facility. Another member, who is a scroll-saw artist, creates puzzles that visiting children can take home. Poindexter said members are considering ways provide quicker response to community requests for space and make space more affordable.

Creative ideas from the congregation have helped First Congregational Church join the larger community. The church invited the public to attend a concert of nine cellists and has also presented recorder groups. Poindexter said the congregation also participates in the National Day of Prayer event sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Anchorage and collaborates with other churches for the Poor People's Campaign, opening the facility for a meal program.

The local Native American legend of Raven Wisdom, explained Poindexter, teaches that we should be willing to take risks and connect with the Spirit.

Large

The Reverend Erica Cooper, assistant minister at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, said her church is guided by its ministry of philoxenia -- love of the stranger. This is especially relevant

Continued>

Picture of Health: CHURCH VITALITY

in New York, where 37 percent of the population was born in another country and less than 35 percent are Christians.

Cooper said that Plymouth Church has a focus on making new people feel welcome. She uses the term “newcomers” to mean anyone new to the church within the past two years, because the words “guest” and “visitor” suggest a temporary situation. She noted that Plymouth Church focuses outward, recommending that all congregations view their church from the outside in and try to understand why newcomers enter your doors and what makes them stay.

Cooper encouraged church leaders to assess their Sunday morning experience, because most newcomers decide whether they like a church within seven minutes of stepping onto the property. Signage; condition of the building; the pre-service atmosphere created by ushers, greeters, and ministers; quality of the worship service (even the sound system), and post-worship atmosphere all impact the overall experience. She noted that worship at Plymouth Church emphasizes God’s love, grace, and peace. An open

communion table helps communicate the message that everyone is welcome.

Plymouth Church has a process for gathering information on, following up with, and tracking newcomers, and uses tracking software to create a database. Newcomers are immediately invited to a meet-up or small group get-together. “We recently hosted a cocktail party for newcomers and 100 people attended,” said Cooper.

So, what does a healthy church look like?

According to Dr. Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Healthy Churches in Nashville, a healthy church is a community of Jesus followers with a shared vision, thriving ministry and trusted leadership. The church doesn’t stagnate but finds and follows a sense of calling into the future. To cultivate a healthy church, leaders must be, in his words, “unapologetically and radically congregational, engaging the people who make up the congregation.”

Wilson described the typical lifecycle of a church, which, beginning with a level

of high energy, grows in congregation and vitality as it develops shared beliefs and missional goals. The church reaches the point of peak performance, but a first sign of decline is when it becomes mired in nostalgia. Unchecked, the church is headed toward the end. “You can resurrect, but not resuscitate congregations,” Wilson warned.

Current statistics paint a bleak future. Wilson said two percent of churches per year are closing. If trends continue, churches will see up to a 45 percent closure rate in the next 25 years. Wilson said we have a choice in how we respond, “we can either be scared to death or scared to life.”

Wilson described a church equipped for the future as a congregation of Jesus followers who exhibit humility and spiritual brokenness and are open to God’s grace. Wilson said this type of congregation is “over being a club and ready to be the body of Christ,” putting spiritual issues first. Members of healthy churches model a servant spirit, cultivate spiritual dependence and practice spiritual discernment, growing more

Ron Toliver, Erica Cooper and Jacob Poindexter describe what works



rooted in God CONTINUED

indifferent to their own agenda and more interested in God's will.

Health comes when members share a clear vision and mission. Wilson recommended that church leaders focus most of their time and resources on becoming mission-centric if their churches are fuzzy about their reason for being. A clear sense of purpose is vital, as is accepting that your church can't be all things to all people.

Strength in numbers

The Reverend Lincoln Skinner believes our churches are challenged by fear of losing members, losing resources, offending others with the Gospel and change. That fear is compounded by the



Bill Wilson and Moderator Laura Hamby

increasing number of people with no religious affiliation. There is hope if we look to one another.

"As Congregationalists we are unleashed – free to adapt to the challenges as God's Word leads us and the Holy Spirit empowers us" said Skinner, senior minister of Oneonta Congregational Church in South Pasadena.

Skinner recommended that churches build a team with internal and external

resources. He advised church leaders to take advantage of the NACCC conflict resolution resources and seek out personal mentors and consultants from outside the church. Guidance is also available in books such as *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancy and *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen Covey.

Skinner recommended that the church prioritize its time, energy, and resources by developing a strategic plan as blueprint. Planning should consider the 80/20 principle: 20 percent of the actions will generate 80 percent of the results.

Skinner introduced three church models that are potential strategies for growth. In the Merger Model, two small churches combine to create one big church with all the benefits of greater income, larger congregation, more volunteers, and staff. There will likely be confusion over leadership, theology, and assets however. Under the Landlord Model, a church rents out portions of its campus to other churches. All churches retain their autonomy, and the relationship is simply an exchange of meeting space for income. The Parent Model emphasizes partnerships. Partner churches remain separate and autonomous from the Parent (host) church, while sharing ministries, meeting space, resources, finances, ideas, and volunteers with all churches on the campus.

To watch one of Lincoln's workshops, paste the following link in your browser: https://www.facebook.com/shares/view?id=10160548415330187&overlay=1¬if_id=1530053599685995¬if_t=story_reshare&ref=notif

Lincoln Skinner

NACCC as resource

Throughout the conference the NACCC presented workshops to build member awareness of Association benefits and opportunities for participation. Sessions covered topics such as tax preparation for ministers and church leaders, and how to organize a church group mission trip. The Congregational Retreat Society offered instruction and guided practice in prayer techniques, while the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies discussed the academic resources it provides for seminary student support and post-graduate grants. A workshop on devotional writing encouraged submissions for the Advent and Lent devotional booklets. In preparation for the anniversary of the Mayflower landing at Plymouth, a workshop offered a sneak preview of plans for the Plymouth 400 celebration.



Participants demonstrate their knowledge of early Congregationalists in preparation of Plymouth 400.

UNLEASHED *to Witness:* what's it take to bear witness

by Marianne King

Acts 1:8 -- the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit and unleashed to be Christ's disciples in the world, bearing witness to God's presence. In his three-part Bible Lecture at the 64th Annual Meeting & Conference, Dr. Terry Lindvall contemplated the varied nature of God's witnesses – unconvinced, unaware, unlikely, and unexpected.

Lindvall is ensconced (his word, not mine) in the C.S. Lewis Chair of Communication and Christian Thought at Virginia Wesleyan University. He is a prolific author, well-known for his explorations of humor and how it deepens our understanding of the Bible. The conference theme, Unleashed to Witness, refers as much to modern Christians as to Christ's disciples. Lindvall's lecture emphasized the flaws, the fears, and the humanity of biblical witnesses to suggest they weren't so different from the rest of us.

Those of us in the audience weren't with Christ in the upper room or struck blind like Paul. Most don't have first-hand experience of a miracle as did Sarah and Lazarus. But, if the idea of witnessing to God in the 21st century seems anachronistic, it is, Lindvall reminded, exactly what God commands us to do.

"Though we are not eye witnesses to Christ's ministry, God puts us in certain situations in which we see his power and promise," said Lindvall. Many of us feel that we don't have the biblical scholarship to be a credible witness. According to the late J. Hampton Keathley, III, "The goal is to investigate the facts of Scripture so one can see from the process of investigation presented in this study just what the Bible teaches us about how God exists."

But Lindvall reminded his audience that Jesus did not call us to be his advocates, defenders, or lawyers, but to bear personal witness to God's power in our own lives. As modern Christians, our goal is to try to find that Trinitarian power of witness.

In the beginning . . .

Lindvall launched his journey with the Torah and the prophets. At its start, the Torah introduces us to the significance of the witness. Even God is a witness, ready to testify against those who break his commandments. The consequences of breaking God's Law were so severe two witnesses were required to secure a conviction. Conversely, bearing false

witness made one liable to the same punishment as the accused.

We are comforted by Lindvall's point that God makes witnesses of the weak and sinful, old, and flawed members of His family. Noah was a drunk. Moses doubted. David was a murderer. And, yet, God chose them to experience His power.

The Gospel is full of disciples who doubt what they have seen. Apostle Thomas must place his finger in Christ's side to prove to himself that this man is the risen Lord. Peter sees Jesus walking on the waters, walks out to join him and sinks when he doubts his own eyes.

It is only later in the New Testament that the disciples come to accept their place as eyewitnesses: "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

Lindvall singled out Sarah, "mother of laughter," as a flawed but faithful witness. When God promises Sarah, already an old woman, that she will bear a son, she laughs from what might be fear or skepticism. . . or, as Lindvall suggested . . . a sense of humor. Sarah denies her

**Jim Schibsted greets
Terry Lindvall post-lecture**



laughter when rebuked by God. Yet she conceives a child by her faith and names him Isaac, which means "he laughs." Lindvall said that, like Sarah, we try to deny our doubts and cover up our uncertainties, becoming "witness to our own sins."

Many of the Bible's witnesses seem unlikely choices. Lindvall asked his audience to consider the woman at the well. Lindvall mused that a lot of action takes place at wells, which seem to be good places for biblical characters to find a wife. "Wells are like the pick-up bars and taverns of the Bible." In this story, the woman at the well is a Samaritan, a sinner, and an outcast, unlikely to even recognize Jesus. Yet the Samaritan woman becomes a passionate witness to the power of Jesus' love. Her testimony is even more effective among the others because it is so unexpected.

The blind man whose sight is healed by Jesus is another unlikely witness. Blind from birth and a well-known beggar, the blind man is an outcast among his own people. Once the blind man has regained his sight, he becomes almost unrecognizable to the townspeople. His witness to Jesus' healing is powerful.

The fact that the Samaritan woman doesn't recognize Jesus and the blind man can't see Jesus is significant. "Being a witness is confessing our ignorance," said Lindvall.

Not all witnesses described by Lindvall are human. Nature, too, serves as witness to God and the Hebrews. In his appeal to the children of Abraham, Moses calls on heaven and earth to serve as witnesses. Joshua places stones as witnesses to the children of Israel as they pass into Jericho and to help them find their way home. The Psalms use nature to communicate an awareness of God and to reveal God's glory, as in "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge." (Psalm 19:2)

Paul explained it thusly, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being

understood by the things that are made, even his Eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20)

Lindvall acknowledged nature's dark side, but called it essential to our understanding. He said we are witnesses to both aspects of creation – the glory of God and his majesty, as well as darkness and decay. Jonathan Edwards declared that God is revealed in both the Word and creation, with the terror of creation as important as an appreciation of its beauty.

God is in nature; nature is not God. Lindvall suggested we receive nature and animals as parables that allow us to contemplate human nature as reflected in the natural world. He offered a playful example from the writings of C.S. Lewis. An animal lover, Lewis made the observation that dogs and cats pray differently. Dogs, being humble, thank God for life, for food, for their masters. Cats, being Pharisees, thank God they're not dogs . . . or humans.

Christ's eyewitnesses

The Gospel gives us witness in four reports: some come from eyewitnesses; in others, people proclaim witness to each other. The Gospel of Mark is the earliest written account of Jesus' ministry, and Mark, according to Lindvall, provides himself as an eyewitness to Jesus. Mark is the young man in the Garden of Gethsemane, wearing nothing but a cloth, who follows Jesus. When the guards try to seize the young man he flees, naked, leaving only the cloth behind as testimony to his having been there.

Lindvall mentioned the Gospel of Matthew in passing, because it is a "retelling of Mark for a different audience."

In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist comes as a witness to testify to the light which is Christ: "The Word became flesh and lived among us." (John 14:7) It is in John's gospel, also, that Jesus tells his disciples that they are witnesses to God, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

Cerinthus, a contemporary of John

and a gnostic, was a well-known cynic regarding God's incarnation in the figure of Jesus. Cerinthus' controversial stand against John's testimony was popular with many. But Lindvall suggested that Cerinthus' skepticism may have goaded John into writing his gospel. After all, John was an eyewitness, unleashed by his first-hand experience of Easter and the resurrection to witness to Christ as the Word become flesh. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." (1 John 1:1)

Though Luke never met Christ, in the preface to his gospel he makes it clear to Theophilus that it is based on autopsies, the accounts of "eye witnesses and servants of the Word" from the beginning of Christ's life.

More than the writers of the other three gospels, Luke considers women to be trustworthy eye witnesses to Jesus from the very beginning -- the Magnificat of Mary -- to the three women at the empty tomb. In Luke's account of Easter, women are more active witnesses than men, recalling Jesus' words to them. Lindvall proposed that women are, after all, better at remembering the details.

Lindvall reminded his audience that witnesses see and remember the "pain and the suffering we know too well." The sufferings of Job and Rachel, the anguish in the Psalms and the passion of Christ remind us that, in Lindvall's words, "brokenness and humility are necessary to becoming a witness to God in Christ." He suggested that it was "his broken humanity that made C.S. Lewis into a credible eyewitness." Even Jesus humbles himself on the cross, crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Christ is alone, abandoned, and separated from God. At that moment, Christ recognizes that sin and death have separated all of us from God. Pain and suffering make us humble, and a humbled spirit is open to God's grace.

Continued>

UNLEASHED to Witness: what's it take to bear witness

CONTINUED

Or, as Lindvall put it, "that which would make us cry would yet make us rejoice."

Martyrdom as a witness to Christian faith

Lindvall's discussion of martyrs began at the beginning with the death of Stephen, the first martyr. Stephen's death was essential to the spread of the faith. It's significant that Stephen is simply an ordinary man who, filled with the love of God, would rather die than stop bearing witness to Christ. An approving bystander at Stephen's murder, Paul is transformed by his encounter with God on the road to Damascus and preaches all around the Aegean Sea and in Athens, witnessing to strange cultures. Peter, with the power given him by Christ, converts Jews and brings Christianity to Gentiles. The martyrdom of Peter and Paul could have dealt a fatal blow to the development of Christianity. Lindvall said that the persecution of Christians caused witnesses to disperse throughout the region, spreading Christianity even further.

As Christianity grows, martyrdom becomes a sign of the Holy Spirit at work. Polycarp, converted from Gnosticism and disciplined by the Apostle John, sought out martyrdom at age 86. St. Ignatius of Antioch, baptized by the Apostle John, wrote "to all churches" that he would die willingly for God and asked that no one interfere or show him "unseasonable kindness."

Lindvall recounted the story of St. Lawrence, a deacon of 258 A.D. Rome, under Emperor Valerian's edict that all Christians be killed, and their property confiscated. In defiance, Lawrence began

distributing the money and treasures of the Church to the city's poor, considering them blessed by God and especially loved by Jesus. When Valerian offered to spare St. Lawrence if he handed over the gold and silver of the Church, Lawrence appeared before Valerian with a crowd of Rome's poor and handicapped. These, he proclaimed, were the Church's true treasure.

Valerian was not amused. He sentenced Lawrence to death by roasting on a large gridiron heated by coals. According to legend, after hours of sizzling on the grill, Lawrence called out, "I'm well done on this side. Turn me over!" St. Lawrence is patron saint of cooks, chefs, comedians and, very likely, Terry Lindvall.

There are martyrs in every age. Lindvall cited many of them, from Thomas a Becket, William Tyndale, and Thomas Cranmer to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the 2.5 million Christian clergy murdered in South Sudan in the 1980s. Their witness continues to transform. Tertullian, first century theologian, wrote in *Apologeticum*, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Witnessing through love

Terry Lindvall's lecture reminded the audience that witnesses are not artifacts of the past, to be taken out and dusted off when we need inspiration. Lindvall said that "witnesses are like us and with us." They are not expecting to witness, but "God comes in to wake them up" and, receiving sight, they become aware. Lindvall warned that God may come to us "incognito." "The witnesses in the Bible may not have known what they

were seeing, but they woke up and shared what they saw. Unleashed, their hearts were filled with joy. . . as can ours.

Lindvall reminded that "we are called to witness what we know when we love Christ." It is that love, not eyewitness testimony or martyrdom, by which we become witness to Christ in our everyday lives.

Lindvall left his audience with these words: "Look at one another. Love one another. And see the witness of Jesus Christ in one another."

*Terry Lindvall, M.Div., and Ph.D., holds the C.S. Lewis Chair of Communication and Christian Thought at Virginia Wesleyan University. He was ordained at Plymouth Congregational Church, Newport Beach, California in 1973 after a Vicinage Council headed by Reverend Harry Butman, Dr. Russ Spittler, and Dr. Cecil Robeck. Terry earned his bachelor's degree from Vanguard University, his Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary, and his Doctor of Philosophy in Communication from the University of Southern California. He taught at Azusa Pacific University, Wheaton College, Regent University, Duke Divinity School, and the College of William and Mary before assuming the Endowed Chair at Virginia Wesleyan University in 2005. Terry has published nine books, including *God Mocks: A History of Religious Satire* (NYU Press, 2015), *Divine Film Comedies* (Routledge, 2016), and *Surprised by Laughter: The Comic World of C. S. Lewis Revised* (Thomas Nelson, 2012). He and his wife, Karen, a musician, have two children, Chris, a comedy film writer, and Caroline, a 6th grade teacher.*



“Who Is My Neighbor Now?”

by Alicia Negrete de Riedy y Familia Legaspi

Editor's note: In his workshop, "Prophetic Preaching," the Reverend Dr. Brett Younger asked how preachers can preach the truth without commenting on what's going on in the world. For some, linking the Gospel to something happening in the world becomes a ministry. The following is the Reverend Alicia Riedy's reflection on her ministry to detained immigrants in southern California.

Dear loved ones, I'm writing not for approval or disapproval, but to share. Since last August after resigning from continual Sunday church leadership I became active in visiting detained immigrants at Adelanto ICE Processing and Detention Center.

Most of the women I have visited are from the Honduras. These women are there under temporary asylum permits, which means that when they arrived at the U.S. border they passed the criteria to qualify for an asylum hearing. But first they go to Adelanto and they wait. They have no rights while they are there, like regular prisoners. Conditions are deplorable because the centers are privately owned and not subjected to health, medical or humane regulations.

We visitors are warned that if we get too attached our hearts will be broken. But how can you not?

Claudia is 33, single and a talented musician who was the worship leader in her church. With her church she was also active in trying to stand up to the corruption that lead to violence in her town. Consequently, they became targets and were bombed. Her family died but she escaped. The pastors underground got her to the U.S. border. She's been in Adelanto for eight months.

One month ago, we were given hope when the judge approved her petition, and she had to post bond -- \$6,000.00. We are always raising funds for bonds

and lawyer services. I drove to ICE in Los Angeles twice to post the bond. It was denied. We called Adelanto only to be told we had to wait for the new appeal. It was recently approved. We were so excited and filled with such hope. I was ready to post the bond the following day.

At 4:30 that morning we received a conference call from Claudia expressing her gratitude and our prayers. She also called to give us a teary goodbye, because they were being deported that day.

We were shocked. All we were told by center staff was "oh well, got to make room for more."

Two more women were told we could do post release for them. Again, we did what we were told, but this time we didn't even get bond. They didn't think we were "sponsor material," so the women were deported.

I have cried and cried, screaming at God for the false hope. But then I remember Job:

Job 10: 1—5 (NIV)

- 1 The LORD said to Job:
2 Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!"
- 3 Then Job answered the LORD:
4 I am unworthy—
how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.
5 I spoke once,
but I have no answer—
twice, but I will say no more."

The Reverend Alicia Riedy was born in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. She entered seminary in Monterrey, Mexico, in 1981 and was ordained elder in 1985. She served Mexican Methodist churches in Ensenada and Playas, Tijuana, until becoming pastor with the United Methodist Church in Escondido, Calif., where she served a large English-speaking congregation and a Spanish language mission of 50 congregants. She is a member of the Association of Professional Chaplains, serving as a hospital and hospice chaplain in the State of Washington for several years. She served as minister of UCC of Sun City and UCC of Moreno Valley, Calif., before being ordained at the Congregational Church of Menifee in 2016, where she continues as senior minister. She currently serves with an ecumenical group – Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice -- and has been trained to visit immigrant detainees.



Sure enough, God sends us Maria, but this time from another jail. Here is her story:



Domestic violence survivor and asylum seeker Maria has spent the last eight years of her life fleeing from torture. During last November, she was being chased through the streets of Tijuana by two of her abusers at gunpoint. With nowhere else to turn to she ran directly into the hands of U.S. border patrol seeking safety. Little did she know then that she was trading her freedom for her safety.

Maria has been held in detention for the past seven months and continues to fight her immigration case for asylum. It is unknown how much longer her proceedings will take. Until recently, her imprisonment seemed indefinite. A bond amount of \$10,000 has been granted in Maria's case after finding sponsorship through the faith community. She will be sponsored by a reverend and her church, who stand ready to provide her with food, shelter, clothing, and resources to help her heal from the trauma and torture she has endured. However, their financial means are limited, and they need help in raising the funds to post Maria's \$10,000 bond. Please help them help Maria who deserves to be free and pursue a life free from fear, violence, and torture.

Maria is a resilient, strong woman who has had to fight for herself every step of the way, but despite her suffering, she continues to have faith in God and the goodness of people. As a victim of domestic violence, Maria's asylum claim is directly affected by the recent Department of Justice Matter of A-B- opinion which essentially makes it harder for domestic violence victims to claim asylum.

Contributions toward her release can greatly impact the outcome of her asylum.



There is utter chaos for immigrants, legal and illegal. There will be more "Marias," because they have been sitting in detention for months; long before the recent border crisis.

The work will be more challenging, but those of us who have made these individuals our ministry cannot stop. We will visit, house those who may be given the small chance of post release, and maybe we will be able to post a bond.

Why am I involved in this ministry? I am an immigrant, I have been detained more than once in my life, and God has called me to serve this group of His children.

Luke 10: 27-29, 36-37

- 27 He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' [a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [b]"
- 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
- 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
- 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
- 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

If you are moved to help, you can donate to our bond fund. For more information, please email me at revalicia@gmail.com.

I am proud to be an American, Mexican, Christian, and a legal citizen. Alicia



WHAT DO MILLENNIALS *in a Church?*

by Linda Tossey

The Rev. Linda Tossey has been Senior Pastor at People's Congregational Church, Bayport, Minnesota, since January of 2015. Following a career in education and marketing, she received her Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary in 2008 and served as Senior Pastor at a church near Chicago for six and a half years prior to coming to People's. The photo shows Rev. Tossey and a new member of her congregation!

Are millennials looking for a hipper band, coffee shop, and fog machines at church? Not according to writer, speaker, and "church girl" Rachel Held Evans, anyway. In her recent book, *Searching for Sunday*, Evans, a millennial herself, writes, "Millennials aren't looking for a hipper Christianity . . . We're looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity."

Recalling her own journey from "growing up evangelical" to "doubting everything I believed about God," Evans reveals that she and many other millennials are searching for churches that are, "safe places to doubt, to ask questions, and to tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable. We want to talk about the tough stuff -- biblical interpretation, religious pluralism, sexuality, racial reconciliation, and social justice -- but without predetermined conclusions or simplistic answers."

Now, that's a wakeup call to churches, isn't it? Many mainline churches have struggled the last couple of decades. Not willing to embrace the approach of presenting an hour-long entertainment extravaganza, (even with top-notch preaching delivery); many of our churches have agonized over how to keep the sacred and still keep the crowd.

We've agonized, read articles, even attended conferences with break-out sessions focused on how to attract young families. Yet, many millennials aren't married, get married later, don't have children; and if they do, they want their single, racially and socio-economically diverse, and LBGTQIA friends welcomed in, without judgment.

Certainly, a particular church's theology will play a part in

what is acceptable and what isn't. Yet, in her book Evans lays it out clearly, "We millennials have been advertised to our entire lives . . . The church is the last place we want to be sold another product, the last place we want to be entertained."

So, what to do? We in the older crowd may cling tightly to theologies, liturgies, and rituals that have grounded us for generations. Many of us are fed, nurtured, and find meaning and holiness in how we "do church." Yet, the question is the same. How do we keep the sacred and keep the crowd?

Yes, of course putting efforts into great programming for children and adults is necessary.

Yes, worship services that engage and inspire, while opening our hearts to the Holy and the movement of the Divine in our lives, are all part of gathering together in the name of God.

However, let us as parishioners, questioners, searchers, doubters, believers, followers of Holy teachings, consider something more. To echo Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., let us, as churches, consider the content of our character.

Let us consider the kind of churches we are called to be deep in our bones, in our spacious acceptance of others, and in welcoming the questions.

As churches, or as persons considering one, let us not ask how we cling tight-fistedly to a set of doctrines, or how we best deliver an hour's worth of entertainment. Rather, let us ask the same question of ourselves that millennials are asking of us.

How do we become "safe places to doubt, to ask questions, and to tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable?" Will we be willing to "talk about the tough stuff - biblical interpretation, religious pluralism, sexuality, racial reconciliation, and social justice - without predetermined conclusions or simplistic answers?"

We might discover that the sacred, the Holy, the Divine, can be found in the very act of wrestling with each of these questions. We might discover we don't need to have all the answers. Rather, the deepening, broadening, and enriching of our spiritual lives will come when we, together, explore the varying paths and directions to which the Holy points us.

At People's Church, we are discovering exactly that. Let us pray others will consider flinging open their doors, their minds, and their hearts, so that our churches, vital to the health of our communities, can keep both the sacred and the crowd.

Book attribution: Searching for Sunday; Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church; Rachel Held Evans, Nelson books, HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Santa Rosa, CA; 2015.

Thoughts from Emily Wulff, A Millennial Member of Peoples

During the Stewardship Campaign in the Fall, Emily Wulff shared her reasons for being part of People's Church with the congregation.

If you would have asked me even just two years ago, if I would be getting in front of a church and giving a speech about inclusion I wouldn't have believed you – not because I don't believe in inclusion (I do), but because I wouldn't have thought I would be so involved and invested in a church.

I didn't grow up going to church regularly, and by age twelve I stopped going altogether, unless for Christmas Eve at my grandparents' church in Farmington. Truth be told, the people I knew to be very religious and attending church regularly we're not what I would have called very open, loving, or generous. They would give, but only to things they approved of, and they seemed to me, only to be generous with people they felt deserving.

As a young adult I quickly decided you didn't need religion to be a good person. So, finding a church never really entered my mind. A few life events happened for me as a young adult that could have made me turn inward, but they instead made me feel like I need to do more, be more -- think of others more and less about my own little pity party. However, I was lost on how to move forward in my needs to be more engaged.

Thank goodness I had Matt, my husband (who had always attended church growing up), reminding me there is a way to be a part of something more, a way to be in a community, a way to



Emily and Matthew Wulff and their daughters, Evie and Hannah.

help others. It's called church! He helped me see there are people who practice Christianity where all are welcome, questions are ok to ask, and giving to others (all others) is the real truth under all the clutter and loud voices of some Christians who would seem to say otherwise.

As a couple we visited churches and we attempted to find a community we both could feel engaged in, welcomed in, and open to ask questions and learn in. People's Church is that place for us now.

At October's Visioning Dinner (where I was lucky enough to serve others) I was able to read everyone's thoughts and ideas about inclusion (one of our three pillars as a church). I was so impressed and encouraged to see how many ideas there were about inclusion and how

many people want so much for our church to be a beacon of openness and education, friendship, and true care for others.

I also think People's already operates consistently in the mindset of inclusion. But we can always do more, learn more, and strive for better understanding.

Inclusion is such a big topic and my story about feeling included at People's is just a small example of the power I truly feel People's holds. The amount of ideas that came from one dinner made it so clear to me that Bayport and the St. Croix River Valley need People's Church.

My family have not been members of this church long, but we are very hopeful that the voice of People's, the voice of inclusion, lasts for many, many more years to come.

Hunger of the Soul

is Silent Retreat Theme

The Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides will host a Silent Retreat September 24-26 2018, (Monday through Wednesday) at the Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center in Plymouth, Indiana. The Reverend Garry Fisher will serve as Retreat Guide.

Fisher will help participants honor the spiritual hunger which Scripture describes as the spiritual yearning that moves us to long for the presence of God and the things of God's kingdom. Fisher, Senior Minister of Community Congregational Church in South Bend,

Indiana, has attended several Silent Retreats and Quiet Days and was one of the Congregational Lecturers at the 2017 Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. He is very active with the Michigan Conference of Congregational Christian Churches and the Western Michigan Association of Congregational Christian Churches and has co-led a retreat for the Michigan Congregational Clergy Retreat at the St. Francis Retreat Center in DeWitt, Michigan.

The Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center offers a quiet and

peaceful environment on the shores of Lake Gilbraith in northern Indiana. The natural setting and outdoor labyrinths are ideal for meditative walks.

Contact the Reverend Dr. Charles Packer, Chaplain-Director, at (734) 755-4131 for more information or to register. Checks made out to the Congregational Society of Classical Retreat Guides may be sent to Packer at the Pine Hill Congregational Church, 4160 Middlebelt Road, West Bloomfield, Michigan 48323. Please pre-register by Monday, September 10, 2018.

Pastorates PULPITS

Recent Calls

First Congregational Church, Ashland, Neb. has called Rev. Randy Hoskins as Pastor.

Olivet Congregational Church, Olivet, Mich. has called Maxwell Nkansah as Pastor.

In Search

Senior Minister

Atkinson Congregational Church, Atkinson, Ill.

Congregational Church of Bound Brook, N.J.

First Congregational Church, Crown Point, N.Y.

First Congregational Church, Fall River, Mass.

First Congregational Church, Interlachen, Fla.

First Congregational Church, Saugerties, N.Y.

First Congregational Church, Terre Haute, Ind.

First Congregational Church of Yarmouth, Yarmouth Port, Mass.

First Congregational (Road) Church, Stonington, Conn.

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

Founders Congregational Church, Harwinton, Conn.

Gahanna Community Congregational Church, Gahanna, Ohio

Little Washington Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio

Mayflower Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio

McGraft Memorial Congregational Church, Muskegon, Mich.

Mohegan Congregational Church, Uncasville, Conn.

Ozaukee Congregational Church, Grafton, Wis.

Plymouth Congregational Church, Kenosha, Wis.

Second Congregational Church, Jewett City, Conn.

St. Jacobi Congregational Church, Richfield, Wis.

Stafford Springs Congregational Church, Stafford Springs, Conn.

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

Tinley Park Community Church, Tinley Park, Ill.

Trinity Congregational Church, Adams, Wis.

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Congregational Christian Church, North Manchester, IN

Non-NACCC Church

First Congregational Church, Laurel, Mon.

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SEPTEMBER 24-26, 2018

Silent Retreat: The Hunger of the Soul

Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center, Plymouth, IN

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65th Annual Meeting & Conference of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

Cleveland Airport Marriott, Cleveland, OH

JULY 22-28, 2020

International Congregational Fellowship Quadrennial Conference

Curry College, Milton, MA

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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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Correction

We apologize for the confusion regarding the dates provided in the article about the Rev. Dr. Harry R. Butman in the June issue of The Congregationalist. Dr. Butman was born on March 20, 1904 and died on July 29, 2005 at the impressive age of 101.

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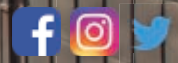
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