

**How do I know
the Congregational Church
is where I belong?**

1. **Come and worship** with us! Worship is important to the members of the congregation. You can tell a great deal by how we worship and how we relate to each other.
2. **Pick a fellowship event** or group and come visit a couple of times. You can't really know a person or church until you see them in an informal setting. If you like our worship, you will really like who we are in less formal settings!
3. **Look at our covenant.** This covenant is the "faith and mission statement" — the guide for what a Congregational Church believes and does.
4. **Pray about becoming a member** of this Congregational Church. Ask God if this is where God wants you to be.

If you are at peace with your decision, if you feel "at home" when you worship with us, then chances are God is leading you to become a member of this Congregational Church.

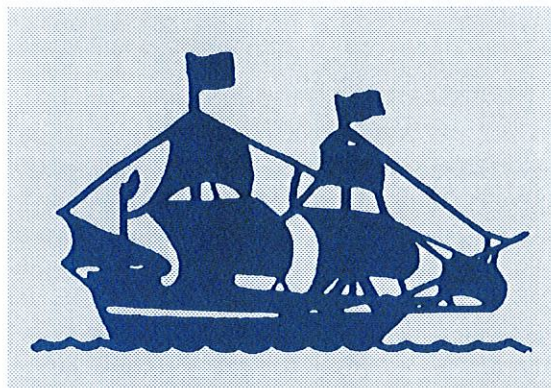
Henry David Gray, Ph.D., L.L.D., D.D., (1908-1994), father, minister, a founder of the NACCC and ICF, author, scholar.

David Lawther Gray, D.Min., son, Pastor Emeritus, Congregational Church of the Messiah, Los Angeles, CA, former dean of CFTS, co-founder of HOPE and C-WAY.

Douglas Lorbeer Gray, M.Div., grandson, Pastor at First Church of Squantum (Congregational)

Printed by and Available from
NACCC
P.O. Box 288, 8473 S. Howell Ave.
Oak Creek, WI 53154
800-262-1620
nacc@nacc.org

WHAT It MEANS to Be a MEMBER of a CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Henry David Gray

Revised in 2016 by

David L. Gray and Douglas L. Gray



Welcome

You are invited to become acquainted with the origin, beliefs, distinctive principles and inclusive fellowship of a Congregational Christian Church. We hope you will find a kindred spirit in the Congregational Way and choose to become a member of a local Congregational Christian Church.

Based on the New Testament

Congregationalism came to America on the Mayflower to reestablish a Church on the New Testament pattern — a fellowship of persons who freely choose to be followers of Jesus Christ. The earliest Christians believed that wherever two or three were gathered together in the Name and Spirit of Jesus Christ, that Christ would be there with them. (Matthew 18:20)

The Mayflower Pilgrims also gathered together freely, committing themselves to worship and serve together as the Spirit of God moved them. In matters of faith they accepted full responsibility for their personal relationship with God in Christ and allowed no outside authority to dictate how they should believe, worship or serve God.

Congregationalists expect each member to have a personal relationship with God as the motivating force in his or her life.

The purpose of the Church is to help us grow in our relationship with God and our expression of God's love in our lives.



Copyright © 2016 David L. Gray and Douglas L. Gray

What It Means to Be a Member

To be a Church member is to recognize our commitment to God as God is made known to us in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We choose to be counted with those whose purpose is to build a more Christian community.

To be a Church member is to enter a dedicated fellowship: growing in our understanding of Christ, sharing each other's burdens and joys, and serving others in Christ's Spirit. These are all part of a living fellowship of those who follow Christ.

To be a Church member is to offer strength and encouragement through shared worship, prayer, study and service. Each member adds talent, time, money and prayers to the total work of the Church. When we work as a team to accomplish God's purpose, we receive the joy of God's contagious inspiration.

To be a Church member is to make real in our everyday lives the love of Jesus Christ. When Christ is alive within us, our relationships with others are deeper and truer. We rejoice as we experience and see God's love expressed in Christian fellowship around us.

To be a Church member is to find forgiveness for sins, strength for life's tasks, and assurance of a destiny worth desiring — to know oneself as a child of the living God!

If you are already a member, may these words reawaken in you the desire to serve our Lord more fully.

If you are not a member, we invite you to dedicate yourself to the Congregational Christian Way.

Open Bible

Congregational Christians stand for an open Bible. It is the inspired Word of God, a guide for life. Through God's Word we learn and experience the power and love of a living God so Christ becomes the primary light in our daily lives.

The Holy Spirit

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to understand and apply God's Word written in the Bible and experienced in our lives. The Spirit helps us develop as intelligent and joyful followers of Jesus Christ, expressing in our lives the fruit of God's Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22)

Sacraments Are Not Magic

Congregational Churches practice two sacraments: Baptism and The Lord's Supper, also referred to as Holy Communion.

Christian Baptism of infants or adults is practiced in different ways. God's blessing of the new life in Christ is the essential factor. Christian Dedication of infants relies on the parents' sacred promise to bring up children in the Christian faith. Christian Dedication is a common practice among our churches.

The Lord's Supper is practiced in a variety of ways. The Presence of the Living God is the essential factor. No human ritual, tradition or practice by itself can provide the inspiration and spiritual strength which comes from God to believers in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and God's faithfulness.

Christ Centered

Congregational Churches accept Christ alone as the head of the Church and are completely responsible for hearing and responding to Christ's guidance as they understand it. Each church is autonomous and self-governing, free from outside church authority to follow the leading of Christ's Spirit.

The relationship between Congregational Churches is one of mutual respect and kindred fellowship. Decisions are only recommendations and advice. They have only as much authority as there is truth in them.

When you join a Congregational Church, you accept the comprehensive view that all believers are one in Christ — regardless of organizational affiliation.

Individual Conscience

Congregational Christians believe deeply in God, in Jesus Christ, in the guiding Spirit of God, in prayer, in the worth of worship, in the value of the sacraments, and in the power of God to triumph over all that is evil.

We do not accept any formal statement of faith as binding on all members. It's not because we think creeds do not matter, but because we believe authenticity of conviction demands intellectual freedom and personal relationship with God.

Congregationalists have liberty and responsibility of conscience in interpreting the Gospel.

A common requirement for membership is sincere Christian conviction and honest desire to live in fellowship as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Our Relationship with God

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39) God relates to us directly both individually and collectively. Congregationalists advocate following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as individual conscience dictates.

In Congregationalism, while we each have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we also need the support of a loving community to grow to full maturity in Christ.

United by Covenant

Each Congregational Church has its own covenant with God and one another. We bring our different gifts and understandings of God as we walk, work, worship, pray and celebrate together.

Mutual respect for diverse expressions of sincere Christian belief is a primary conviction of the Congregational Way.

A Caring Community

Being a part of our Congregational Church family means being surrounded by a group of caring people who help us up when we fall and who give us opportunities to serve God. As we serve others and are served in return, we rediscover and grow in our faith in Christ. A caring community strengthens members' faith, purpose and focus.

Wider Relationships

Congregational Churches are often in fellowship with like-minded churches in local, state, regional, national and international organizations, none of which have authority over the local church.

My Church

My Church is not a building, though it often meets in one. My Church is not a club, though it is a community gathered in Christ, standing together for Christ with great conviction.

My Church is a fellowship of like-minded souls. Its members are united by a shared conviction, great purpose, life-changing community —

- the conviction that God is eager to share the road of life with us
- the purpose to build personal character modeled after Jesus Christ
- and community that reflects the Kingdom of God.

Because we share this conviction, purpose and community, our Church is extraordinarily responsive to God's will as we come to know it.

My Church is a living Church. Its focus is Jesus' focus — on ministering to others and living our faith. My Church is a Church that values the past and dreams of the future, but lives in the present.

My Church is a thinking Church. Though it values ancient creeds, it is a Church of the seeking mind, looking ever for the truth which God has yet to show us. My Church strives to be faithful in our day, as other disciples have been in theirs.

My Church is a Church of the Spirit. It puts people first — before programs, committees, or things. It is a Church which seeks the highest, but humbly and fearlessly follows God's Light as God gives us the ability to see the Light.