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What is
Christmas?

Water is
Life:
Mayyim hem Chayim

Believeland:
**AMC in
Cleveland**



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*Christmas
Blessings*

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ON THE COVER: *The Rev. Dr. Cindy Bacon Hammer talks with children about the meaning of Advent and Christmas at Heritage Congregational Church, Madison, Wis., December 2013. Photo by Larry Sommers.*

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

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

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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

By Michael Chittum,
Executive Director
National Association of
Congregational
Christian Churches



What is

Christmas



According to the authors of *Christianity for Dummies**, Christmas is explained in this way:

You probably know that Christmas is celebrated on December 25. In the United States, families distribute gifts that Santa Claus left under the Christmas tree on Christmas morning. Many attend church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, and later gather for Christmas dinner with extended family.

Christmas is the observance of Jesus' humble birth to a virgin in a stable in Bethlehem. The holiday also celebrates the events surrounding his birth, such as an angel's appearance to shepherds, telling them to visit the newborn king.

This statement gets many of the basic facts about Christmas – the date observed, practices of people in observing the day, and a reference to the Biblical narrative concerning Jesus' birth, but, to my mind, it does not really capture the essence of the meaning of Christmas Day.

Through the years in the various churches I have served and while I was at Piedmont College, I participated in services of Lessons and Carols.

The closing scripture in those services is taken from John 1. In that section of scripture, we read these words:

~~~~~  
*“And the Word became flesh  
and lived among us,  
and we have seen his glory,  
the glory as of  
a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth”*

*(John 1:14, NRSV).*  
~~~~~

To me, these words have been captured in the sculpture located on the portico of St. Martin-In-The-Fields Church in Trafalgar Square in London. (You can see photos of sculpture at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_Child_\(sculpture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_Child_(sculpture)))

“What is Christmas? It is when we celebrate and remember that the word became flesh and lived among us.”

Have a Blessed Christmas Season.

Michael

*<https://www.dummies.com/food-drink/entertaining/christmas/what-is-christmas/>





RECOGNITION *is DUE*

The recognition of one's peers is the highest form of praise, so the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) is especially pleased to provide its members opportunities for recognizing ministers who have made special contributions to Congregationalism.

Excellence in Ministry Awards

Annual Excellence in Ministry Awards are given at the discretion of the Vitality Ministry Council (VMC).

Award nominees should exemplify personal commitment to the Congregational principles of faith, freedom, and fellowship. Churches or individuals may make nominations. Supporting documentation, such as letters of support and/or articles about the nominee, may also be submitted to assist the VMC in its selection process.

Butman Awards

The Harry R. Butman Award is given to an ordained minister who has served at least 10 years in an NACCC church. The nominee must have demonstrated a commitment to the principles of Congregationalism. The \$500 award is intended to provide ministerial assistance to lift and encourage a minister.

The Jennette Butman Award goes to the spouse of a Congregational minister who has served an NACCC church for at least 10 years and has assisted his or her spouse in ministry. The \$500 award is based on need, merit, or outstanding achievement.

Deadline for submitting nominations for the Butman awards is April 30, 2019. Award winners will be announced at the 65th Annual Meeting & Conference in Cleveland.

Joseph Jones Russell Sermon Award

The J.J. Russell Sermon Award recognizes pastoral excellence in preaching related to Congregationalism. Submitted sermons must focus on some aspect of classical Congregationalism and its relevance for today. The sermon must have been preached/can be preached any time from July 2017-April 2019. An applicant must be an ordained pastor who is serving an NACCC active-member church of under 400 congregants.

Submissions must include the following:

- 1) A copy of the Sunday worship bulletin at which the sermon was preached,
- 2) DVD, YouTube, or website link of the sermon in its entirety (visual and audio preferred),
- 3) Full manuscript or a minimum two-page outline transcript of the sermon.

Send links and documents to the Rev. Justin J. Nierer via email at theoutreachguy@hotmail.com. Please email Rev. Nierer if you require a mailing address or for submitting a DVD.

The winner of the Russell Award will be announced at the 66th Annual Meeting and Conference in Portland, Maine. Winner of the award will receive \$350, full registration to the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference, and a 50 percent discount on the room rate at the meeting.

Nomination Forms

To obtain a nomination form, go online to <http://www.naccc.org/awards>. All completed nomination forms and materials should be submitted by email to Rev. Nierer at theoutreachguy@hotmail.com.



Water is Life: Mayyim he

An interfaith mission to

Yom Kippur, observed this past September, marked the 12-month point for “Water is Life,” the joint mission project of Florence Congregational Church and Beit Ahavah Reformed Synagogue of Northampton, Massachusetts. Together they delivered life-saving water purifiers to the people of Puerto Rico, still struggling amid the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Maria. “It has been such a blessing to observe and interact with literally hundreds of people assisting in this mission project. Beautiful, amazing and sacred,” said the Reverend Dr. Irvan Gammon, pastor at Florence Congregational Church.

Beit Ahavah Reformed Synagogue has been sharing sanctuary space at the church for 20 years. The two congregations were always cordial but didn’t know much about one another.

Hurricane Maria changed that. On September 20, 2017, the hurricane scoured Puerto Rico, knocking out power to the entire island. A U.S. territory, Puerto Rico is home to 3.3 million citizens. Most were without power or running water for up to eight months. Communications were out, and the airport closed. Without a functioning airport and access to the villages the aid efforts were hamstrung. Already, U.S. disaster relief had been stretched to the breaking point by historic storms in Texas and Florida.

Gammon remembers watching coverage of the Hurricane Maria



Pastor Irvan Gammon, Florence Congregational Church, and Rabbi Riqi, Beit Ahavah Temple

aftermath, especially one disturbing image – a group of Puerto Rican children drinking brown water from a stream. At about the same time, Rabbi Riqi of Beit Ahavah sat in her office and cried as she watched a news video of a grandmother with little drinking water and only saltine crackers for her grandchildren. These images drove the pastor and the rabbi to join forces and take action.

“It’s interesting how a Jewish group with their theology and a Christian group with their own theology can find a common ground,” said Gammon. “That common ground is human need. We all have an opportunity as well as a responsibility to reach out together.”

A hiker, Gammon is familiar with the use of water filters and suggested getting them to Puerto Rico to ensure clean drinking water for families. He called Rabbi Riqi, and they developed the plan for a mission to send LifeStraw Water Filters to Puerto Rico.

The first step was to contact the LifeStraw company, which creates technology designed to provide pure drinking water, including a high-volume point-of-use water purifier with built-in safe storage that makes contaminated

water safe to drink. Gammon negotiated a discount price (from \$75 to \$52.50 per unit) on the filters, and the mission was ready for take-off.

Both Florence Congregational Church and Beit Ahavah Reformed Synagogue launched the project during the first weekend in October 2017, just days after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. Radio and television coverage, articles in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* newspaper, a classroom demonstration at a local school, posts on each congregation’s Facebook page, and a general buzz energized the congregations and the Northampton community. The project received 349 donations – large and small, from near and far.

Gammon asked the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) to consider supporting the mission, and the association jumped on board, sending four substantial donations. NACCC’s initial donation in early October allowed for the first bulk purchase of water purifiers.

Getting There

LifeStraw doesn’t ship to Puerto Rico, so the search was on for a free mode of transportation. To succeed, the mission also required a contact on the ground and a point of distribution in Puerto Rico.

“There are no coincidences in life; God has a plan,” said Gammon, noting that once the units were ordered, things just seemed to fall into place.

A member of the Beit Ahavah congregation, Robin Warner, happened to know JetBlue pilot Ophneal Kellman, who, she explained, has an “incredible

m Chayim

help Puerto Rico

with Rev. Dr. Irven Gammon and Raquel S. (Riqi) Kosovske

humanitarian soul." Warner contacted Kellman, who changed his flight assignment from JFK Airport in New York to San Juan Airport in Puerto Rico. He also worked behind the scenes to get the duffle bags full of LifeStraws onto his plane as cargo.

Volunteers from both congregations joined to pack the 202 LifesStraw units into 18 duffle bags in less than an hour. Unfortunately, the number of packed bags exceeded the cargo guidelines of no more than 10 bags at a maximum of 50 pounds each. Rabbi Riqi made a late-night run to the 24-hour Walmart in the next town to purchase larger bags. After another round of packing and repacking, a member of her congregation drove through the night to deliver five duffle bags to the airport at the crack of dawn.

The 202 water purification units were delivered to Puerto Rico the morning of October 19, 2017. Before handing off the bags at the airport, Kellman uttered a phrase as password to make sure the recipient was from Temple Beth Shalom in San Juan:

*"But my God shall supply
all your needs
according to his riches
in glory by Christ Jesus*

(Philippians 4:19) .

The recipient, Zevio Schnitzer, sent this email:

The filters arrived safely! I took one home to test it out, and on Shabbat will be demonstrating how it works and how to clean it and will then give one to each family. We will also distribute some to families and community-run soup kitchens and to families who live near our temple. The rest will be given to volunteer brigades that are working nonstop to deliver supplies to the center of the island where the devastation was greatest.

It is, indeed, a small world.

The partnership of Florence Congregational Church and Beit Ahavah Reformed Synagogue found

Puerto Rican contacts, who distributed the units through their temple, a network of churches, community-run soup

kitchens and community leaders who had ties of some kind with Northampton.

Stateside they worked with Jossie Valentin, a member of the Holyoke City Council, who was raised in Puerto Rico. She took several duffle bags of water purification units on a couple of her monthly trips to visit her family there. Another partner was Fred Florentino, a carpenter from New Jersey and founder of Cypress Missions, a non-profit that mobilizes short-term, work-oriented mission projects. Fred transported filters, solar lights, and solar chargers on his trips to help rebuild a community in Puerto Rico.

A Need Fulfilled

By the end of 2017, \$68,354.02 had been raised to purchase Family LifeStraw Units, duffle bags for transport and, more recently, portable solar lights. In four months, the interfaith mission sent 1,000 water purification units in 11 shipments to San Juan. From there they were delivered to 16 towns and cities.



Quick team packers



Congregants at Temple Beth Shalom in San Juan

Continued>

Water is Life: Mayyim hem Chayim

CONTINUED

There was no cost for the transport. The mission not only helped our struggling neighbors in Puerto Rico but made good friends from many who were once strangers.

Estimates of the number killed during or because of Hurricane Maria have varied dramatically. This past summer, George Washington University's Milken School of Public Health released research results which estimated that 2,975 people died in the five months following Hurricane Maria, compared to the prior year.¹ The study examined the number of deaths between September 2017 and February 2018.

Commissioned by the Puerto Rican government, the independent study noted that people of all social levels and age groups have died from conditions resulting from the hurricane, with men age 65 and older hit hardest. The risk of death was 45 percent higher for people living in towns with low socioeconomic development.² The study also took the Puerto Rican government to task for its lack of preparedness. In May, Harvard University released a study that placed the estimated deaths at more than 4,600 individuals.

This past September, Gammon visited Puerto Rico to see for himself how the island is faring and to deliver more supplies. He said the trip was "amazing, but also heart-breaking to see the snail-pace reconstruction." He and three others traveled into mountains (eight hours round-trip) to visit those with less access to assistance.

Gammon reported meeting a woman in Jayuja who has been caring for folks deeper into the mountains. She drove an hour to meet the U.S. group:

She has shared her love with the people of a small village selflessly for eleven months. Edgardo, our guide and translator, had met up with her to deliver our supplies in the past. We finally were able to meet this amazing woman, as well as she us. After a brief conversation we loaded up her truck with additional supplies. When we had to say goodbye, I went to shake her hand. For some reason we both found ourselves drawing each toward the other with the handshake. We hugged. She seemed almost ready to melt and tightly hung on.

After delivering supplies one day, the team set out to visit the El Yunque National Rain Forest –the only "rainforest" officially located in the United States. As they neared the rainforest, they were delayed at the main road. When they finally reached the internal official entrance it was blocked, and they were forced to park near the visitor center. Edgardo was able to learn from the center's staff that the road has been impassible since Hurricane Maria hit and will stay that way for another three to four years.

"While there, we stumbled upon a team from southeastern states – Georgia or the Carolinas," said Gammon. "We discussed our mission and they theirs. They were in Puerto Rico assisting folks in the hill towns with power grids, solar panels, etc. We joined hands in a circle in the middle of the parking lot to pray. It

was powerful."

According to Gammon, a year after Hurricane Maria made landfall, the landscape is still afflicted by downed trees, drooping power lines, and washed out areas. Hundreds of blue tarps and homes without power dot the countryside.

"We met folks who claimed they would get power back for a couple days and then lose it for four or five. Refrigeration was almost impossible, even after eleven months of recovery," said Gammon.

Seeing the ongoing devastation, the congregations of Florence Congregational Church and Beit Ahavah Reformed Synagogue decided to continue their mission into the new year by supplying the solar component to Puerto Rico.

To contribute to "Water is Life: LifeStraw Family Water Filters for Puerto Rico," make checks payable to Florence Congregational Church (write "water filters" on the memo line) and mail to: 130 Pine Street, Florence, MA 01062. Online donations can be directed to Temple Beth Shalom's Hurricane Maria Recovery Fund or to the Jewish Federation of North America's 2017 Hurricane Relief Fund.

¹ "GW Researchers: 2,975 Excess Deaths Linked to Hurricane Maria," August 29, 2018, GWToday, <https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/gw-researchers-2975-excess-deaths-linked>.

² Ibid.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES



65TH ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE

JUNE 22-25 2019 | CLEVELAND, OHIO

HOSTED BY THE OHIO ASSOCIATION



Believeland: AMC in Cleveland

Playhouse Square attracts over a million guests to its 1,000+ annual events. Photo by Cody York for thisiscleveland.com

A town that calls itself Believeland certainly sounds like an ideal location for a gathering of people of faith. The 65th Annual Meeting and Conference of the NACCC will be held June 22-25, 2019, at the Cleveland Airport Marriott in Cleveland, Ohio. Our hosts, the Ohio Association of Congregational Christian Churches (OACCC), are excited about the venue's proximity to public transit that will allow visitors to explore and enjoy Ohio's North Coast.

Here are just a few basics about Cleveland:

- Our city is located on Lake Erie, smallest and shallowest of the Great Lakes.
- Heavy industry now shares the economic spotlight with biotechnology and fine arts.
- Greater Cleveland is home to over 2 million residents.
- Cleveland is a huge professional sports town. Expect a lot of team apparel.
- Over a dozen colleges and universities infuse Cleveland with a young outlook.

Authentic neighborhoods are the heart of Cleveland. Pierogis rule in Parma. Little Italy hosts the Feast of the Assumption. The Fairfax neighborhood, northern destination for many during the Great Migration of the early 20th century,

is home to Karamu House – the oldest African American theater in the United States. One story illustrates what grit and determination can accomplish – threads woven through the Cleveland story.

The Cleveland Indians now play downtown at Progressive Field, but their original home still exists. League Park



Photo by Cody York for thisiscleveland.com

at East 66th and Lexington is now a city park. Small portions of the original stadium remain. The baseball diamond occupies its original site. You can stand at the home plate where Babe Ruth hit his 500th home run and where Joe DiMaggio got his final hit in the phenomenal 1941 streak. Perhaps more important, the park anchors a reviving Hough neighborhood. New construction is replacing neglected buildings. Cleveland is being reinvented block by block.

Visit web sites thisiscleveland.org and livecleveland.org for fascinating details about Cleveland neighborhoods and attractions such as the West Side Market and Cleveland Zoo. If you are in the area a bit longer, check out the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Healthcare leaders can meet and collaborate at the Global Center for Health Innovation, which highlights another facet of Cleveland's reinvention. Home to the world-famous Cleveland Clinic and esteemed educational institutions, the corridor east of downtown developed a reputation as a center of biotechnology innovation, leading to the creation of the Global Center. City planners, seeing the

possibilities for a corridor, developed the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) HealthLine. This route features hybrid electric vehicles running at 5-minute intervals. In addition to serving the health community, the line provides great access to cultural gems: the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Botanical Gardens, the Museum of Natural History and more.

The downtown lakefront features the Great Lakes Science Center, the Browns stadium, and of course, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. You might wonder why the Rock Hall is in Cleveland. Buddy Holly wasn't from Cleveland and neither was Elvis. But Allan Freed was; his radio show helped launch rock 'n roll into the national spotlight. A few decades later, a groundbreaking FM radio station featuring album cuts instead of background music advanced Cleveland's image as a rock mecca. They provided the soundtrack and the attitude that helped Cleveland survive a deep trough in its history. Their Buzzard logo adorned many of Cleveland's "winter beaters," which seem to sneer at the weather and the town's detractors in equal measure. The station eventually achieved significant notice in the music industry. That and an impressive promotional effort succeeded in bringing the Rock Hall to town.

The CLE vibe is youthful optimism, serious dedication, respect for the past and faith in the future. "Believeland" once referred only to serious fans of Cleveland's Tribe, Cavs and Browns, but has come to mean so much more. Believeland is Greater Cleveland. We hope that you'll take the opportunity to visit and appreciate all that it has to offer.

Come Join Us!



Ted and Ellen Polhemus Stiffler live in Mansfield, Ohio and are members of First Congregational Church. Recently retired, they ran an art gallery together. In his previous career, Ted was a county planner. Ellen continues her artistic endeavors making cards and jewelry. They enjoy gardening and cooking. They visit Cleveland often.

The NACCC's 65th Annual Meeting & Conference will gather at the Cleveland Airport Marriott, 4277 West 150th Street in Cleveland, just three miles from the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE) and right off I-71. The Cleveland Airport Marriott offers complimentary airport shuttle service. A courtesy phone is available in the baggage claim area, or call the Marriott at (216) 252-5333 and let them know you have arrived.

Reservations

The group rate is \$99. To make reservations, call the Marriott Reservations at (800) 228-9290 or direct dial (216) 252-5333. A web link is provided in the registration brochure available at naccc.org. Cutoff date for reservations is Wednesday, May 26, 2019.

Cleveland Airport Marriott Highlights:

- The \$99 group rate will be offered three days before and three days after the conference, based on availability.
- All NACCC Marriott Guests will receive a \$5 voucher each day to use in the hotel outlets.
- Complimentary airport transportation and transportation within a three-mile radius of the Marriott are offered.
- Complimentary parking will be offered for all NACCC guests of the Marriott and attendees from NACCC local churches.
- Complimentary Wi-Fi is available in the Marriott lobby, guestrooms, and meeting space.
- Hotel is located eight miles from downtown Cleveland.

For more information, go online to naccc.org. Click on Now Trending, and click on the 65th Annual Meeting & Conference brochure and registration forms.

Letters TO THE EDITOR

Dear brothers and sisters,

I want to update you on what is happening with our work here in Riverside and Los Angeles. Our little church, thanks to C.L.U.E. Justice, Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice, and personal donors like yourselves, made it possible for "Miriam" to be released with an ankle monitor; and received into a widow's home in Menifee. I drive her every two weeks to ISAP (Intensive Supervision of Aliens Program) for check-in. I drove her to the Mexican consulate to obtain her birth certificate and provisional Mexican passport at my personal expense. "Miriam" must turn over to ISAP a copy of the receipt and the actual passport.

Deacon Ibarra from St. Vincent Ferrar Catholic church sees her every week for counseling regarding the trauma she has suffered at the hands of her abusers and the experience of being incarcerated at Adelanto. "Miriam" has enrolled in ESL classes and volunteers at the Catholic church.

We must rely on the Community Cupboard and other food pantries for groceries. Clothing has been donated, including new undergarments. The church is giving her personal toiletries. However, there is no allowance for medical care. If she should get sick I will need to drive her to the clinic for the poor in Los Angeles and pray they don't charge us.

"Miriam's" appeal was granted, and her case sent back to lower immigration federal court in Los Angeles. "Miriam" has been blessed that she has an attorney from Public Counsel representing her for her asylum application.

Freedom for Immigrants works mostly with people who have been in immigration detention beyond one month. In fact, approximately 48 percent of people we work with are held in immigration detention for two to four years, although about five percent of people are held in immigration detention for over four years. I got involved in immigration advocacy because of the visitation done by Freedom for Immigrants at Adelanto. The top complaint we receive from people in immigration detention is medical neglect/abuse.

C.L.U.E., Inland Coalition for Immigration Justice, and now our church are working together to use our funds for future bond posts. Bonds are needed every day, but more important is finding individuals who will sponsor asylum-seekers and give them shelter. In other words, "welcome the foreigner" into their homes. They accompany the person through the process until the end . . . knowing that the end could result in deportation or asylum. Training is provided in our areas for volunteers who want to do visitation (paraphrasing Jesus, if you visit one of these, you visit me).

In my area you may donate by sending a check to The Congregational Church of Menifee, memo "bond fund" and send to 27701 Murrieta Road Space 71, Menifee, Ca. 92586

Please note that once a case is resolved either with asylum granted or deportation the bond money is returned. It is redeposited to grow and help the next person. There is no knowing how long the process will take.

(For more information about supporting this effort, please contact Rev. Riedy.)

Along THE WAY



Floor to ceiling – everything must go at Pamela's house.

Final day at Pamela's house.



Youth On a Mission of Faith

HOUSTON RELIEF EFFORT A COMPLETE SUCCESS!

Submitted by Amber Hagin, Second Congregational Church of Warren, Maine

Summer 2017: The Youth Missions team at Faith Community Church in Franklin, Wisconsin, was just back from building wheelchair ramps in Nashville when Hurricane Harvey was forming in the Gulf and headed for a direct hit on Houston. They were eager to head to Texas. Initially, Mission Discovery, Inc., our mission trip organizer, wasn't planning to go to Houston, but that changed when it was inundated with calls from churches like Faith Community Church that wanted to help.

The estimated cost to send one student to Houston was over \$900, including travel, lodging, and registration with Mission Discovery. The students' theme for their annual February dinner/silent auction and other fundraising was Houston, We Have a Solution. The NACCC provided some of the funds designated for Houston relief to help the youth on their mission.

Six youth and adults from United Church of Beloit and nine more from Maple Hills Congregational Church in Kansas signed on. In the end, a total 34 youth and adults participated in the trip.

My God sighting for the week was watching the houses come back to life and seeing the hope brought back to the people who we have helped.

Faith Anklam, age 14

July 16-21: In Houston, a group mostly from Kansas was assigned to help with the remodeling of a house owned by a

woman named Caroline to replace the damaged drywall throughout. Caroline could see her house literally being resurrected daily by the youth. She had lived in it since 1950 and was saying goodbye to many memories.

The larger group, mostly from the two Wisconsin churches, was sent to another hard-hit part of the city to help with demolition of a home, which would be converted into a mission house by a local church organization, Living Paradigm. The renovated structure would house missionaries coming to Houston to provide ongoing relief work and outreach to the community. We helped remove all the siding, windows, air conditioning unit, and broke apart an old bathtub. Organizer April Wolf hoped the group would complete removal of the siding on the back of the house, but 90% of siding on the entire house was gone by end of day. When the group unexpectedly finished the Mission House ahead of time, April shifted their effort to Pamela's house a few blocks away.

Our group worked at Pam's house and this energized group overwhelmed her with joy, faith, I might even say "a miracle" that she was waiting for. Eleven months of wondering how her house is ever going to be her house again.

Jason Kierzek, adult leader

Pamela woke on the morning of the hurricane to find her house with six inches of water. She had lived with

her sisters for 11 months, during which her house had sat virtually untouched. Mold and other flood damage made the house unsafe to live in. Our group was instructed by a local volunteer on how to safely remove all the drywall from ceiling to floor. They completely dismantled Pam's kitchen and removed all the furnishings and walls from her living room. In two and a half days the group completely removed all the walls, ceilings, master bathroom tile and fixtures and filled two dumpsters with the remains of Pam's house. The work was hot and dirty, but the process of mitigating mold and rebuilding the home would finally get started after we left for home.

The best part of the trip was seeing how grateful everybody we were helping was.

Heather Schmidt, young adult

Mission Discovery provided housing at the St. John Divine Church, including all meals and evening worship time. Each night the youth and young adults worshiped and shared their "God Sightings" from the day. Pamela came to the group's final worship time. Her heartfelt thanks were very uplifting. Caroline had done the same at her home earlier in the day. The youth were very moved, feeling as though they had truly been a part of "the solution" for at least these two ladies. The youth and adults made lifelong friends, and they were grateful for all the support given them to make their "solution" a reality.

150 Years and Counting

In 1867 Waseca, Minnesota was a pioneer town of about 70 homes on what were once wheat fields. The streets were unpaved, and one of the early pastors recalled seeing a cow stuck in the mud on State Street. First Congregational Church held its first worship service that year – the first religious service held in Waseca. About 25 people attended the services conducted by Reverend E. H. Alden in an unfinished building on State Street.

The following year a council was convened in the parlor of the Trowbridge Hotel to consider the organization of a Congregational church. Nine articles of faith, a church covenant and a set of rules were read, adopted, and signed by 16 people who gathered there.



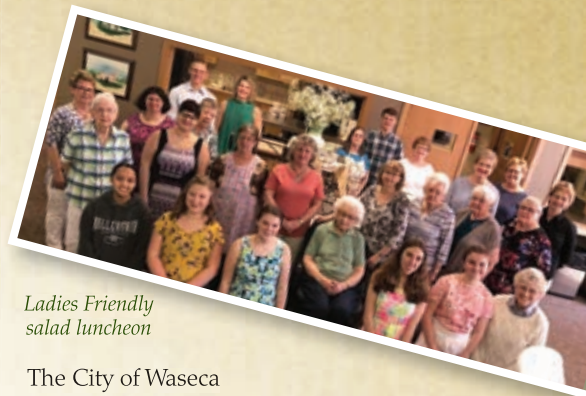
Waseca graduates with their quilts

This year marks the 150th anniversary of First Congregational Church in Waseca, and the congregation has found a multitude of ways to celebrate the occasion, beginning with their annual meeting and potluck dinner. The church shared its joy with the community by hosting a variety of events: The Greater Waseca Ministerial Association Lenten soup lunches, a Passover Seder dinner, the Waseca Community Easter Dinner, and the 45th Annual Ladies Friendly Salad Luncheon. Annual events such as Confirmation Sunday and recognition

of the graduating high school seniors became opportunities to observe the church's milestone. For example, graduates were presented quilts made by the Ladies Friendly group. The congregation rededicated its present

church (built in 1950) during a Sunday service, followed by a lunch.

A highlight of the past year was the Don Fisher Memorial Concert, featuring nationally acclaimed singer-songwriter Pierce Pettis and the local high school jazz ensemble.



Ladies Friendly salad luncheon

The City of Waseca was celebrating its own 150th anniversary events in 2018. In late August, First Congregational Church held an open house during Waseca's all-school reunion and 150th Year Community Celebration, also participating in the Waseca All-Church Service. The First Congregational anniversary celebration has extended beyond church walls in myriad ways, from staffing a booth at the county fair to sending youth in fellowship on their mission trip to Milwaukee with Next Step Ministries. Rally Sunday and the start of Sunday School offered a soup luncheon open to the community. Thanksgiving brought the annual dinner and talent show. First Congregational Church of Waseca will close its 150th year with the celebration of our Savior's birth: the youth Christmas program, followed by a potluck meal.

In the 150 years since the Congregation Church of Waseca was formed, the people have changed, the church building has changed, the ministers have changed, the means of communication and carrying on the work has changed, but the purpose of the church has remained the same. The present church was built on the faith, hope, love and sacrifice of the pioneers and those who followed them. The accomplishments have been many, but they have seemed easy when members come together in a common faith in God. People come, serve, and go; but the church lives on, and, we pray, is ready for another 150 years of adventure in Christ-like living. Those who make up the present congregation salute those who have gone before and pray that those who are to follow experience much joy in their service and strength in their belief.

The church today and the Old First Congregational Church in Waseca



Submitted by Maggie Alexander, Moderator
First Congregational Church, Waseca, Minnesota

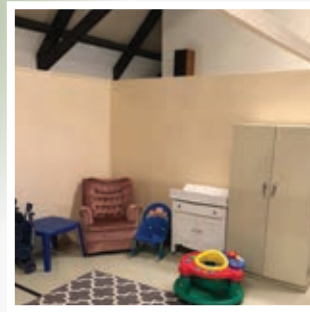
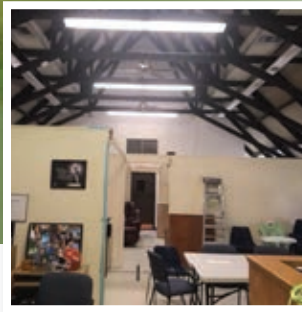
Along THE WAY CONTINUED

Church opens doors to homeless

For 16 years, Family Promise operated a day center at a Lutheran church in Beloit, Wisconsin. Last spring, Family Promise launched an effort to upgrade its facilities. John Pickart, a former member of its board as well as the United Church of Beloit, contacted church leadership with the idea of offering space for Family Promise.

As a result, United Church provided around 4,000 square feet of space and the new day center reopened this past July. A remodeling project included the installation of bathtubs and showers in each bathroom at the church. The Staline Family YMCA donated day passes and use of its shower facilities during the remodel.

United Church of Beloit Lead Pastor, the Reverend Steve Erkel, said offering the site is an opportunity to better utilize



*Remodeling progresses at UCB.
Photo by Family Promise Executive Director Ryan Bell*

church space and serve God. He told the *Beloit Daily News*, "We are incredibly excited about this partnership and the possibilities of ministry which could take place with the use of our building in this way."

Pastor Carol Taylor added that it was wonderful for the church to take another step in a longstanding relationship with Family Promise. "We support this organization we know does great work in Beloit," she said.

Another 11 area churches partner with Family Promise, on a rotating basis, to provide overnight shelter for the homeless. At least 20 churches total partner with Family Promise, several of which help the 12 host sites.

Submitted by Pastor Carol Taylor
United Church of Beloit, Wisconsin

WANTED:

Dedicated church members who feel called to be part of the leadership of the NACCC.

Get your nominations into the office before January. Forms available on the NACCC website: naccc.org.

Let the Holy Spirit be your guide!

My Journey from Burma to Marshalltown, Iowa USA

I was born on December 20, 1983, in Burma. I lived in Burma until 2001. I moved to Thailand in 2001 because I had no human rights in Burma. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior in 2001. I was a Buddhist before I became a Christian. I became a refugee in 2004 by the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR). Then I lived in Umpiem Mai refugee camp in Thailand where I met and married my wife. She was not able to come with me when, on July 28, 2010, I came to the United States under the Refugee Resettlement Program. I lived in Moline, Illinois until I moved to Marshalltown, Iowa on Nov 1, 2010 and began working at JBS (Swift). God led me to attend First Congregational Church in 2016 and I stayed because every church member welcomed me. I became a U.S. citizen on August 3, 2018. During the oath ceremony my name was changed from Nay Liew to Solomon M. Davidstars. I am proud to be an American citizen. My wife, Nan, will come to live with me in Marshalltown on August 26, 2018. The United States will be our home now.



This photo was taken after the oath ceremony. I am standing beside the United States District Court Magistrate Judge, the Honorable Helen C. Adams, and all my support group from church and family.

Submitted by Solomon M. Davidstars

Bringing the Gospel to the stage

Submitted by Amber Hagin, Second Congregational Church of Warren, Maine

On February 8, 2018, I received an email from Nancy VanVuuren, music director at our church, about the John Richard Memorial Endowment grant* opportunity, asking if I would consider directing a youth musical theater production at Second Congregational Church in Warren, Maine. I was entering the second semester of my freshman year at the University of Maine, having grown up in Warren and the Congregational Church, singing in the choir, and organizing and directing the Junior Choir. I was excited. This would mean moving into new responsibilities in musical theater, working with young people, opening music ministry to the larger community – all near to my heart.

Then the hard work began. First, to find the right musical: *Godspell Jr.* This pick would challenge any group of young kids, but especially those who had no prior theatre experience; a church that had never put on a musical before; and me who had never directed a theatre production. Nancy applied for the grant and obtained scripts and music. Next thing I knew we had everything we needed to start this new adventure,

except the cast. Our numbers were small, but the support from the church was great. The kids seemed excited but nervous, as was I, to step into this new experience; but our church family took a leap of faith, jumping in head first.

The cast worked endlessly to learn 12 new songs, new Bible verses and lessons. I used games and exercises I had learned in high school and college theatre to teach the cast and get them comfortable with acting. The hardest scene was the death of Jesus on the cross, followed by the kids carrying him out. By the time the kids learned that scene they were prepared to take on the responsibility of this touching, deeply moving topic. Jesus was played by a few of the children throughout the performance to lighten the load for speaking parts and represent the idea that Jesus is in every one of us.

Throughout the whole experience Nancy was there to guide me through and so was the church family who took this project, along with the kids and me, under their wing to help in any way big or small. Looking back from the first day, the kids and the church grew so much. In just two

weeks these seven kids learned a lot and were transformed as they gained stage presence, voice projection, joy, confidence, and a new understanding of what it means to act out another person's thoughts and feelings. I could see it on each face how proud they were of all they had accomplished when they took that final bow. My favorite moment from the musical project came when I watched their last performance.

The cast were all active in our Sunday School. We plan to continue this project next summer, reaching out to and involving more community members.

**John Calvin Richard was a gifted musician. His love for music and theater performance was a large part of his talented but short life. The John Calvin Richard Memorial Endowment was established by his family as a loving and living memorial. The Endowment awards annual grants of up to \$500 to NACCC member churches of 200 or fewer members that are planning a fine arts or performing arts event in their church.*



The young thespians rehearse. Photo by Hope Creighton, church historian



The cast carries Jesus out, singing the final song. Photo by Hope Creighton, church historian

The First Congregational Church of Yarmouth Yarmouth Port, MA

*Following Christ,
We Proclaim the Gospel,
Teach God's Word,
And Serve with Love.*



We are searching for a full-time Senior Pastor to guide us on our Christian journey, sharing God's Word and His love with our church and the local communities.

More information about our church may be found on our website www.fccyarmouth.org as well as on our Church Information Form at www.naccc.org.

News AND NEEDS of OUR Missions

CHRISTMAS AT OUR MISSIONS

The deadline for making Christmas donations to the missions has passed, but any time is the right time to support our missions. The missions will deliver a great deal of comfort to their communities this season:

Panamerican Institute, Mexico, gives out food baskets, valued at \$50 each, to families for Christmas. Every basket contains: pinto beans, rice, wheat flour, sugar, salt, canned tuna and vegetables, margarine, cereal, cooking oil, tomato sauce, cookies, pastas, gelatin, jelly, toilet paper, soap, tooth brushes and toothpaste.

Morgan Scott Project, TN, and Bread of Life Mission, FL, distribute toys for kids.

Our two missions in the Philippines, NACC Philippines, and Christian Mission in the Far East, provide an extra month's salary to their pastors.

Our missions in Honduras – Ministerio Vida Hospital, and Mexico – Mission Mazahua, give out an extra month's salary to their workers as well.

One Great Hour of Sharing

This summer has been a time of great flooding in Myanmar and the Philippines. All three of our missions in these areas have been affected by storms in their regions. The Mission Council sent disaster relief funds from One Great Hour of Sharing to help these missions. Chris Bryan and his granddaughter, Lucy, of Milwaukee, went a step beyond, holding a yard sale to raise funds for flood relief in Myanmar. They raised \$135.



Indian Trails Mission Has Closed

Many of you are familiar with and have supported Indian Trails Mission, Arizona, and the Gossett family, who directed its programs. The NACCC has been a strong supporter of Indian Trails Mission for more than 50 years as it accomplished great work among the Native Americans in Arizona and Mexico. After the passing of Sharon and Tom Gossett, the mission lost many supporters. The Gossett children continued the mission for a while but lost ongoing support. As a result, they made the decision to close. The Mission Council and NACCC thank all of you for your generous support over the years.

Remembering Rev. Castillo

The Reverend Ernanie Castillo, founder and director of NACC Philippines, died of prostate cancer on July 10, 2018. Born March 13, 1941, he was raised by a poor family on Negros Island, Philippines. "Nannie" did odd jobs throughout high school to help his family. Gang life lured him until he met the Lord. He attended Bible College and served many churches. He also worked for a well-known Christian radio station. Ernanie was employed for 17 years as the Executive Director of the Far East Relief and Development Services. After that, he began the National Association of Congregational Churches in the Philippines with the goal of bringing Congregationalism to the Philippines.

Ernanie Castillo



Visit with Philip Malakar

In August, The Reverend Peter Smith (pictured right), from First Congregational Church in Hanson, Massachusetts, enjoyed a brief visit with the Reverend Philip Malakar, Indian Community Fellowship, in India.



Prayer
is needed

Charles Nyane, Word Alive Mission, Ghana, has been diagnosed with glaucoma.

The Castillo family, NACC Philippines, is feeling the loss of their husband, father, and grandfather.

The violence in northern India against Christians and the ministers of Indian Community Fellowship continues.

Flooding is causing suffering for people in Myanmar and Philippines, as well as those affected by Hurricane Florence in the U.S.



Preparing food for the new meal program

Good Bye to a Good Friend

On March 1, Linda Miller will bid farewell to the NACCC family and set out for new adventures in new places. Linda began working with the NACCC in 2007 as assistant to John Carson, Executive Secretary for Missions and Congregational Church Development and State/Regional Partnerships. Most of us know Linda for her dedicated service as Missions Coordinator and State & Regional Associations Liaison.

If you haven't met her, you've most likely read her reports in the "News & Needs of Our Missions" feature in this

magazine or her quarterly newsletter.

Missions to people in need have been Linda's passion for a long time. Prior to joining the NACCC, she worked with Chicago's homeless for 20 years, helped resettle refugees as a volunteer with Travelers Aid, and worked with the Aids Pastoral Care Network.

Today, NACCC and its member churches support about 25 international and U.S. missions. Linda has visited most of the missions located in this country, Happy Life in South Africa, and the Panamerican Institute in Tijuana.

Reflecting on her experiences with NACCC, Linda said, "Working with missions has given me a more worldly view of life. I don't think locally or nationally, but consider what's happening around the world. My time with NACCC has broadened my perspective."

Linda plans to stay in Milwaukee, but she won't be sitting still. Following her retirement, she plans to cruise the Danube from Budapest to Amsterdam. Then she'll visit a cousin in the south of France.

Our best wishes go with her!



Linda Miller

Haiti Mission Expands Its Reach

Love Worth Sharing, Haiti, began a new ministry in Maniche, a city west of Port-au-Prince. The new program consists of a Bible study and feeding program. The ministry is housed in the local school building until the mission can build its own facility. There are 346 children enrolled in the school, with 200 of them in the Christian Education Program. They hope this number will rise next year to include all 346 children as they look forward to teaching the children about Jesus and leading them into a personal relationship with Him.

New Kitchen for Argentina

Asociacion Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina, has built a new kitchen. Their next project is a new dining hall. The new "soup kitchen" will allow the mission to provide a Saturday meal for 200 children of the poorest families, who have difficulty feeding their families.



For more information on any of these missions, or to donate to any of these projects, please contact Janet Wilson, chair, NACCC Mission Council at jaw.47jaw@gmail.com.

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

Word Alive Mission Update

Word Alive Mission, Ghana, has one orphanage with 17 children (total capacity is 25), of which six are in high school and one is in nursing school. The mission's school serves 250 children, ranging from kindergarten through ninth grade. Its Nursing School started in 2001 with 75 students. Since then, 700 students have graduated from the program. The mission also operates a one- to two-year Bible College program. Twenty-eight churches have been formed by its graduates.

To increase its income, Word Alive Mission is planting rubber trees and delivering water.

New Center for Christian Mission in the Far East

Christian Mission in the Far East, Philippines, is building a new Center for its office space. The new facility will have three large rooms. The middle room will be the office, with a big room on either side to accommodate delegates for all the spiritual gatherings.



Rev. Julian and his new well



New center for CMFE



ON

Giving

by Kevin Gromley

The holiday season has arrived. It is a time for family and friends, for happy reunions, for children and the magic of Christmas.

It is a time to think about Jesus' birth, and all it has meant to the world. It is also a time to think about those less fortunate. It is a time to think about giving as well as receiving God's gifts.

We Americans are a generous people. That is the common wisdom, at any rate. Last year, U.S. giving to churches, charities, and education exceeded \$410 billion, of which 70% came from individuals. This was up 5% from 2016 and the first-time giving exceeded \$400 billion. Of the total, 31% was donated to religious organizations. (<https://givingusa.org>) We Americans give more to charity than any other nation on earth.

That said, the number of households that give to charity has been falling since 2002. In 2014 (the last year for which data are available), some 56% of U.S. households gave to charity. The dollar

total was up last year as the average donation size increased, but fewer households are donating.

There is more to giving than money, of course (although in the commercial barrage of the holidays that may be sometimes difficult to remember). The Charity Aid Foundation does a survey that looks at helping strangers and volunteering time, as well as donating money to charity. It ranks countries on participation along these metrics. On this basis, the United States was fifth in the world last year. (<https://www.cafonline.org>) (Not bad, but hats off to Myanmar, a perennial number one.)

This year there is concern among charitable organizations. The new tax law has an impact, reducing the tax benefit for many donors. The results through the second quarter of this year suggest that both the number of donors and the total dollar amount of giving are down from 2017.

And the need for giving is great.

This year we have seen wildfires in the West. Hurricanes have ravaged Hawaii, the Carolinas, and Florida. Hurricane Florence, as one example, destroyed or damaged nearly 700,000 homes and businesses. Abroad, Indonesia was hit by earthquake and tsunami. A typhoon spread death and destruction in the Philippines and southern China. Flooding and mudslides caused by extreme rains hit Japan.

So, there is a need for donations of money and time, to help those affected by disaster. But there is also a need in our country for strong churches. It is no secret that we live in polarized times. It is as important as it ever has been to have healthy, vigorous Congregational churches, spreading God's word, working to bridge divisions, providing a place of spiritual healing and peace. I have been on the Board of the Congregational Foundation for about a year now. The Foundation works to secure donations to provide long term support to

the NACCC, and to manage those donations in accordance with donors' wishes and the NACCC's purpose. In that time I've seen the Foundation and National Association leadership at work. I have seen the thought that goes into encouraging donations, the care that is taken to follow donors' wishes, the focus on ensuring every dollar support the National Association's mission: 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.

And so I am encouraged. I am optimistic. I am inspired by those Congregationalists and congregations that have given to the National Association and have, through the Foundation, established endowments to help ensure the long-term health of the NACCC as we strive to do God's work. I am humbled by the dedication of those who give and those who use these gifts to further the NACCC's mission. I am grateful to be a part of this work.

Jesus had quite a bit to say about giving.

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38)

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care

of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:31-40) And my favorite...

~~~~~  
*"He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*  
(Mark 12:41-44)  
~~~~~

It is not how much you give, is it? And it is not all about giving money.

For over ten years now Congregationalists from southeast Michigan have travelled to New Orleans in the first months of the year. This started about sixteen months after Hurricane Katrina. Over the years nearly 100 different volunteers from eight

Michigan Congregational churches (plus a few hardy volunteers from Green Bay) have made the trip. We have had men, women, retirees, people taking a week off work. We have had volunteers experienced in construction work and volunteers who had never wielded a hammer. The group works on housing, repairing damaged homes or helping to build new construction for displaced and low-income residents. Although the physical damage from Katrina has been repaired, the dislocation and economic effects linger. The Congregationalist volunteers give time, toil, and sweat. When we work on repairing an existing home, we often have the opportunity to meet the owners. They thank us for what we have given and often bring some food for the work crew. They tell us how much it means to them, what a difference it will make when they can live in their own home again. And every time, we take away in our souls more than we give.

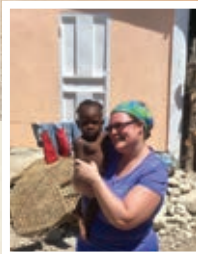
One of my favorite Mark Twain works is the collection of short stories in the form of excerpts from the diaries of Adam and Eve. It shares their different perspectives on learning about the new world and about each other – humorous, of course. But at the end of "Eve's Diary," Adam is at her grave. He says, "Wheresoever she was, there was Eden."

With apologies to Mr. Twain – Wheresoever there are people who give of their time and their talents and their spirit and their wealth, wheresoever there are people who care for others, without thought of reward, wheresoever there are people who work to do God's will in the world – there is Eden.



Ephraim and friends

Life Together on Mission



*Christina Surber
and Matye*

The fountain of fellowship is Jesus. In Matthew 18:12 Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them (ESV).”

In 2013 my wife Christina went on a mission trip to Haiti. Three months later, my impassioned wife dragged me back with her. God ruined my life in Haiti in the most beautiful possible ways imaginable! Not long after, we moved there. We planted a growing and thriving ministry there called Supply and Multiply. We oversee that ministry with a large staff of workers and missionaries, mission teams and partnerships, while shepherding a church in America. This model allows us to continue to gather friends for the work as we empower indigenous leaders. Our family and friends have learned so much in this process.

Here is the heartbeat of what we have learned.

Expectations

When we went to Haiti I thought I understood what it meant to be a missionary. I went to seminary. I've read all the books. You go to a place. You set up shop. You teach people how to do something. You preach the Gospel. You bring in groups of Americans to love orphans, paint a house, get their Instagram pics and head back to America!

Bing-Bam Wing-Wham, you're a missionary!

Realizations

There is a lot more to it than that. The “mission field” doesn't know it's

the mission field. It's just another place on this beautifully desolate planet where people live. I thought I knew what being a missionary meant. Then I watched God shatter my expectations and build a ministry by building a community. Being a missionary is about being broken before God and pliable in connecting with His people. It isn't primarily even about helping people. Being a missionary is being connected to God and people at the same time.

We've had tremendous success in terms of quantifiable growth in mission activity. We've built and maintain two elderly care homes which we call Matthew 25 Houses. Through them, and other activities, we employ a significantly-sized staff. We've built and continue to build several family homes which have a huge impact on the local community. We've bought boats for fisherman. We put more than 60 children in school this year alone through our school sponsorship program. And much more! But doing “stuff” isn't the point.

More importantly, we get to watch God weave lives together. Most notably, we get to be a part of God grafting

by Chris Surber

Christians together from two distinctly different cultures. We find that when people come to Haiti the foundations of the understandings about the world are assaulted. Americans are largely taught to fear people from places like Haiti. Poverty equals violence, we're told. But when nervous Americans on their first mission trip is confronted with an authentically relationship-driven culture, when a desperately poor child offers them a portion of the granola bar they just gave him, their hearts are torn into pieces!

We all have misconceptions about places like Haiti. I have seen the anxiety in the eyes of many first-time mission team members as they shyly debark the plane in Port-Au-Prince. Then we roll into town in the back of a crickety-clangy-rusty pickup truck and witness throngs of children chasing the truck yelling, “Christina! Christina!” as they excitedly look for my wife and her truckload of American friends! There is a distinctive kind of belonging that happens when God creates a community. It cannot be easily manufactured but we can sprinkle a few ingredients into our lives that, at the very least, put us into a position to potentially realize it.



Chris Surber, Ben, and children

In his 1978 book, *A Special Kind of Belonging*, Herbert Wagemaker writes, "The love that transforms the group process doesn't originate within the group members; it originates with God."¹ It's common for mission team members to initially see themselves as heroes headed to a foreign land to educate poor people in some far-off place, or to bring them the Gospel that, in many cases, they've already heard.

Indigenous people have false assumptions, too. Most Haitians are not unfamiliar with foreign missionaries. Generations of empty promises and parochial attitudes have embedded a kind of cynicism among some Haitians and inflated expectations among others. I'm not knocking short-term mission teams here. In fact, our ministry in Haiti depends upon them. I love mission teams but, when mission team work is primarily about doing stuff rather than knowing people, they will seldom produce lasting progress and never impact underlying realities that contribute to the poverty of the spirit that drives material poverty.

When our primary interest is building Christ-centered relationships, the Holy Spirit crushes false assumptions and heals cynicism. The amazing thing about it is that when that happens, the floodgates of doing stuff opens up! The synergism created in authentic loving Christian community is presently changing lives in Montrouis (pronounced Mo-Wee), Haiti.

The Fruit of Christ-Centered Community

We're not just helping people in this life. The truth of the eternal saving grace of God in Christ is constantly declared because it has become the regular discourse of this community God has created. Wagemaker also writes, "That is what evangelism means in the Christian community. It is the natural outgrowth of community, the process of witnessing to changes so dynamic they have to be shared."² The natural, supernatural outgrowth of life together is missions!

It is the normative consequence of the supernatural activity that is presently binding hearts together in the Supply and Multiply family.

Time and again in the Scriptures we see the need for Christian community. Where two or three are gathered Jesus is there with them. Paul says that we are each living stones being built up into the true Church of God (I Peter 2:5). We're mortared together! God's Word declares that this connection is so intrinsic that, as followers of Jesus, it is not as though, but is such that we are the very members of the living, visible, touchable, present incarnation of Jesus as His body in this world (Romans 12:4-5).

That truth transcends metaphor. The truth of our connectedness is a reality, but it will only existentially be realized to the extent that we accept and enter into it. But there is a cost to this level of deep fellowship Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

With an abstract idea it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even put into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience. Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living son. And the Christianity of that kind is nothing more or less than the end of discipleship.³

I would suggest that the inherent link between Christian community and Christian mission is missing in many of our fellowships because we are living with abstracted ideas about the communal aspect of discipleship. We have so individualized our understanding of faith and action that we have robbed ourselves of the greatest resource for faith and action – one another.

Isn't that the point of the Church? We are they. There is no "everyone else." There is only the universal all-inclusive



The Reverend Dr. Chris Surber is pastor of Mt. Hope Congregational Church, Livonia, Michigan. He is Executive Director of Supply and Multiply (Haiti).

"us." I've watched children from Virginia, teenagers from North Carolina, twenty-somethings from all over the country come together with Haitians of every age to become a family unbound by race, socioeconomics, or even the language of the tongue.

The only thing we share in common is Christ and He is more than enough. We speak the language of the love of Jesus.

I'm convinced that what God desires from His Church in every expression of it, whether on our street corner or an outreach in a hut in the most remote corner of the unreached globe, is simple genuine Christian community. Don't do missions. Don't pursue mission projects. Do live-together and missions will pour out of community. Pursue Christ in community and you won't have to twist arms into doing projects – authentic Christian activity is always the consequence of authentic Christian community.

Life together leads to life on mission together. Compassion shared together necessarily spills over to compassion shared with others. In Haiti God shattered my expectations. He used Haiti like an anvil upon which to crush my heart and begin to reshape it. What I learned about mission reshaped my understanding of daily discipleship.

We need one another. The deeper our fellowship together becomes the more abundantly the life of Christ will flow out of it in visible, touchable, life-changing ways.

The root of fellowship is Jesus. The fruit of Jesus-centered community is mission.

¹ *A Special Kind of Belonging*, Herbert Wagemaker, Word Books, Waco, 1978, page 68.

² *Ibid.*, 84.

³ *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Macmillan Publishing, 1963 (First Edition 1949), page 63-64.

The Preaching Task



by Michael W. Glidden

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

Are there any preachers out there? I must admit that I love the task of preaching! How about you? If you are a pastor, I can imagine that you, too, are excited about the craft and task of preaching. I began preaching in 1991 in small rural churches in Washington County, Maine. As a young 23-year-old, I had the joy of practicing the art of preaching upon many elderly congregants. They were all very gracious to me. The feedback was fairly consistent. I was loud, enthusiastic, demonstrative, biblical and conservative. And not necessarily in that order. They appreciated the fact that they could hear me! Early on as I preached in these remote parts of Maine, the voices beckoned me to remember to preach biblically. What does it mean to preach biblically?

In the summer of 2001, I took a class on expository preaching while a Doctor of Ministry student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. It was here that I was blessed to learn the fine art of preaching from a preaching giant, Dr. Haddon Robinson. Dr. Robinson taught the concept of the big idea of biblical preaching, which means to take a single text and effectively communicate it to a congregation. Robinson pressed it into my heart and mind that expository preaching is preaching that upholds the glory of God. God's truth and power is communicated through the preaching of a text. The text communicates a truth that is applied to the life of a believer. And if an unbeliever is present, God speaks

through the text to speak to the soul. For two weeks that summer, Dr. Robinson painstakingly taught some crucial steps in helping along the preaching process. It was during this class that I realized how vulnerable I am and that I can never be content with handling God's Word. Before approaching the preaching task, I need to open my life and heart before God and allow Him to search me.

I learned some valuable tools in the preparation of sermons that I still use to this day. I would like to share these with you. I would like to hear from all of you as to how you prepare messages. I do not believe in a "one size fits all" approach to preaching. I've found, with my personality style, that expository preaching is a blessing and works the best for me. On to the preaching task...

I get right at it **on Monday** mornings by reading the lectionary for the upcoming week. I read all of the passages and begin to pray while jotting down some initial observations that come to mind. From there, I ask a lot of questions about the text – the basic who, what, where, when and why, for which I thank my eighth grade English teacher! After a while, I need to leave it alone and let it all set. **On Tuesday**, I like to read commentaries and other sources to hear what other voices have to say. (I need to stop here to reinforce the fact that each session will always begin with prayer!) **On Wednesday**, I begin to craft an outline, which becomes the basis for a manuscript to take into the pulpit. I look for the big idea with a central theme to preach on.

I try to write out the crucial statement that is the basis of the sermon. **On Thursday**, I look at my notes on the passage and begin to frame an outline into three major sections not including the introduction and conclusion. As **Thursday moves into Friday**, I begin to add flesh to the bone structure of my outline.

Not all my sermons look the same but have a similar flow. I will explain the text, illustrate the text, and then apply the text. Before Sunday comes, I will often stand in front of a mirror or invisible congregation and practice my delivery. I'm grateful for this time because it's here that I can make all the mistakes to be made. As **Saturday evening** comes to a close, I realize that I have worked and prayed for at least 15 hours on this message.

Someone told me years ago, I think it was in seminary or someone at coffee hour, that the word "worship" actually means work. Handling God's word demands work! As a pastor I realize that the souls that sit in the pews are under my care. How will I care? I will lead. I will teach. I will visit. And I must preach!

HIT SHARE:



The Reverend. Dr. Shawn Stapleton is the Pastor of Community Congregational Christian Church in Citrus Springs, Florida. He works full-time as an advocate for children in foster care.

Joining the NACCC staff

by Shawn Stapleton

I have been a newspaper reporter, a Congregational congregant and pastor, a writer for an advertising agency, a life coach, and a child advocate. Today, I am thrilled to say I am your newest support staff member with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and am looking forward to finding new ways to support the health and growth of our congregations around the country.

As your new Workshop

Coordinator, I am coordinating the recording of events that would benefit our wider fellowship. It is our hope to create a virtual library of such resources, from scholarly presentations to practical guides for congregational life. These recordings will then be made available through the NACCC website (naccc.org).

In addition, I am working with the Vitality Council to coordinate the redevelopment of the Lay Ministry Training Program. This redevelopment will make it even more convenient for those who feel called to ministry – but not to seminary – to grow in their spiritual development and their understanding of the role of disciple and Christian leader among God's people, guided by some of the most spiritually gifted mentors in our association.

If you have a special speaker, intriguing Bible Study, or other event that you believe would benefit other churches in our association, please let me know! You can reach me at shawn.p.stapleton@gmail.com, or by phone at 727-403-3663. I look forward to hearing from you!

GOOD NEWS!

The Boston Seminar in Congregational History and Polity will take place mid-summer (date to be determined) in Boston and Plymouth, Massachusetts. The 2019 seminar is open to Congregational lay leaders and ministers, as well as ordained clergy from other faith traditions. We are currently investigating holding the seminar in late July or early August.

For more information or to express interest in attending, please contact the Rev. Dr. Charles Packer, Dean of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, at drcapacker@gmail.com. Stay tuned . . .

Necrology 2018



REVEREND DR. ROBERT LAWRENCE

The Reverend Dr. Robert P. Lawrence, 88, died at home on October 2, 2018, in Dartmouth after a brief illness. A minister for more than 60 years, Lawrence served churches in Little Compton, Rhode Island and Fall River, Massachusetts. He was pastor emeritus at Fall River Congregational Church.

Early in his career Lawrence was a chaplain for the Federal Bureau of Prisons and worked for the FBI. While minister at First Congregational Church in Fall River, he coordinated with the Fall River Police Department to organize the first gun buy-back program, located in the church basement, raised funds for a police K-9 and gear to protect officers.

A spiritual and civic force for good, he was presented the Distinguished Citizen Award and an honorary associate degree in humane letters from Bristol Community College. The Fall River Humanitarian Award was established in his honor.

For 20 years, Lawrence authored a column, "From the Pulpit," in *The Herald News*.

JANET GARBER

Janet Garber passed away on July 17, 2018. She was the wife of the late William (Bill) Garber until his death in 2017. The Garbers were members of the Congregational Church of the Messiah in Los Angeles. Janet served the church in various capacities, including involvement with the Cal-West Association of Congregational churches. Janet was active in the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and served in a leadership position for the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies 2007-2011.



REVEREND DR. LOUIS B. GERHARDT

Louis B. Gerhardt passed away at home on February 13, 2017 at age 92. Raised in Washington, he attended college and was ordained as a Congregationalist minister after serving in World War II. Following seminary in Berkeley he was called to ministry by a Congregational church in Port Chicago, California, where he met his first wife Grace and her children. They lived in Alaska, Indiana, and Utah, followed by a position with a church in Detroit, where he hosted an interview show on television. He returned to California in 1969 to serve a church in Fresno. Grace died in 1994. A year later he was called by First Congregational Church in Twentynine Palms and, soon after, married Patricia. His passion was fighting for human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples and gays, and opposing capital punishment.

Gerhardt served in many leadership positions for the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. He was a member of Christian Education (1964-1967), the Executive Committee (1967-1971), Financial Stewardship (1978-1981), Nominating Committee (1981-1982) and served a term as Moderator (1980-1981). Gerhardt was editor of *The Congregationalist* magazine between July 1973 and June 1977. He returned to a church in California in 1980 and he is survived by wife, Patricia, stepdaughters Marjorie Christian and Nancy Colchico and stepsons Gabriel Ditommaso and Matthew Ditommaso. He requested that no services be held. His body was donated to Loma Linda University Medical Center.

Choir Member Gives GIFT OF LIFE



by Terry Lester Wing

Terry Wing is a member of Heritage Congregational Christian Church of Madison and year-round delegate to the NACCC.

God leads us in directions we would never think possible in our lives. We go to church on Sunday mornings and are active in the choir and other functions of the church social life. We meet new people and make friends with the membership. We sing together, pray together, cry together, and celebrate together, yet we never know what the people we worship with will do for one another.

When God asks us to do something, we wonder if it is for real. We question whether we're hearing ourselves or God talking. God asks us to do things in our lives that we really must pray about. That is what Bob and Karen Millholland found themselves doing in the winter of 2000. God told Bob that somebody needed one of his kidneys. Bob said "yes."

Church member Jackie Wing, a diabetic, had been on the kidney transplant list for two years. She had been maintaining and was not yet to the point of being on dialysis but was slowly weakening.



Bob and Karen Millholland

One Sunday morning at the coffee hour following the worship service, Bob told Jackie Wing that they had the same blood type. He asked Jackie if she would like one of his kidneys. Jackie was stunned that Bob, who was not a relative, would take such a risk for her. After some tears, Jackie said "yes."

Bob, Karen, Jackie and I sang in the church choir together. The choir not only sings, but also is a core prayer group in the church – Heritage Congregational Christian Church in Madison, Wisconsin. We pray for each other and for all members of the congregation, and we have seen miracles happen. We believe and acknowledge what prayer has done in our lives.

After weeks of blood cross-matching and many medical tests, Bob and Jackie were deemed compatible, and surgery scheduled for August 1, 2000. Both families began to prepare for the event. We did a lot of praying over the next few weeks.

When the day arrived, the two surgeries (now common) began at the University of Wisconsin Transplant Clinic in Madison. Karen and I, surrounded by family, waited to hear any news. Bob's doctor appeared first to inform us that Bob was in recovery and doing fine. About an hour later, Jackie's doctor let us know that the surgery went as expected, the kidney was making urine, and Jackie would be in her room shortly.

By February, Bob and Jackie were fully recovered.

Bob's wife Karen was once asked if she had ever second-guessed the decision they made to donate one of Bob's kidneys. She said she was jealous that it could not have been her own kidney that was donated!

Jackie died on August 22, 2011, from complications of her diabetes, but she and I were forever grateful to Bob, Karen and their two children for their unselfish action.

Family and friends were by Jackie's side when she passed away. In memory of Jacqueline (Jackie) Switzky Wing, I planted an Autumn Blaze Red Maple on church property.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), there are currently around 114,650 people on the national transplant list. If more people would step up in faith, as did Bob, and become organ donors (live or cadaver), the lives of 20 people each day, on average, could be saved.

IMPRESSIONS

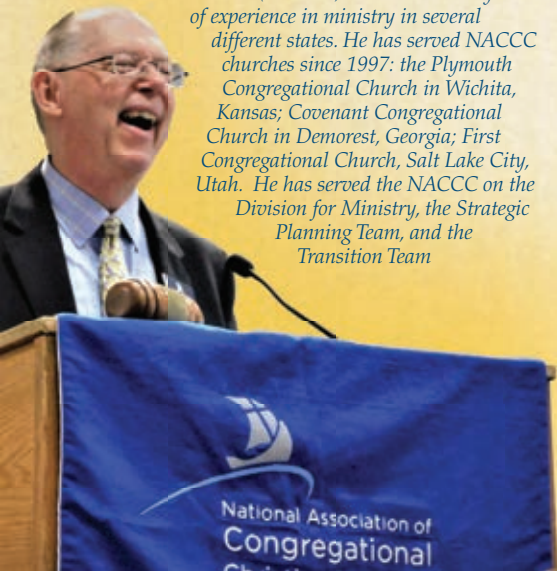
from the Awakening Symposium

by Michael Chittum

The Awakenings Symposium, hosted by the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa, as part of the church's 150th anniversary celebration, was held on October 11-13, 2018. The Reverend Dan Vellinga, pastor of the church, was part of the organizing committee. The other members of the Steering Committee for the Symposium were: The Reverend Dr. Charles Packer (chair), Pat Anderson, Miriam Bryant, the Reverend Kathrine Miller-Todd, the Reverend Richard Miller-Todd, and the Reverend Tom Van Tassell. The Iowa event also celebrated the first NACCC Symposium, held in 1998 at First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

In the September issue of *The Congregationalist*, the Reverend Dr. Charles Packer provided a preview of the upcoming Awakenings Symposium with a brief biography of the presenters and a sketch of the papers to be presented. I will not duplicate that information, but I

The Reverend Dr. Michael Chittum is Executive Director of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC). He has over 35 years of experience in ministry in several different states. He has served NACCC churches since 1997: the Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas; Covenant Congregational Church in Demorest, Georgia; First Congregational Church, Salt Lake City, Utah. He has served the NACCC on the Division for Ministry, the Strategic Planning Team, and the Transition Team



will attempt to share my impressions of the event. My only disclaimer is that these are my thoughts; I cannot and will not presume to speak for all who were there.

I would say, first, that the presenters and participants represented a cross-section of NACCC Congregationalists. There were folks from Iowa and Nebraska, of course. There were also folks from California, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Wisconsin, and beyond. There were even representatives of Congregationalism from England and Wales. Some were older; some were younger. Some had been in ministry for decades; a few had retired; others were just starting their ministry journey. Some were more conservative; some were more liberal. Some had advanced graduate degrees; a few were beginning their academic careers. In short, it was a very "Congregational" crowd.

Second, I would note that, in the best tradition of NACCC gatherings, there was great food and conversation. The FCC Marshalltown "kitchen team" went above and beyond the call of duty to make certain we were all well fed; and the church's volunteers pampered us, for which, we were all greatly appreciative. The conversations that took place during breaks, over table at lunch or dinner, and with the morning cup of coffee before the presentations began were enriching.

For example, I was able to talk to ministers and get an update on what was happening in their churches and in their regional associations. I had chances to talk to ministers who had recently moved to new places of ministry. I also had the

opportunity to discuss issues and answer questions about the pastoral search process with folks.

Finally, and most importantly, the Symposium was an opportunity for us all to hear new ideas, to think about our faith, to open our hearts and minds to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and to discuss how this information could inform our ministry in our church. I learned about aspects of the First Great Awakening. I was challenged to consider what or who was awakened and how that revival in the 18th century in America affected the local church and ministers. I learned about the societal context of that time and how it was similar to or different from our day. I learned how to consider the work of the Spirit in our churches now by thinking of new ways to work for the Kingdom of God within my community in mutuality and collaboration with others, and I was challenged to be open to new ways to perceive the work of the Spirit. Further, I was challenged to dream of what God could and would do within our congregations as I heard about a model of discernment to be used by a local congregation in making decisions, about how the local church should be and could be a place to nurture a sense of call to ministry, and how the local church and individual members could engage in Christian social action.

I did not just listen to individuals lecturing me about these ideas. I had the opportunity to discuss them all within small groups so that I could share my thoughts and reactions to the presentations and have my questions answered and my thoughts refined, sharpened, and integrated into a better understanding of possibilities for ministry through our NACCC churches.

In short, the 2018 Awakenings Symposium in Iowa was a most Congregational event. We were challenged to open our minds and to engage our spirits to consider what the Holy Spirit would move us to do as we strive to be faithful to proclaim the good news of God's love.

Pastorates & PULPITS

Recent Calls

First Congregational Church, Saugerties, N.Y. has called Pastor Frank Fabiano as Senior Minister.

Ozaukee Congregational Church, Grafton, Wis. has called Jeffrey Larson as Senior Minister.

Thomas A. Edison Congregational Church, Ft. Myers, Fla. has called Rev. Jim Harper III as Senior Minister.

First Congregational Church of Royal Oak, Mich. has called Rev. Carrie Marie Orlando as Pastor.

The Shandon Congregational Church, Shandon, Ohio has called Rev. Dr. Edward Long as Intentional Interim Minister.

Mohegan Congregational Church, Uncasville, Conn. has called Rev. George E. Blair III as Senior Minister.

First Congregational Church, Fall River, Mass. has called Rev. Andrew Stinson as Senior Minister.

First Congregational Church, Laurel, Mon. has called Pastor James M. Dawson as Senior Minister.

Second Congregational Church of Warren, Maine has called Rev. Matthew McDonald as Transitional Pastor.

Congregational Church of the Chimes, Sherman Oaks, Calif. has called Rev. Dr. Elizabeth E. Bingham as Senior Minister.

1st Congregational Church of Crown Point



Pastoral Vacancy
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IN SEARCH

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Atkinson Congregational Church, Atkinson, Ill.
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First Congregational Church, Interlachen, Fla.
First Congregational Church, Peterson, Iowa
First Congregational Church, Terre Haute, Ind.
First Congregational Church of Yarmouth, Yarmouth Port, Mass.
Flatbush-Tompkins Congregational Church, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Founders Congregational Church, Harwinton, Conn.
Gahanna Community Congregational Church, Gahanna, Ohio
Little Washington Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio
McGraft Memorial Congregational Church, Muskegon, Mich.
Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif.
Second Congregational Church, Jewett City, Conn.
St. Jacobi Congregational Church, Richfield, Wis.
Stafford Springs Congregational Church, Stafford Springs, Conn.
Tinley Park Community Church, Tinley Park, Ill.

Associate Minister

Congregational Christian Church, North Manchester, Ind.
United Church of Marco Island, Marco Island, Fla.

Assistant Minister – Minister of Youth

Amelia Christian Church, Clayton, N.C.

Non-NACCC Church

First Congregational Church United Church of Christ, Springfield, Vt.

Corrections

On page 23 of the September issue of the magazine there is a photo of the Reverend Joy Matos. The other person in the photo is Barbara Dabul, whose name was left off inadvertently.

(L-R) Joy Matos and Barbara Dabul.



On page 18 of the September issue, the subhead at the top of the first column of names should be \$100-\$249.

Our apologies for any confusion we may have caused.

January 14, 2019

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Contact editor@nacc.org or 800-262-1620, ext. 1624

April 29 -May 2, 2019

East Coast Ministers' Convocation
Cathedral Camp Retreat & Conference Center
East Freetown, MA 02717

APRIL 29- MAY 2, 2019

Midwest Ministers' Convocation, Weber Center, Adrian, MI

April 29-May 2, 2019

West Coast Ministers' Convocation
Zephyr Point, Zephyr Cove, NV 89448

JUNE 22-25, 2019

65th Annual Meeting & Conference of the National Association
of Congregational Christian Churches
Cleveland Airport Marriott, Cleveland, OH

SAVE THE DATES

JUNE 27-30, 2020

66th Annual Meeting & Conference
Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland, Maine

JULY 22-28, 2020

International Congregational Fellowship Quadrennial
Conference, Curry College, Milton, MA

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

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

The NACCC reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

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