

The CONGREGATIONALIST

Magazine of the Congregational Way since 1849

Vol. 166/No. 2

Congregationalist.org

June 2014



A LOVING RESTORATION AT REDLANDS

MITHRAISM ⇨ CHRISTIANITY?
HMM...

WHERE TO **FIND** YOUNG PEOPLE

A NEW (OLD) WAY TO READ SCRIPTURE

and more ...



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Our Kitchen Table

A member of our Congregational family asked me to read a magazine essay and possibly reprint it in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*. This would not be unprecedented; we do sometimes, with permission, reprint outside content.

The recommended piece was well-written and relevant to the theological debate that has ebbed and flowed in our pages for several issues. We decided not to reprint it, however—because our ongoing conversation is really a series of expressions by *members of our Congregational family* “around the kitchen table.” Any heartburn felt over some of these expressions may be eased by the fact that they are authentic contributions from members of our own fellowship. To add in views from farther afield would be to put the editor’s thumb on the scale.

Let us repeat what we have said elsewhere about the argument taking place in our pages: We think it’s our job neither to provoke nor to suppress controversy—much less to sponsor, referee, or shape it—but to present respectfully, in its best light and on its own merits, *each particular expression* of relevant, authentic, articulate concern that comes from within our Congregational family (broadly defined). If you are part of the Congregational Way, and you have something to say around our kitchen table, we’ll clear a space and let you make your best case.

That’s not a license to bore our readers or to insult their intelligence. Neither will we retail *ad hominem* attacks or unduly inflammatory remarks. We recognize, however, that some things must be

stated “with the husk left on” to convey the force and emphasis of the author’s true voice. We won’t censor you, nor will we tolerate rhetorical hanky-panky. Come at us straight up, and we’ll give you a decent hearing.

We continue to invite to you say what’s on your mind, through *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*; but don’t ask your editor to play God. It’s enough for this ink-stained wretch to sort out the traffic in the traditional sphere of respectful Congregational discourse.

On a more mundane note, readers may notice larger body type, fewer words per page, and a somewhat less crowded layout in this issue. This is meant to bring you a more pleasing and user-friendly product. It is the first stage of a planned freshening of our “look.” Nothing radical, of course; we just hope it helps you enjoy this magazine even more. Reader feedback is welcomed.



LARRY SOMMERS, *Editor*

The CONGREGATIONALIST

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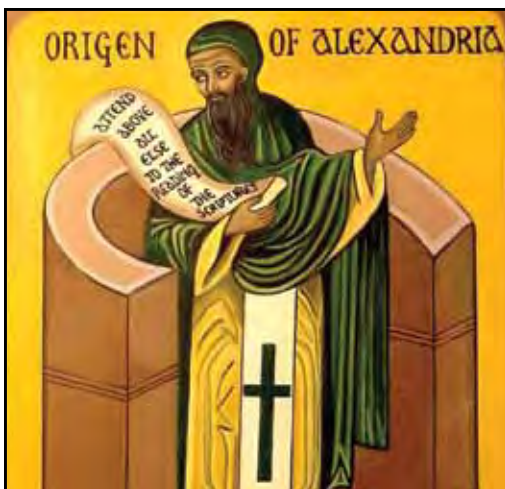
Vol. 166/No. 2

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June 2014



FEATURES



7 TRANSITION
by Casey vanderBent

10 HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE
by Tim Roberts

14 RESTORATION AT REDLANDS
Historic Windows, Labor of Love
by John Berry

18 MITHRAISM AND CHRISTIANITY
by Steve Schafer

**21 CHILDREN OF THE MILLENIUM
PART 1**
Who are the Millennials ?
by Sarah Gladstone

**23 GREAT RESOURCES ARE CLOSER
THAN YOU THINK**
by Les Wicker



EDITORIAL STATEMENT

All content in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* appears by the authority of the editor. We reserve freedom of expression to our authors and freedom of opinion to our readers.

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

Neither *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* nor the National Association 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.

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Relation**
Our Kitchen Table
- 6 By Way of Mutual Care**
What's in it for us?
- 8 Strangers and Pilgrims...**
Jonathan Edwards
- 9 Net Mending**
Does Your Heart Bleed?
- 28 More Light**
- 30 News and Needs**
- 32 Along the Way**
- 34 Letters**
- 36 Necrology**
- 39 Pastorates and Pulpits**
- 39 Calendar**

Vol. 166/No. 2

June 2014



ON THE COVER:

Moderator Mike Henry sands a piece of old window bracing at First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif. Church members under Henry's leadership did much of the hands-on work to prepare for reinstallation of the church's historically-significant windows after the stained glass was painstakingly restored by specialists from Judson Studios of Highland Park, Calif.

“What’s in it for us?”

by Casey vanderBent

I’ve heard the question from inquiring churches and from member churches that have not been active in our association. I’ve heard it from clergy trying to juggle multiple needs and ministry opportunities, often with shrinking resources. “What’s in it for us?”

First of all, being in fellowship with other Congregational churches is what we do. Even the Pilgrims of the Plymouth colony—Separatists that they were—only became fully Congregational when they began to share themselves with sister churches in New England. In our Way, each congregation is complete under Christ and fully able to govern its own affairs, with the Spirit’s guidance; but it was never intended that the local church should be completely independent. We are most free in fellowship, as individuals in a local gathered body or as particular local congregations in a church association. No single church can exist in a healthy way when it is utterly removed from fellowship; and it is with other Congregational churches, whose journey and heritage we share, that we most completely realize that fellowship.

As a pastor I know very well the stress a local church and its leaders experience when considering where and when to invest their precious resources. That’s why the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches offers a range of programs and services for churches beyond what even our highly-prized state and regional associations can do:

- Resources for education, stewardship, youth ministry, finances, leadership development, clergy search, and consultation on a range of topics from church revitalization to conflict resolution.

- Churches joined with sister churches to support missionaries around the world.
- Resources for church staff, and a Congregational Investment Trust in which to invest surplus funds. A Building and Loan fund for important local building needs.
- Clergy insurance and retirement benefits, resources for training and support, grants to support clergy in case of hardship, assistance in seeking a new call, and opportunities to gather with fellow clergy at our annual Ministers’ Convocation.
- Leadership resources on best practices as well as courses in leadership development and Congregational history and polity.
- NAPF/HOPE gatherings, bringing together Congregational youth for worship, service, and Christian fellowship.
- Our Annual Meeting and Conference, for sharing in faith, freedom, and fellowship with Congregationalists from around the nation.

You may not need these resources all the time, but when you do need them, they’re indispensable.

“What’s in it for us?”

As churches in fellowship, it is equally important to ask: What do you have to offer the rest of us? What does your local church bring to our common Congregational table? For starters, your own unique expression of our Congregational Way is a tremendous value that you can share with others.

We need the vital activity of every one of our churches—just as each member church needs

the nurturing communion with the rest of the body. We are not now, nor have we ever been, a tradition that thrives on independence. We strive for interdependence, an art this association practices very well when we dedicate ourselves to the endeavor.

I pray that your church will renew its commitment to the NACCC today. May God bless our fellowship.



CASEY VANDERBENT
Executive Secretary

Transition

by Casey vanderBent

The NACCC's Strategic Plan, including organizational restructuring, has been part of our shared conversation for most of the last five years. The plan was adopted in June 2011, and since then we have been in the "implementation" or "transition" phase. We have been actively discussing and working on our "transition" for so long now that it feels to some as if we will never be "transitioned."

Recent developments encourage optimism that at this year's meeting in Omaha we may well be able to take conclusive action toward realizing the goals of the Strategic Plan.

A major reason we've been on hold is that we've been awaiting an Internal Revenue Service determination affecting the "Corporation"—that part of our National Association that officially manages the association's money and property. Finally, our case has been assigned in the IRS, with an initial review done and a first set of questions answered. If all goes well, we will receive a favorable ruling and will be able to make our organizational changes permanent, ushering in a great new day for our National Association.

Here are some of the things delegates will likely be voting on in June:

- Changes to our Corporate and Association Articles and Bylaws reflecting the new structure of the NACCC—with its Leadership Council, three Ministry Councils, and Board of Directors.
- Direct election of leaders to their new Council and Board positions.
- A recommended change to our staffing model that will better serve the needs of our member churches under the new structure.
- Real steps toward achieving a balanced budget in the future.

You will also hear reports on the many ways that our new structure is already working, in the interim, to bring new resources and services to our churches, assisting them like never before in the fulfillment of their ministry objectives.

We hope that you will join us in Omaha to commemorate a milestone in the achievement of our strategic goals.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards was a very important figure for at least three reasons: (1) He was a strong believer in the Congregational Way, trying to get Congregational churches to return to the original ideal of the “gathered church,” a church composed not of mere churchgoers but of genuine believers; (2) he was one of the best-known and most effective leaders of the Great Awakening; and (3) he has been called the greatest philosopher ever produced by America. We will spend more than one of these columns on him. Here, we will begin an overview of his life.

Clarence B. Carson, noting that Edwards was born in 1703 and died in 1758, gives a thumbnail sketch of his life in very economical language: “Edwards was born in Connecticut, trained at Yale, became a Congregational minister, and was pastor of churches in New York and Massachusetts. He was the leading Calvinist thinker in 18th century America, sparked the Great Awakening in New England, and was a foremost philosopher of his time. In his later years, he became a missionary to the Indians, and in the last year of his life accepted an appointment as president of the College of New Jersey ([later known as] Princeton).”¹

The introduction to *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* tells us that

Edwards was born Oct. 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Conn. His father, Timothy Edwards, was also a Congregational minister. His maternal grandfather was the famous Solomon Stoddard, the Congregational minister who was the founder of “Stoddardeanism,” which Edwards would oppose later in life as being too liberal a view of the church and the Sacraments. Edwards graduated from Yale and then earned his master’s degree. He was briefly a pastor in Bolton, Conn., before he went back to Yale to serve as a tutor for two years. He made a study of the flax spider that was highly regarded.²

Like Saint Augustine, Jonathan Edwards was as much a philosopher as he was a theologian, and his work in epistemology and ontology is still well respected today. He also wrote about free will, about redemption, original sin, the Trinity, and other standard theological topics. In addition, he was a biographer and a

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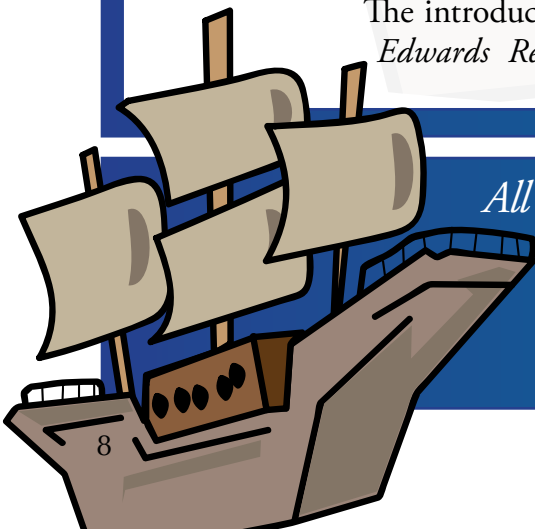
1 Clarence B. Carson, *A Basic History of the United States* (Wadley, Alabama: American Textbook Committee, 1983-1996), Vol. 1, p. 100.

2 Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, eds. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), x-xi.

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

All these died in faith, and received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and believed them, and received them thankfully, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

—HEBREWS 11:13 (Geneva Bible)





Does Your Heart Bleed?

Hearthbleed is not just an individual problem, or a tech problem—it's a church problem. In case you haven't heard, "Heartbleed" is the name of the Internet's first superstar security vulnerability. It's not a virus that attacks individual computers, it's a hole in the Internet's own security protocols, leaving *everyone* vulnerable. Any transaction since December 2011 is potentially insecure. There's no way to tell, and there's no way to go back and undo it.

Internet providers and businesses are patching their systems right now, but there is still plenty that churches can do. *First*, assume all of your passwords are already exposed, and replace them. *Second*, turn on "two-factor authentication" for any service that offers it. *Third*, teach your members and neighbors.

- 1. Passwords**—Stop using the same password over and over again. Pick a base password that includes letters, numbers, and symbols. "John3:16" would work great. Now combine that base password with the name of whatever service you're logging into, (for example, googleJohn3:16 or John3:16Facebook) and you have a unique, easy-to-remember, decently strong password for each site you use.
- 2. Two-factor authentication**—It works a bit like your ATM card, where you need the card and the PIN code to get in. For Internet services, this usually means pairing your account with a mobile phone; but once it's set up, you can log in as usual from your "trusted" computer. You'll only need to

enter the extra code when you're on a new or shared computer. To help add it to your Facebook account, I've created a video at <http://youtu.be/lcgZ0YNnsh4>. And here's one for your Google account—<http://youtu.be/VPFNftnKiFI>. *Note: Two-factor authentication in Google may disable certain mobile apps, or e-mail clients like Outlook; so here's another video I've made to show you how to fix that* → <http://youtu.be/x38dr771frQ>.

- 3. Teach your people**—If your church is like my church, about half of your members are not going to want to do this. But do you know what security system has stopped more thieves than any other? *Good neighbors!* So take this opportunity to care for one another in a practical way by helping neighbors improve their passwords and activate two-factor authentication.

You'll be glad you did.



THE REV. ROBERT J. BRINK is senior minister at First Congregational Church, Saugatuck, Mich. If you have a technology-related question for "Net Mending," e-mail Rob@RevSmilez.com or write Rev. Rob Brink, P.O. Box 633, Saugatuck, MI 49453.



Icon of Origen of Alexandria by Eileen McGuckin, www.sgtt.org.

HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE



by Tim Roberts

In my college somato-psychology class we studied the body-mind relationship by, among other things, reading a book entitled, *How to Read a Person Like a Book*, by Gerard Nierenberg (New York: Pocket Books, 1990; \$7.19 paperback, Amazon).

In his little book, Nierenberg illustrates how we humans exhibit nuanced communication. Certain body postures, or expressions, communicate a non-verbal message. We can say a great deal without speaking any words at all! There are layers of meaning through how we communicate verbally *and* non-verbally. We are not simple creatures; we are multi-dimensional in the ways we communicate and in the meaning of our multiple ways of communicating.

The Bible, like any other serious body of literature, is no different. It communicates to us through obvious teaching *and* through nuanced subtleties. We cannot dismiss the many layers of its communicating any more than we can dismiss the layers of human communication. To treat the Bible or people as one-dimensional communicators neglects the richness of meaning woven through the written, spoken, or non-spoken word.

It behooves the student of Scripture to consider these insights before aligning with a single method of interpretation. Often we limit our

methods of interpretation because of a theological orientation. Stereotypically, conservatives read the scriptures literally and only literally while liberals read the scriptures morally or metaphorically, shunning a literalist approach. Either extreme is one-dimensional and neglects the rich layers of meaning and communication found in our Bible.

What are our options?

A theologian and biblical interpreter named Origen of Alexandria (185-253 A.D.) has given followers of Jesus Christ an important gift. He taught us to read scripture the way Nierenberg teaches us to read people. Origen called this method of reading the Bible *the four-fold interpretation of scripture*. He asserted that, to discern the layers of meaning in any biblical text, you should interpret it literally, allegorically, morally, and eschatologically.

THE LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

We begin by seeking the plain meaning of the biblical text. To do so, we view it literally. This is simply the first step, not the only step; so readers can rest assured they are not “*checking their brains at the door*.” But dismissing this foundational step creates the false illusion that there is no value in it. If I you hear me say, “I’m hungry!” you may rightly interpret it metaphorically, but you will neglect an important part of my humanity if you ignore the literal meaning.

Consider the story of Noah. We can view the Noah narrative through the “lenses” of the four-fold interpretation method. The obvious literal meaning of the Noah narrative refers to a man who built a physical ark and who rescued representatives of all creation from a watery deluge. The literal understanding of Noah treats the story, with all of its harsh implications, as an actual historical account. Lives were saved and lost at the whim of an angry God. Whether you do or do not believe the literal accounting of the Noah events, you can also apply and learn from the allegorical method of interpretation.

THE ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

After first viewing a biblical text literally, we then read it as allegory. Allegory is symbolism. One thing represents another, or points to something beyond itself. So allegory helps us to understand a deeper layer of

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meaning beyond the literal. It does not substitute for a literal reading of scripture; it adds to it. Again, there's richness in the layers of meaning. My verbal statement about being hungry certainly can represent different kinds of hunger—soul hunger, emotional hunger, relational hunger, hunger for productivity or meaning, and so on.

Origen and the early Church Fathers interpreted the story of Noah as allegory. They viewed the Noah narrative as a pre-figuring of Jesus. They said Noah represents Jesus; the ark represents Jesus' tomb; Noah's disembarking at Mount Ararat represents Jesus' resurrection, his exit from the tomb; the dove sent forth by Noah represents the Holy Spirit commissioned by Jesus. The Noah narrative points to the peace, salvation, and restoration of creation through Jesus' own sacrifice and resurrection. It represents God's great desire to save all creation, not just humans. And it sets the stage for the Christ event. But we must go further and consider the moral implications of the Noah narrative.

THE MORAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

In addition to the first two methods, we also ask ethical questions about the biblical text. We seek to understand what it asks us to do/not do, or to be/not be. Our conclusions are partly based on the literal *and* allegorical lessons we learn from a given text. Human behavior is shaped by a moral world-view, and the Bible has an implicit moral world-view into which we must tap. Your response or lack thereof to my statement, "*I'm hungry*," depicts the moral "world" in which you live.

The Noah narrative clearly depicts a world in which justice exists: God is angry at the rebellion of people he created; their sin must have consequences. Our holy God could not sit idly by and allow his beautiful creation to become so thoroughly poisoned. God had to act to correct human anarchy. So the repercussions, in this instance, are the near total destruction of all creation. Rebellion toward God has consequences. Through the lens of the allegorical interpretation we can note that God has placed the ultimate consequence of our fallen nature not on us but on Jesus. He was destroyed that we might have life. But it is our sin and rebellion that caused such dire consequences for our Lord. What, then, about our future with God?

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

The Greek word *eschaton* means "end times." To say that everything in Scripture points to an end of time, when God will fully restore a fallen

creation, is to view Scripture eschatologically. We ask a biblical text questions like, *To what end is this pointing us? How are we part of fulfilling God's grand purposes? How does the vision of the end-times impact and shape and compel our living in the here-and-now?*

If allegory symbolically represents something else, eschatology represents the final consummation of all that exists. It's the dream fulfilled. It's the hunger satisfied. Through eschatology we work backwards, shaping our present-day lives according to God's vision of life restored in God's goodness at the end of time. The statement, *"I'm hungry,"* points to a constant future need to be fulfilled and satisfied, literally or not, by something or someone more substantial. My hunger may point to a future and final source of hope, wholeness, and stability.

The rainbow in the Noah narrative speaks to a future with God for the Noah clan and for all creation. The rainbow of God's covenant transcends the Noah event and offers us all a future of hope, peace, promise, stability, restoration, fulfillment, salvation, community, prosperity, and love. Like Noah, our tumultuous life's journey, and that of all creation, will someday come to rest in the safety of God's "mountain." God will, ultimately, rescue us. We know the ending. Jesus promised to fulfill at the end of time the once-for-all rescue of creation that is depicted in the Noah narrative.

Origen of Alexandria blessed us with the four-fold interpretation of scripture! These four methods, taken together, weave a fabric of insight for how we read scripture, for how we follow Jesus, and for how we worship the Christ. The four-fold method of interpreting scripture "speaks" to us with a richness of meaning, just like people do. So, while we can learn to read people like a book, maybe we should learn once again how to read the Good Book like we read people! After all, it was people that God used to speak the words of life into our Bible so that we may continue the conversation, with them and with one another.



*Noah's Ark, oil on canvas, Edward Hicks, 1846.
Philadelphia Museum of Art.*



THE REV. DR. TIM ROBERTS is a graduate of Flagler College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Columbia Theological Seminary. He is married to Lisa, and together they are blessed with four children and three grandchildren. Since 1988 Tim has served churches in Virginia and throughout Florida. He is currently senior pastor at the Stuart Congregational Church in Stuart, Florida.

Restoration



HISTORIC WINDOWS, LA

by John F. Berry

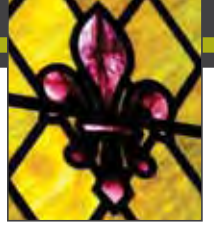
Photos by Monte Stuck

Photos shown above, from left: A newly-restored Tiffany window, firmly held by craftsman Luis Porras; Redlands church volunteers paint new window trim; deacon Ken Hendershot, left, and Board of Directors chair David Streit recondition old window bracings.

Nearly 300 packed the pews to celebrate their church's recently-restored windows: Outside, clouds parted, and the century-old stained glass glowed like new.

"The sun came out at exactly the right time," senior pastor Lowell Linden told them. "I don't think that it was a coincidence at all."

Linden led the First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif., in a March 30 celebration of the windows that not only reflect the church's profound love of Christ but are important to the Southern



Mat Redlands



seeking entrance; the second illustrates Jesus as a shepherd, calling the sheep by name; and the third shows Jesus calling everyone to come to him.

The Tiffany window panels, facing Cajon Street and downtown Redlands, depict the resurrection of Jesus as Lord and savior.

As she left the celebration service, Darlene Becker described the refreshed windows as bright, beautiful, and inspiring. She said they seemed to make Jesus come alive.

David McSorley noticed how much brighter the windows were after restoration.

“It was so dark all the time and you didn’t really notice,” McSorley said. “Now, it stands out.”

Renovation of the stained-glass windows began in 2011, when church leaders faced the problem of restoring historic windows that were sagging and bowing with age.

“What they had to do was to put new lead around the glass,” Linden explained. “When lead gets old, it gets tired, and it begins to sag—like people.”

Church leaders traveled from Redlands to the Los Angeles neighborhood of Highland Park to visit the Judson Studios, a national leader in stained-glass renovation. In 2013, during a special congregational meeting, members voted to fund the entire restoration for \$500,000.

A Judson Studios crew carefully removed the windows from both the Olive and Cajon Street sides in late 2013 and early 2014 and trucked them to Los Angeles. At the studios, employees painstakingly renovated the windows with the help of precision tools and computer mapping. Some windows had actually been painted over, and one had sustained a mysterious bullet hole.

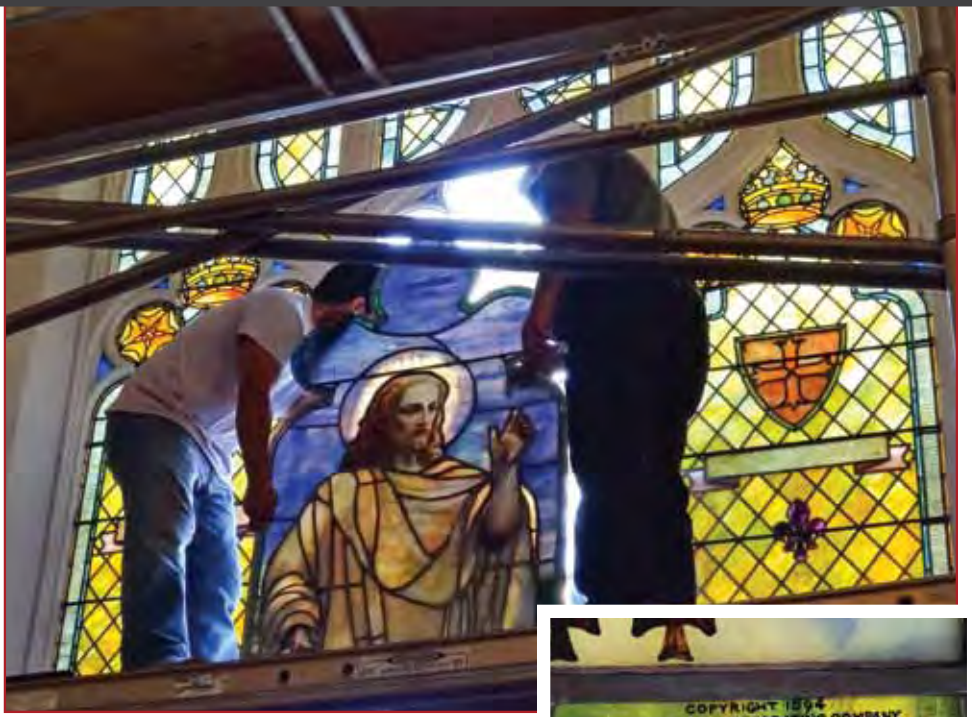
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California city itself. At night, an interior light illuminates images of Jesus for pedestrians and drivers alike.

Installed in 1900, when the meetinghouse was built, the windows, including some designed by Lewis Comfort Tiffany, have become a stop on city walking tours, and they even showed up as a backdrop in the official oil painting of the 25th Annual Redlands Bicycle Classic in 2009, “Legends and PossAbilities,” by Tracy Bailey Holmes.

The windows that face Olive Street show three images of Jesus. The first has him knocking at a door

BOR OF LOVE



Above: Judson Studios craftsmen install Tiffany window panels near the apex of the Redlands church's Cajon Street side; (inset) Tiffany's mark adorns the installation, showing 1894, date of the windows' manufacture. **Facing page:** The Redlands sanctuary sparkles after the restoration of all its stained glass windows; (inset) fleur-de-lis detail from one of the Tiffany windows.

For decades, farmers in the area's formerly dominant citrus industry burned oil in smudge pots during especially cold weather, to protect their oranges from frost with a blanket of warm smoke. That smoke also inevitably deposited layers of soot on the once-bright windows.

While the experts from Judson painstakingly restored the glass and clad it in new lead seams, about two dozen church volunteers re-conditioned the windows' wooden braces, led by Mike Henry, a deacon of the church who was the congregation's moderator at the time.

The brace project took seven full days of work. First the 75 original braces for the non-Tiffany windows were restored by scraping, sanding, filling, bonding, and patching.

"That was so labor intensive," Henry said, although "not all the windows were basket cases—some of them

required no repairing at all, just sanding and painting." Still, with five full days spent on the braces from the Olive Street side, and another 60 braces to go for the Tiffany windows on the Cajon side, the church decided to order all new braces for the Tiffanys. Since the new braces only needed sanding and painting, it took the volunteer crew only two more days to complete them.

All of the braces got three coats of paint—one undercoat and two outer coats.

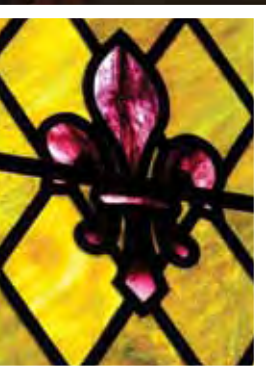
In 2014, Judson Studio crews reinstalled the freshly-restored windows.

"The glass is all original," said Hector Vargas, a Judson craftsman for 24 years. "We're putting it back the same way."

Craftsman Luis Porras said restoring Tiffany windows is a treat because they are intricate, heavy, and detailed. He has worked on Tiffany windows before, but few on the West Coast.

Louis Comfort Tiffany was a world-renowned glass maker by the time he crafted the vibrantly-colored First Congregational Church windows at his New York City studios in 1894.

Tiffany's windows for First Congregational were dedicated to the Rev. Charles A. Kingsbury, a retired



(non-Congregationalist) minister who migrated to Redlands from Pennsylvania for health reasons in the late 1800s and became very active in civic affairs.

Kingsbury, whose name is emblazoned below Tiffany's Christ window, died in 1893, a year before the windows were made and six years before they were installed at the new church in 1900.

Kingsbury's great-grandson, Edward Landell, 77, attended the March 30 celebration and recalled family discussions involving the windows. He said his family didn't realize the windows would take on such significance 114 years after installation.

"Tiffany at the time was the best," Landell said. "They wanted something that would last many, many years."

The newly-restored windows are protected by a thin, transparent covering. Their value today is estimated at \$6.1 million, according to Tom Cutler, owner of Cutler Church Insurance Services.

At the celebration, though Linden described the entire renovation process as "scary," he also said he expects the windows to be around for another 114 years.

"If the Lord Jesus Christ has still not returned," he said, "I hope there will be people at that time who will appreciate our stewardship of this building."

And he had a special word for the children of the church: "You can enjoy these windows for a long time. And we want you not only to enjoy them, but to be blessed by them. They are a reminder of who we are as Christians."



JOHN F. BERRY first attended the First Congregational Church of Redlands with his wife, Sharilyn, and son, Marshall, in 2007. He has served as a deacon and is the current church council publicity chairman. A former atheist, Berry came to Jesus in 2004 the moment his son was born. He was a journalist for 20 years and has served in the U.S. Army and the Army Reserve since 1983.

MONTE STUCK is a retired Air Force officer and 25-year member of the Redlands First Congregational Church, received his bachelor's degree in technical writing from Michigan State University and his master's degree in cinematography from the University of Southern California. In the Air Force he commanded an Air Force photo squadron and served on B-52s and F-4s, including 184 combat missions in Vietnam.



by Steven Schafer

Mithraism and Christianity

Scripture readers for worship at our church are often anxious about how to pronounce unusual words or names from the Bible. I tell them that if they simply read the words with authority, everyone will assume their pronunciation is correct. Whether or not this advice is really true, no one is hurt by it, so it probably makes little difference.

The same attitude sometimes seems to be applied to theological issues or even history: If the writer says it with enough authority, everyone assumes it to be true. But, of course, that is flawed thinking. What we find on the Internet isn't always accurate, and even what we read in hard-bound books is sometimes simply wrong. To accept things someone tells us without thinking is foolish.

Last December's issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* carried an article ("Following Jesus," by Douglas Lobb, pp. 21-23) which quoted a passage from the book *Saving Jesus From the Church: How to Stop Worshiping Christ and Start Following Jesus*, by Robin R. Meyers. The passage suggested that the church (specifically Emperor Constantine) engineered a merger of Christianity with sun worship in the fourth century and that many elements of the cult *Mithraism* survive in the church yet

today—that the church "borrowed" liberally from this rival new religion.

To be honest, I had never heard of Mithraism until I read the article. But my interest was piqued. If "miters, wafers, water baptism, altar, and doxology" all came from this other source; if calling the teacher "good shepherd", 'the way, the truth and the life,' and 'redeemer, savior and messiah'" all came from a source outside the early church; if the Apostles mimicked the Mithraists in telling of Jesus' entombment of three days followed by resurrection, this is important to know: Perhaps Christianity is nothing but a second-rate hoax and we all ought to be worshiping Mithras.

So I did some research. I'm not a scholar nor do I have an abundance of time to investigate such matters, but this seemed to warrant some of that time usage. Was what Robin Meyers stated in his book correct?



Marie-Lan Nguyen

In this typical Mithraic altarpiece from the second or third century A.D., filled with cultic symbols, Mithras is shown slaying a bull, overseen by Sol, the Roman sun god, and Luna, goddess of the moon.



Marie-Lan Nguyen

On the reverse side of the altarpiece, now displayed in the Louvre, Mithras, top right, reclines at a banquet beside Sol, while Luna, in upper left, looks away. The figures below are torch-bearers.

It didn't take much research to come up with a simple answer: No.

Christianity is not a carbon copy of Mithraism. In fact, if there are similarities, it is fairly obvious that Mithraism is a copy of Christianity since this particular Christian rival didn't even come into being until the second and third centuries A.D. (there seem to be hints of its existing in Iran as much as a hundred years earlier). Also, it is considered a "mystery religion" in that its practices were kept secret from outsiders and no insider recorded any detail about what went on. So little is known about Mithraists' beliefs and practices that no one can make any definitive statements as to what they believed or practiced. It's pretty hard to adopt practices that you don't know about. Mithraism died out quite suddenly in the fourth century, along with the rest of Greco-Roman paganism, after the conversion of Constantine.

There were, however, some similarities in the two religions. Interestingly, most of what we know about

Mithraism comes from Christians repudiating Mithraic beliefs. Tertullian (160-220 A.D.), noted that the pagan religion used baptism as well as bread and wine consecrated by priests. He wrote that Mithraism was inspired by the devil, who wished to mock the Christian sacraments in order to lead faithful Christians to hell.

Two religions developing at the same time in the same part of the world might be expected to have some similarities of practice and ideas regardless of their level of interaction. *Ritual communal meals* and the theme of *sacrifice for salvation*, for instance, were common not only to Mithraism and Christianity but much of the ancient world, as were ablutions (baptism), purification, and secret passwords.

Some scholars suggest that Mithras was born of a virgin, like Jesus. But there is no evidence of this ever being a belief of the Mithraists. Rather, Mithras is said to have been born from a rock, fully grown.

SOURCES:

David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

David Fingrut, "Mithraism: The Legacy of the Roman Empire's Final Pagan State Religion," student essay, Toronto, 1993. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Periods/Roman/Topics/Religion/Mithraism/David_Fingrut**.html (Accessed February 11, 2014).

"Mithras and Christianity" article at

http://www.tertullian.org/rp/parse/mithras/display.php?page=mithras_and_christianity (Accessed February 11, 2014).

Continued on p. 20

December 25 (Jesus' birthday and Mithras' birthday) and Sunday worship do seem to be similarities. However, history suggests that neither deity's birth was actually on December 25, but rather the date was chosen to dilute (or, for Mithraists, to join in) the cultural celebration of Sol Invictus, the Roman sun god. Church tradition suggests that we worship on Sunday because that was the day of the week of Jesus' resurrection. Mithraists did so because it is *Sunday*.

On great occasions, the "soldiers of Mithras" took part in a sacrament of bread and wine as sacred bulls were sacrificed. But blood sacrifice goes further back than either Christianity or Mithraism. Bread and wine were among the most common elements in any given meal of that day. It should be no surprise to anyone that they became important elements of remembrance.

Unlike Christianity with its broad appeal to the masses, Mithraism found followers mostly among

Roman soldiers, minor government officials, imperial freedmen and slaves. Women were excluded from Mithraic adherence.

Mithraism may have called Mithras "good shepherd', 'the way, the truth and the life,' and 'redeemer, savior and messiah'" but, other than Meyers' book, I could find no reference to those. But why not? Mithras was thought to be a god. Why wouldn't they want to give him the same appellations as people gave the one who overcame sin and death and who would come to be worshiped and served by billions throughout the world for two millennia?



THE REV. STEVEN SCHAFER is pastor of Mount Hope Congregational Church, Livonia, Mich.

First Congregational Church in Hanson, Massachusetts



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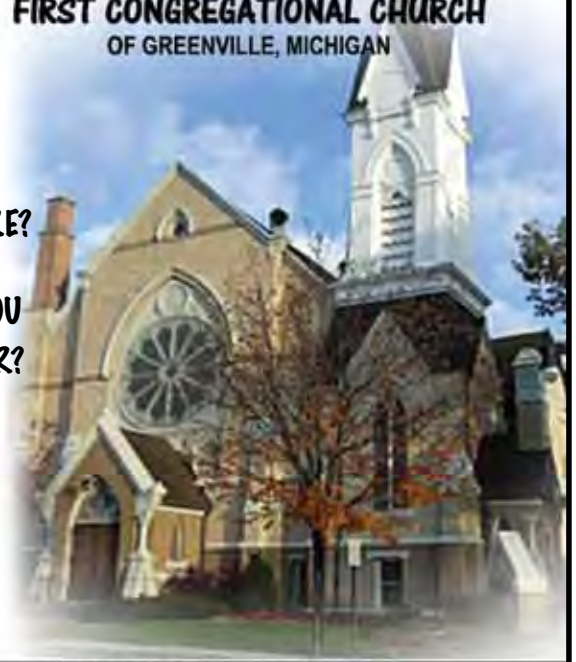
A 250-member church near Boston seeks a full-time senior pastor to lead us in our spiritual journey, after retirement of our pastor of ten years. We have a large, handicapped-accessible meetinghouse and provide a parsonage.

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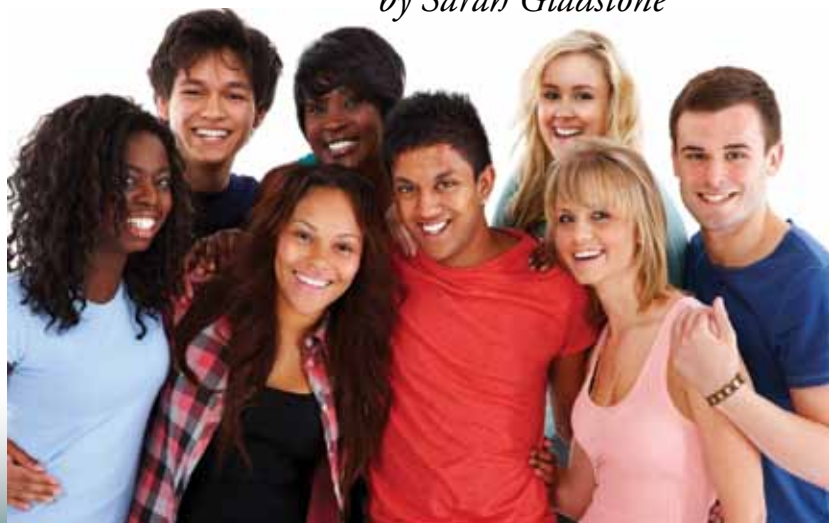
In a church that truly embraces the concept of Mutual Ministry, where "all members are ministers," can you, as Senior Pastor, lead us to the next step on our faith journey?

Please see our Church Information Form on the NACCC website.

Who Are the Millennials?

by Sarah Gladstone

Those born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s have entered, or are entering, early adulthood. Many of these “Millennials” do not attend church, but some are church members, and some are even ministers. Here we present the first half of a thought-provoking article by a Congregational pastor who happens to be a Millennial. Part 2, scheduled for September 2014, will explore how churches can successfully relate to Millennials.



As a young woman in ministry, I often hear talk of my fellow Millennials as this sort of “lost generation.” I hear that today’s young adults are materialistic and lazy, that they leech off their parents and have a complete disregard for the traditions of the church. I hear it all the time and in lots of different places! And I think I may understand why: In today’s aging Church, frustrated parishioners are looking behind them to the leadership that is upcoming, and they see very few options to keep up the work and the ways of the church as they know it. This can be scary.

I find myself pondering the future of the church with these parishioners a lot. The conversation always ends with: “So where are they? Where are the Millennials? And why should the church care?”

Let me invite you into the mind of a Millennial.

Meaning, independence, mastery

I was raised in a rural, predominantly white town, by Midwestern, middle-class, hard-working, Baby Boomer parents who loved me. My parents just

celebrated their 35th year of marriage; so like about half the children in the U.S., I was blessed never to have to deal with the lingering affects of a divorced household.

My sister, Courtney, and I were told often by parents, teachers, and grandparents that when we grew up that we could be or do anything that we wanted to be or do. My parents worked a lot of overtime to ensure that we had the opportunities and the education to make that happen. And even for Millennials not blessed by opportunity and security such as we had, I would guess that most of us are ingrained with an ethic that is deeply education-and-experience-focused.

This encouragement towards dreaming and independence produced a generation with wide eyes, open and eager minds—and, often, zero ability to maintain and keep to a budget. (We can explain to you in detail the inner workings of Excel; point you towards several helpful Web sites and widgets; and build for you a Pinterest-inspired, color-coordinated chart. But effectively controlling spending is another beast entirely!)

Continued on p. 22

By the time we reached adulthood our mantra was: “My life will have meaning! It will be important! I will be the best in my field! And I will be happy, independent, and pull in six figures!”

This is what every Millennial wants: Meaning, independence, and mastery.

Options

Thanks to opportunity and a supportive community, I graduated from Michigan State University with a bachelor’s degree in Social Work with a focus in Diversity Studies (and way more credits than necessary) in 2008. The year I graduated was the year the job market plummeted. There were zero jobs—certainly none that I saw as meaningful, that allowed me independence and that paid a six-figure salary.

So I had a few options:

1. Do I take out student loans for graduate school and hope the market improves so I can finally get my meaningful dream job?
2. Move back home and hope the job market improves so I can finally get my meaningful dream job?
3. Or, do I humble myself to the realization that my picturesque, meaningful future may take a lot more than just education and patience; thereby committing myself to a life of poverty in search for meaning and purpose elsewhere?

Those are the options that nearly every millennial has had to face.

I am a Millennial, through and through; I tried all three options between the years of 2008-2013.

Thank God for Christ! And thank God for loving every one of us in-debt, optimistic, open-minded, over-educated, progressive, awesome Millennial fools!

Standing at the crossroads

You may have read my little biographical sketch as simply further evidence of the fickle and romanticized lifestyle of a Millennial. But, just think: Some 85 million young adult Millennials, of whom I am one, are the future of the Christian Church.



Barry Szymanski

Alban Institute trainer John Wimberly makes a point at Convocation.

So take a deep breath, and let me tell you why this is a very good thing.

You are in good hands.

At the Annual Ministers’ Convocation of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, clergy brothers and sisters set aside time to learn about strengthening our church’s systems and vision to better serve a culture that is becoming more and more diverse. We heard Alban Institute consultant John Wimberly talk about Intentionality, Alignment and Teamwork. We spoke at length about the struggles and barriers to success and growth in our churches.

The consensus was that right now, amid diminishing church attendance and worn-out committees and councils, the Christian Church is at a great crossroads of potential. That potential is, in large measure, locked in the Millennial generation!

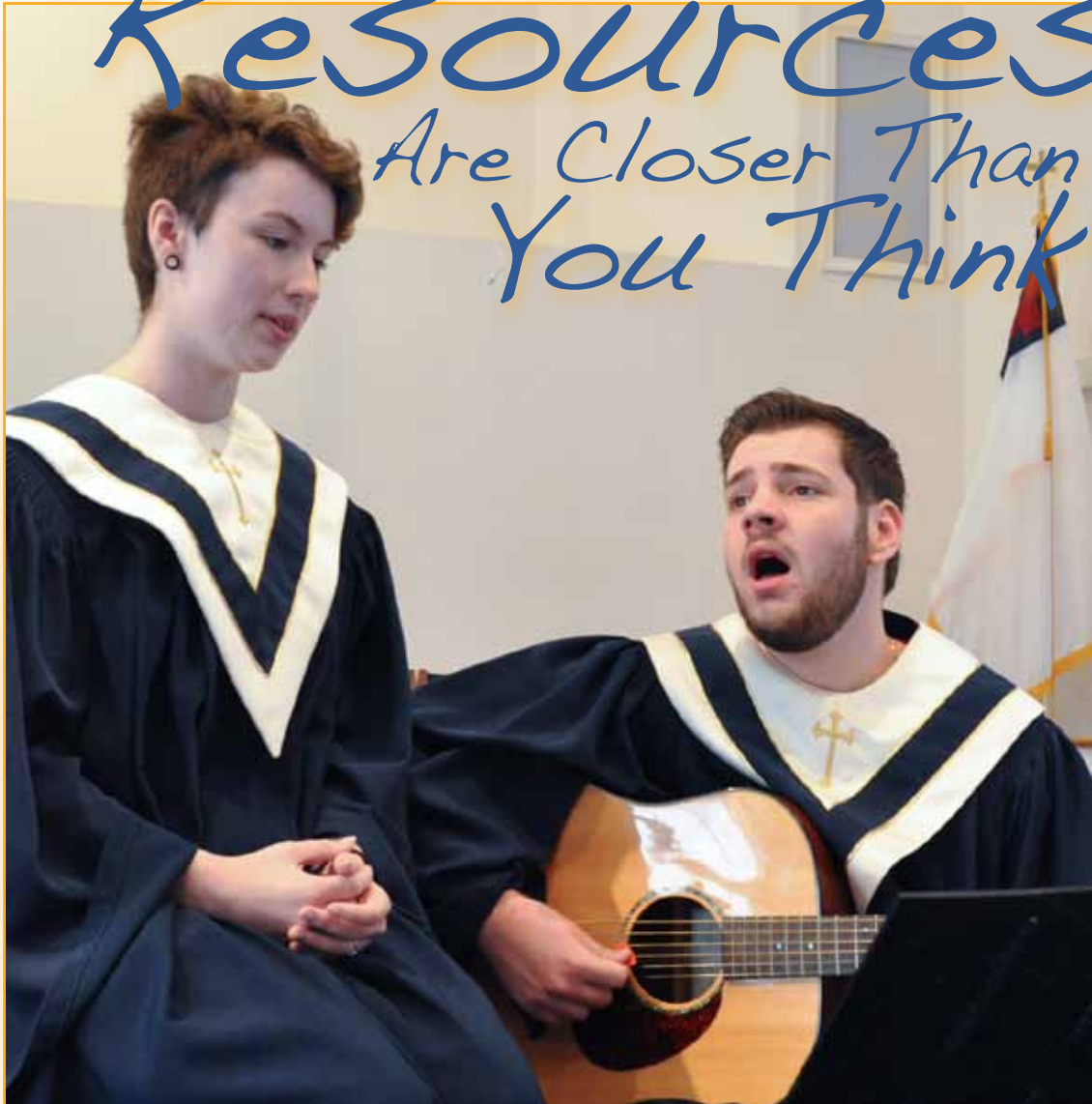
So, think about the Millennials you know, and about the experiences our whole generation has gone through. In Part 2 of this article, we’ll explore how our churches can begin to unlock the potential in this latest “great generation” of the Church.



THE REV. SARAH GLADSTONE is pastor of Hampshire Colony Congregational Church in Princeton, Ill. In the past she has served as a licensed minister of the First Congregational Church of St. Johns, Mich., and as a chaplain to the Appalachia Service Project. She is an M.Div. graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

Great Resources

by Les Wicker



Stacey Holcombe

Maddie van Ness and Max Wise perform a song in the Sunday morning service at First Congregational Church, Naples, Fla., May 4, 2014.

You may have read of the founding of Temple University by Russell Conwell and of his famous “Acres of Diamonds” speech, which he gave over 6,000 times around the world. Football players at Temple even wear a diamond on their helmets as a reminder of Conwell’s inspirational lecture. The essence of the lecture is quite simple: One searches far reaches for diamonds while overlooking the large nuggets in one’s own back yard.

Continued on p. 24



Stacey Holcombe

The Rev. Dr. Les Wicker praises music director Tara Buonamici in the Sunday service.

The metaphor has great meaning for those of us looking for talent to fill particular needs in ministry. Incredible leadership and talent may be right under our nose while we are looking over the horizon, thinking “out there” is Mr. or Ms. Right, who will oil our ministry machine and make the engine hum.

Musicians needed

Such was the case with our music program. We were seeking trained musicians as sectional leaders, vocalists, and instrumentalists, while less than two miles from the church was Gulf Coast High School, the largest high school in the county with 2000 students, a most talented chorus of 125 and an orchestra of 100, not counting the 200-plus band students.

Lisa Clarke, our music director, had found some amazingly talented members of the Naples Philharmonic Youth Chorale who were planning careers in music. These students were from a couple of nearby high schools and had incredible voices. One day during a conversation with Lisa, the thought occurred to us that perhaps the large high school just down the street might have some choral students who would respond to an appeal.

A call and visit to Tara Buonamici, the high school choral director, did yield a positive response in that she allowed me to make an appeal to her choral students. The appeal included the offer of a small stipend for any student who would sing with our church choir. A couple weeks later, I received a call from Maddie van Ness, who had heard of the offer and said she would like to sing with the choir.

Maddie, a freshman at the time, was the only student to take up the original offer but was obviously talented and engaged with the opportunity. I remember Maddie walking from the school to the church for choir rehearsal on several occasions. Not only was she talented, but she loved to sing. Lisa began giving her voice lessons and featured her in a number of pieces the choir did.

When increased responsibilities at Lisa’s primary job forced her in May 2013 to give up her position as music director, I was wondering where we might go to find a talented director who could take the program to the next level. Any pastor understands the importance of good music as an integral part of worship and the entire program of the church. Good musicians are often drawn to churches that have outstanding music programs.

Resignations of good people can leave one scrambling and such was the case with that of Lisa Clarke, who was an outstanding choral director. Finding a quality director would be a challenge. The thought occurred to me that just perhaps Tara Buonamici, whom I had met the previous year, might have an interest.



“Just for the summer”

The very next day I was in her office, pleading my case for the needs of the church. A very kind and sweet-natured person, Tara was trying to let me down easy: There was simply too much on her plate at the high school with constant performances, out-of-town choral trips, competitions, and after-school responsibilities. Finally, however, she relented, since it was late May and school was letting out for the summer; she would “help the church out for the summer”—but come fall, she would be back in full throttle at the school.

“Half a loaf is better than no loaf at all,” so we agreed that she would lead the music program during the summer months and would bring some of her most talented students to give support to the choir. The church again agreed to provide a small stipend to express gratitude for those students who would share their time and talent.

By mid-summer the music program was soaring again, with the support of these talented students who could read music, sing four-part harmonies, and play whatever musical instrument was needed for the moment. And the bonus was that Tara was beginning to feel good about leading the music program of the church, receiving accolade after accolade from the congregation on the great music she was bringing. By the end of the summer, she said she just “may be able to direct the music program after all.” In addition, she would continue to make the opportunity of singing at our church available for her students.

Almost immediately, the size of the choir doubled as choir robes were filled with talented and enthusiastic young singers. Having the students in the choir was also sending a message to the community that we were not a church of “senior adults” in a retirement community, but a church alive with young people. It was a visual that could not be missed!

From its music budget, the church agreed to a stipend of \$25 per student, providing the student came to rehearsal and sang in the choir on Sunday morning. This proved to be a wise investment, which was returned to the church not only by having the students sing in the choir, but by a number of their families, who began attending the church. At times there have been as many as 25 parents of these students attending the services. Who wouldn’t want to come and support their child?

Leaders pop up

One of the talented students immediately on board was Max Wise. Max was actually the student choral



Drew Whitcomb, left, and Max Wise.

Continued on p. 26



Naples' high school musicians— Back row, from left: Brianna Mull, Max Wise, Kaitlyn Huaroto, Elise Thome, Maddie VanNess, Drew Whitcomb. Front row, from left: Lexii Low, Justin Delvasto, Bella Asanti, Abbey Smith, Kaylyn Lewis, Mariana Low, music director Tara Buonamici, Jason Mirabal.

Below: High school floutist Abbey Smith.



leader at the high school, a kind of magnetic personality within the high school and mature beyond his years. Max began to recruit a number of his friends in the high school chorus to come and sing in the church choir. Almost immediately, his parents, Shelton and Marci, began attending the services. We discovered that Marci was an award-winning inspirational author, whose book, *Pain, Passion and Purpose: A Guide to Escaping Torment and Finding Bliss*, was a best seller. Marci was soon recruited to lead the Women's Retreat, an event that was a catalyst for solidifying the women of the church into a core group. Max's leadership skills prompted me to speak to him about considering ministry as a life vocation, an overture he is considering. He will attend Florida Gulf Coast University as a music student but will continue to be an integral part of the music program of the church and will continue reflecting on a possible call to ministry.

Now these outstanding students were becoming a part of the life of our congregation. The first big event that blended our own church youth with the choral students was an overnight trip to Canyons Zip Line

near Ocala. More than 20 of the choral students went on the trip, along with Ms. Buonamici.

The church loves these outstanding young people, and obviously they love the church. I might add the church has had an impact on their lives, as some had seldom been inside a church.

With Tara Buonamici in place as the music director, things began to jell in terms of a connection with the high school. Each week as I attended the Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting at the high school during the students' lunch break, I would also stop by the chorus room to say "hello" to the chorus students, all of whom seemed to embrace the thought of a pastor stopping by to say hello. By now a number of the talented chorus students were either singing in the choir, providing vocal solo pieces, or playing instruments as needed. But the connection with the school went much further.

Having Ms. Buonamici as the music director and connecting with the students has greatly broadened the church's connection with the high school. Mr. Joe Mikulski, the principal, has spoken to our Men's Group and has given the men a tour of the school. He is actually scheduled to give the sermon while I am away on vacation in late summer. I have become closely connected to the head football coach, Pete Fominaya. Of course, everyone seems to know that "Ms. B," the popular choral and orchestra director, also directs the music program at First Congregational Church of Naples. It is a win-win for everyone.

Revitalizing worship

I have come to love these students and feel a close bond with each one. I make it a point to stop by the choir rehearsal room on Wednesday evenings just to say "hello," or get a hug. Some of the seniors naturally move on after graduation as they will be attending college elsewhere, some majoring in music. Others will be attending college locally or finding their place within the community. Some have already said they will continue to be part of the choir and their families will continue attending the church.

Along with Max Wise, a second student, Drew Whitcomb, is reflecting on a call to ministry. Drew is already reading the Scripture in our services when requested to do so. He also shared with me in a post-Christmas creative sermon in which we impersonated shepherds "back around the campfire" after having gone to Bethlehem. On Maundy Thursday, Drew acted the part of Andrew, one of the Twelve Apostles, in a drama based on Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper painting.

The church does two candlelight services on Christmas Eve. One is a traditional service with the chancel choir which includes lessons and carols. The second we call the Victorian Carolers. Choristers dress in Victorian attire, and we create a late 19th-century street

corner scene with the Victorian carolers singing on the street corner. The service has become quite popular as it has a kind of Currier-and-Ives feel of yesteryear. This year the Victorian carolers were almost exclusively high school students. With their families and the people who normally come to the Victorian Carolers service, the church was completely filled.

The Easter Service this year also saw a record number of worshipers as the church (still somewhat of a new church plant) was completely filled. Much credit for the attendance must go to Tara and her high school students, who brought their families and friends. The students sang an a cappella piece entitled, "The Stone Was Rolled Away." One doesn't usually hear applause on Easter Sunday, but the piece was so beautifully done, the congregation could not resist expressing their appreciation.

Who could not marvel on what began as simply a search for a music director becoming such a dynamic in the life of a congregation? It is, after all, rather awesome. Across America thousands of churches are looking for people to fill particular needs within the church. They should not look too far!

Right down the street or around the corner is a high school with some of the most talented, eager-to-be-involved kids one could ever imagine. These young people can change the very dynamic of a church and, at the same time, the church can impact their lives as church leaders for the next generation.



THE REV. DR. LES WICKER is pastor of First Congregational Church of Naples, Florida. He has served churches in North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Florida. He is the author of *Preparing Couples for Marriage, a premarital guide for pastors*, and most recently *The Miracle Church. He has led numerous seminars on church growth and marketing.*

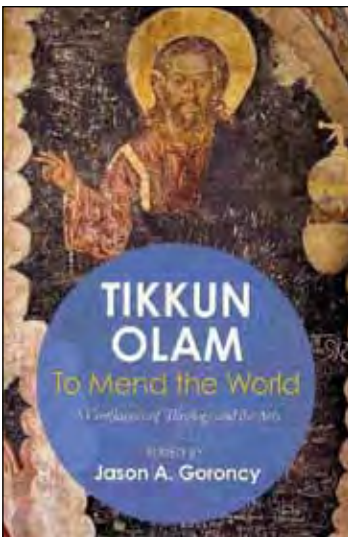
Summer Reading Suggestions for God's Free People

by Steven Blackburn

Several recent offerings from publishers center on the relationship between Christianity and the artistic imagination. Tweak your own imagination by dipping into one or more of these new books.

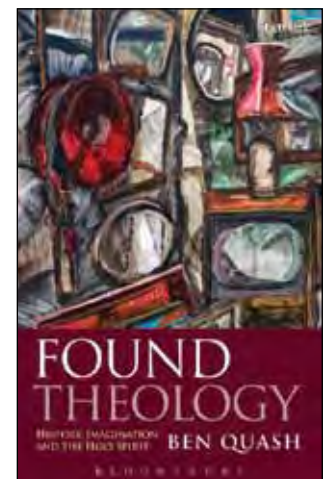
Tikkun Olam: To Mend the World: A Confluence of Theology and the Arts, edited by Jason A. Goroncy.
Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2014. 232 pages; \$9.99 Kindle, \$23.19 paperback (Amazon).

Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit, by Ben Quash
London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 336 pages; \$15.49 Kindle, \$112.00 hardcover, \$31.46 paperback (Amazon).



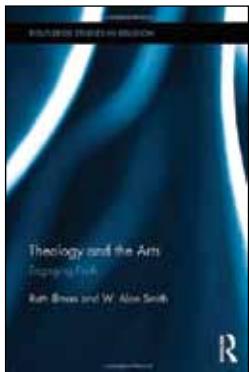
The editor of this collection of articles specializes in the work and ministry of P. T. Forsyth, a late 19th- to early 20th-century British Congregational clergyman who was interested in theological aesthetics, *inter alia*. Thematic echoes of Forsyth, who held forth from the Congregational pulpit at the Clarendon Park Church in Leicester,

England, can be heard in articles by Trevor Hart and John Dennison dealing with the Incarnation, while Julianne Clarke-Morris' essay on "New Media Art Practice" takes a practical look at the use of multimedia in congregational worship.



Quash's chapters have the feel of being a free-wheeling collection of individual essays on a number of figures, both theological and artistic. There is also something of a feeling of whimsy in this work, with an appeal to T. S. Eliot's "Naming of Cats," which introduces a profound theological point from Isaiah. The artistic figures include painters, translators, philosophers, poets—the range is intentionally broad. While not exactly the kind of book you could take to the beach, it allows for reading in short, independent snippets. Still, there is a unifying theme: that the Holy Spirit is the least fixed Person, One to whom we need bring our imagination in order that the Spirit may be "found."

Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith,
by Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith.
New York: Routledge, 2013. 230 pages; \$100.00 Kindle;
\$117.47 hardcover (Amazon).

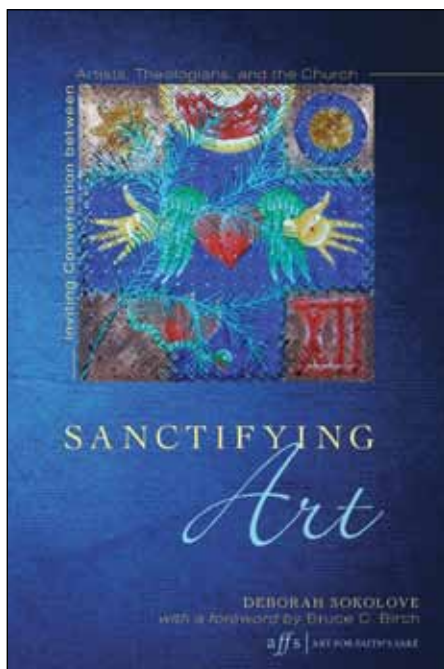


This book's opening exchange between Charlie Brown and Schroder helps set the tone for ensuing discussions of liturgical dance, religious theater, film, and the fabric arts as well as the "usual suspects" of music and literature. These studies draw their characterization from the world of music, being called *études*, a

theme continued in the conclusion by looking to the symphonic form of a last movement or orchestral finale. The work of these two maestros deserves a hearty round of applause: *Bravissimo!*

Sanctifying Art: Inviting Conversation Between Artists, Theologians, and the Church, by Deborah Sokolove.
Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2013. 202 pages; \$9.99 Kindle,
\$19.80 paperback (Amazon).

"Art in the Body of Christ" makes the case for the arts in congregational worship, art that is sanctified by the church's use of it, and art that sanctifies those who use it as a means of worship. While the extensive discussion of icons in worship might be



a bit mystifying to Congregationalists, we can perhaps more fully relate to the choral music found in our churches. Is this "art" which "sanctifies"? Is it worshipful? What is our understanding of "performance" in the service of the community at worship?

Urban God Talk: Constructing a Hip Hop Spirituality,
edited by Andre E. Johnson.
Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2013. 266 pages; \$51.49
Kindle, \$81.00 hardcover (Amazon).



While the second grouping of six articles and essays, entitled "Hip Hop and Religion," would appeal to most of us who are not specialists, the seven introductory chapters on theory and method should not be overlooked. For example, Liberation Theology (which has ties to the Pilgrimage motif so well known in Congrega-

tionalist thought) is linked to the content, style, and structure of Hip Hop. Similarly, the final essay "In the Church, In the Streets" highlights explicitly Christian forms of Hip Hop. For those of us who might have difficulties in sensing conventional forms of religiosity in Hip Hop, the essay "From the Same Womb of the Same Struggle: Hip Hop Music with the Blues and the Gospels" will help us make the bridge.

Happy Reading!



THE REV. STEVEN BLACKBURN, PH.D., is Hartford Seminary's Library Director. He has served Congregational Christian Churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and was elected to three terms as executive secretary of the Connecticut (now Northeast) Fellowship. He has also chaired the NACCC's World Christian Relations Commission.



NEWS

KENAZ SOLOMON RETIRES



Rev. Kenaz Solomon, center, and his family

The Rev. Kenaz Solomon, **Travancore Church Council (India)**, retired April 1 after 50 years of service. As friend and missionary, the relationship with Kenaz goes way back. In 1964, he studied at the Earlham College School of Religion in Richmond, Ind. His education was subsidized by the Wisconsin Congregational Association, and he was ordained by North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point, Wis. He went back to India in 1967 to become the president of the Travancore Church Council. He remains involved in church activities in his community. The Mission and Outreach Council and all his supporters wish him well.

MISSION GROWTH

Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (Florida) plans to open a Regional Impact Center in Burkina Faso, a country of sub-Saharan Africa. This region has one of the harshest climates and ranks statistically as one of the poorest regions on Earth. ECHO also hopes to develop an Appropriate Technology Department to include more working demonstrations and provide a venue for presentations and lectures on their Florida campus.

Indian Trails Mission (Arizona) plans to open a new mission on the Navajo reservation this summer. There was a dedication of a new church in San Carlos in

April. They recently had a meeting in Naco, Mexico, with 50 in attendance from local churches in the area.

Christ to the Villages (Nigeria) had their second inter-house sport event between Alpha Nursery and Primary School Shao. It was a big event as visitors, parents, and other schools were invited. We praise God for the success of the event.

Congregational Church of Myanmar (Myanmar) plans on building a new school facility for Grace School.



New uniforms for Mission School of Hope

Mission School of Hope (Cameroon) decided to get new uniforms and the children are all excited about the new color—green—a reflection of the region's vegetation. In addition, green signifies growth, fertility, life, learning, self-respect, well-being and stability. Green is the key to sustainable development.

OLIVET COLLEGE HURRICANE SANDY RELIEF TRIP

With funds from One Great Hour of Sharing, the Rev. Mike Fales of Olivet College took a group of 19 people to the Little Ferry area of New Jersey to help in relief efforts related to Hurricane Sandy. They worked on six different homes through two different organizations: Bergen County Habitat for Humanity and Rebuilding Together of Bergen County. Little Ferry was hit by a storm surge that filled most of the



Olivet students rehab a house.

homes and businesses with three feet of water. This group spent their days putting up drywall and insulation, as well as painting the finished walls.

They attended a church service at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., who prepared a lunch for them afterwards. The group also visited Eunice Oladele and her husband, who live in Newark, N.J. Eunice is the sister of Matthew Oladele, director of **Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)**.

NEEDS

NEW LEADERSHIP

Seafarer's Friend (Massachusetts) is looking for a permanent executive director. If you are interested or know someone who might be, place contact Ted Coates, tcoates3@comcast.net.

Cook Native American Ministries (Arizona) also seeks an executive director. For more information, contact Gary G. Metoxen, chair of the Board of Directors, at 480-968-9354.

BIBLE TRAINING FOR PASTORS



Indian Community Fellowship pastors in a Bible training session

Indian Community Fellowship (India) is doing Bible training for their pastors through Skype, with the assistance of Dr. Gloria and Rev. Gary Wahr. The Wahrs are in Florida, and these ministers are in Northern India. They hope to have three more sessions this year. Each session costs the mission \$1200, to provide transportation for the ministers plus food and lodging for four days.

SEWING MACHINES

Congregational Church of Myanmar (Myanmar) would like six more sewing machines for their tailoring project.

TRANSLATION HELP

Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (Florida) is looking to the Lord for help to translate important publications such as their *Agricultural Options for the Poor* handbook into Mandarin. This would be very helpful to a large segment of the population of China.

PRAYER REQUESTS

ECHO (Florida)—Pray for the Senior Leadership Team and the Administrative Board. God is blessing and stretching them. As they become aware of the dire needs of so many, the staff want prayers to be faithfully, obediently following God's leading.

Christ to the Villages (Nigeria)—Please continue to pray for Nigeria as they face numerous challenges. The terrorist group Boko Haram continues to kill and terrorize the nation, particularly in the north. Fuel is scarce. Political campaigns and rallies have started. The governorship elections will be this year, and the presidential election next year. This is a call for prayer, as many seek power and political positions by all means.

Thank you for your support!

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

The Missionary Society, NACCC
PO Box 288, Oak Creek WI 53154

For a complete listing of NACCC Mission Projects, please go to our Web site, www.naccc.org, and click on "Missions."

Along the Way

News from the fellowship of churches



CONVOCATION

Who is your minister's minister? It's an important question, because ministers are the *least*-ministered-to people on the face of the earth.

Once a year, usually on the eighth day after Easter, NACCC ministers gather for the annual Ministers' Convocation. It's a time of fellowship, pastoral care, worship, study and relaxation—with emphasis on relaxation. Participants are invited to take part in activities at whatever level meets their needs.

From Monday evening through breakfast on Thursday, the Convocation offers a way to recharge pastoral batteries, renew old friendships and make new ones, and reignite spirits. It's a mix of worship and workshop, designed to help pastors learn something new about strengthening the church and themselves.

This year's Convocation was held at the Weber Conference Center in Adrian, Mich., a campus of the Dominican Sisters. It was a perfect setting and provided extraordinary hospitality—at about half the price of previous years' retreats! Alban Institute trainer **John Wimberly**, our featured speaker, shared great information that sparked many lively and thought-provoking discussions over evening snacks.

Convocation is a blessing and a gift. If you're a minister who hasn't participated before, or a layperson whose pastor has not had the opportunity, start thinking of ways your church can access this remarkable yearly resource.

Maybe you can minister to your minister. After all, ministering is something to which we are all called.

—Rev. Dawn Carlson



Above: The Revs. Elliot Wimbush, left, and Linda Anderson, center, chat with Sister Pat Spangler of the Dominican Order of Preachers.

Left: The Rev. Dawn Carlson leads worship at the Ministers' Convocation.



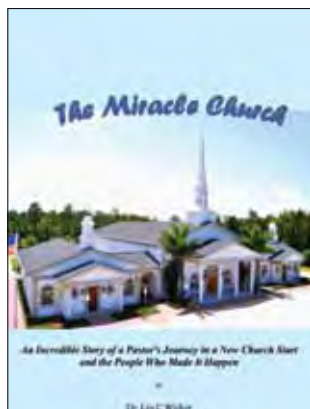
The Anderson String Quartet performs at the Naples church.

STRINGED VICTORY—The Anderson String Quartet was selected to compete as quarter-finalists in the national 2014 Fischhoff Chamber Competition held at Notre Dame University, South Bend, Ind. Members of the talented young group, which often plays in worship services at *First Congregational Church of Naples, Fla.*, are violinists **Misty Drake** and **Noelle Torres**, violist **Cassie Drake**, and cellist **Tarik Marques**. Coached by **John T. Posadas**, the ensemble won the 2013 Florida State Music

Teachers Association Pre-college Chamber Music Competition. The group was introduced to the church through the **Joan Stewart** Advanced Strings, who play for church services twice monthly in exchange for rehearsal space, according to Naples pastor **Les Wicker**.

REVIVAL MEETING—In a March 1 meeting, the *Northern California Fellowship of Congregational Christian Churches* awoke from a Van Winklian period of dormancy. The event, convened by the **Rev. Patti Dando Haaheim** of the Congregational Church of Soquel, was hosted by the **Rev. Ella Ray Toscano** and the people of *First Congregational Church, Rio Vista*. Worship was followed by food and fellowship; then representatives of all the NACCC's Northern California churches met, augmented by one church considering affiliation. Patti Haaheim agreed to serve as interim moderator at least until the fellowship's next meeting, scheduled for September. **Ric Reed** of *Grace North Church, Berkeley*, will act as vice-moderator; **Deborah Perry**, *Church of the Oaks, Del Rey Oaks*, will serve as secretary; and **Stewart Hobson**, also of Church of the Oaks, will serve as treasurer. Hobson also provided much historical information, including the size of the group's intact bank account and a copy of the bylaws, which will be renewed at the next meeting.

MIRACLE IN FLORIDA—A new book by **Dr. Les Wicker** tells the story of *First Congregational Church, Naples, Fla.*, from the time the National Association's Congregational Church Development Division conceived of planting a church plant there to the present day. The first worship service of the new church was Oct. 3, 2004, in a school cafeteria where they continued meeting for five years. The church built its beautiful colonial-style sanctuary in 2009 and added two wings in



2012. The church now has more than 200 members and is an active member of the NACCC. Wicker's book is available from Outskirts Press or Amazon.



Marshall Berry, 9, asks the Passover questions of Seder leader Michael DiMuro, standing center, as the Rev. Lowell Linden and DiMuro's wife, Leonette, follow the order of service.

GREAT SAVING ACT—*First Congregational Church of Redlands, Calif.*, is one church that celebrates a Passover Seder as part of Lenten observances. Such dinners are not actual Jewish ritual meals but are intended to connect church members with the Old Testament background of their Christian faith.

More than 60 Congregationalists took part in this year's Seder dinner April 14. The evening was packed with flavors, song, history, and symbolism. The two-hour celebration was led by church member Michael DiMuro, who is Jewish by birth but accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior during a Youth for Christ summer camp when he was 12. DiMuro now shares his perspective with fellow church members through adult Bible studies and the Passover dinners, which the church has held biennially for the past several years. Wearing a Jewish prayer shawl, DiMuro taught the Passover story of God's deliverance of the Jews from bondage in Egypt, in accordance with a *hagaddah* or text showing the order of service for the Seder. The four questions of the service, customarily asked by the youngest child present, were posed this night by 9-year-old **Marshall Berry**.

"The Exodus is God's great saving act of the Old Testament," pastor **Lowell Linden** said, "just as Christ is the great saving act in the New Testament."

—reported by John F. Berry

FIND CHRIST IN LOVE

After reading Jack Swanson's article "Following Christ" [March 2012, pp. 17-18], the only words that came to mind were, "Amen, Brother!"

I too follow Jesus as the risen Christ—beaten, broken, crucified, risen from the grave, and coming again. Luke 9:20 confirms this when the disciples are asked by Jesus who they say Jesus is, and Peter replies, "The Christ of God." I follow Jesus as the Christ who walks daily with me in all things; strengthens me whenever I feel I do not have the energy to go on; encourages me when I become discouraged; sits with me while I console a church member who is transitioning from this life to the next—but also the Christ who encourages me to be active in social justice, to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter those who need it, clothe the naked and visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35).

Rev. Swanson [saw Christ in "Billy," a sightless old man in a state hospital]. As a volunteer fire department chaplain I have seen many "Billys," and Jesus the Christ was there with them. He was there in the firefighter who helped cut open a mangled car to save the baby whose mother was killed in the accident, in the EMTs who tried to keep a family alive after their home exploded from a propane leak, and in the volunteers who donated blood when the hurricane injured so many and supplies were extremely scarce.

When people wonder where Jesus the Christ is, let them look for love. Look for the love found in all those who do the work of Jesus the Christ. He is the same Christ from the cross, alive and using all His children to do the work of the kingdom.

KEVIN C. SMAIL
Becket, Massachusetts

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

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KEEP CONGREGATIONALISM PERTINENT TO TODAY

I would like to support what Doug Lobb wrote in his two recent articles in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* ["Following Jesus," March 2014, pp. 21-23, and "A Time for Hard Questions," June 2010, pp. 4-5].

The Bible teaches us very wonderful lessons, but there are changes in culture and knowledge over 2,000 years, so we must see the metaphorical meanings and truths. When I was at the head of over 2,500 workers I had people from many religions and cultures and countries of origin. There were many very good people, and I could not believe they were banished from heaven because they were not members of the Christian religion. I was happy to include them as friends

I could rely upon. I do not think we should look upon ourselves as an exclusive club that has the keys to the hereafter.

[In England] we visited old, large, and beautiful Congregational churches with memberships less than 100, kept alive by endowments developed in former times; these churches were not meeting the needs of the people that should have been their members. This is happening in America for all religions. We need to listen to people like Doug Lobb who are trying to keep Congregationalism pertinent to present-day life and knowledge.

WILLIAM F. GARBER
Playa del Rey, California

The Congregational Library and Archives comes to OMAHA June 28-July 1

HEAR

The Congregational Lecturer · PEGGY BENDROTH

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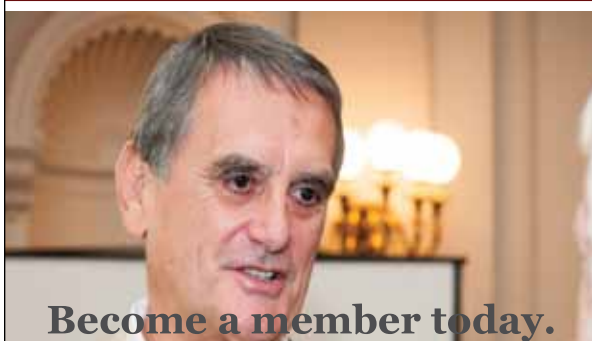
Church Records Management · SARI MAURO

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Anne Killinger

Anne Kathryn Killinger died of colon cancer March 1, at the age of 78.

A musical prodigy, Anne became her church's assistant organist at 13 and for four years was primary accompanist for all musical programs at her high school. Years later, she served for eight years as organist of the Little Stone Church on Mackinac Island, Mich..

Married at 17 to a minister, John Killinger, Anne attended the University of Kentucky, George Peabody College for Teachers, and the New England Conservatory of Music. She taught piano at Georgetown College, Georgetown, Ky., and St. Cecelia Academy, Nashville, Tenn. She and John lived in many places, including Boston, New York, Nashville, Birmingham, Los Angeles; Oxford, England; Paris, France; Lynchburg, Va., and most recently in Warrenton, Va.

Anne wrote the music for two children's religious musicals and two adult musicals. She and John wrote hymns and anthems, some of which were published. She also wrote two novels, two devotional books, and a book to help parents estranged from their adult children.

Anne will be remembered as a cheerful, outgoing woman who was a gracious hostess, a splendid cook, a loving wife and mother, and a generous friend.



John Lancz

The Rev. John James Lancz, 72, of Norwich, Conn., died of cancer March 8. He was pastor at the United Congregational Church of Norwich and will be dearly missed by the congregation, the community, and his family.



John earned a bachelor's degree in Biblical Studies at Philadelphia College of the Bible and a master's degree in Counseling from Indiana State University. He completed his graduate seminary studies in Theology at the Denver Seminary in Colorado.

Over a long, active ministry, he served Congregational, Baptist, and Unitarian-Universalist churches in Indiana, Maine, Colorado, and Connecticut. He also worked as a chaplain and supervising principal psychologist at Wrentham State School in Massachusetts and as executive director of group homes in Winston-Salem, N.C. From 1998 to 2005 he served as executive secretary for the Fellowship of Connecticut Congregational Christian Churches.

John was an accomplished photographer who captured beauty in landscapes, buildings, people, and animals. He was a member of the Norwich Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Norwich Anti-Bullying Coalition, the Green Party of Connecticut, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Nature Conservancy. Since 1996 he was a lifetime member

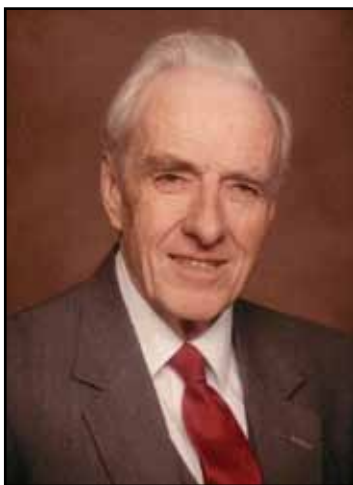
of the International Freelance Photographers Organization and showed his photographs in regional shows.

Richard Pritchard

The Rev. Richard Pritchard, 100, a tireless champion of social causes rooted in his evangelistic Christian outlook, died at his home in Madison, Wis., March 18. Pritchard was born in Milwaukee, attended schools in Wauwatosa, Wis., and graduated from Carroll College, Waukesha, Wis., in 1941 and from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1944.

Ordained in the old Welsh (Calvinistic Methodist) Presbytery, he served a Presbyterian church in Illinois and then, in 1945-1946, served as a U.S. Army Air Corps chaplain in Newfoundland. After his military service he served almost 20 years as senior minister of a Presbyterian church in Madison, but parted ways with the Milwaukee Presbytery and led 75 families out of the Presbyterian church to gather Heritage Congregational Church in 1968. He served as pastor of Heritage until 1984 and then served interim pastorates in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Minnesota.

Pritchard was a strong advocate for racial equality, marching for civil rights in the South and serving on a committee that organized Madison's Equal Opportunities Commission. In the 1970s, he led a very public struggle against the encroachment of



commercial sex establishments into the Madison community. He founded a daily telephone dial-a-prayer service, participated in a host of community activities, and “fought the good fight” with conviction and an iron will, while treating adversaries with respect, courtesy, and compassion.

He was a Welshman who loved singing in the mother tongue and participated actively in the Welsh Gymanfa Ganu Association of Wisconsin.

Pritchard was married to his first wife, Eleanor, the mother of his three children, for 45 years. He was widowed for a second time in 2011 when his wife of 22 years, Helen, died.

David Carmen

The Rev. Dr. David Ralph Carmen, 82, died April 27 in Boise, Idaho. He was born and raised in Bound Brook, N.J., attended Bound Brook schools, and graduated from Drew University and its Theological School in Madison, N.J. He later earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Chicago Theological Seminary.



Ordained a Congregational minister in 1957, he served churches in New Hampshire, Vermont, Alaska, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois over a 40-year period.

In 1959 he married the former Marilyn Noyes, who survives him. Two brothers, two daughters, and three granddaughters also survive him.

Continued on p. 38

David had a love of God, his family, and the outdoors. In 1964 he drove by himself from New Hampshire to Alaska along the Alcan Highway during the winter to serve the First Congregational Church of Anchorage. His family fondly recalls summer vacations spent traveling cross-country, camping, telling stories, and singing along the way. In whatever community

he found himself, he organized family and youth camps, recruiting colleagues (and sometimes his wife!) as counselors.

During retirement in Idaho, David and Marilyn explored the Western U.S., cooked with a Dutch oven, and taught their granddaughters how to fish. David will be truly missed by all who knew and loved his gentle ways.

Strangers continued from p. 8

historian. His account of the Great Awakening was not propaganda or advertising for the movement. He recorded the excesses of the revivals (such as the gruesome suicide of one of his own uncles, who came down from the heights of religious ecstasy to

the depths of doubt and depression) as well as the positive side of the Awakening. He concluded with a balanced view of the importance of the emotions and the importance of the intellect in the life of a Christian. Love for Christ and joy in Christ were just as important as holy living and correct doctrine.

Edwards was envious of his wife's spirituality, which he believed was much deeper than his own. Sarah Edwards would bear eleven children, and their relationship was a true love story. Edwards wrote very frankly about his passion for Sarah, and he was equally frank in trying to evaluate the strength of his passion for the Lord Jesus objectively, in order to continue improving spiritually.

To say that Edwards was very frank in writing about his love for his wife, Sarah, is an understatement. The editors of *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* say that "his relationship with her is essential for our understanding of the beauty and almost sexual intimacy that he used to characterize the saint's relationship to Christ. Toppling modern-day assumptions about Puritan prudery, Edwards celebrates sexual attraction: 'How greatly are we inclined to the other sex!' Even more, attraction to 'fellow creatures' does not get in the way of our love to God, 'but only refines and purifies it.'"³

To be continued.

³ *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, xxxiii.

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—Jeannie Hart, Naples, Fla.

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—Grace Faison, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn

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Pastorates and Pulpits

RECENT CALLS

El Dorado Community Church,
El Dorado, Calif., has called the
Rev. Joe Ramirez as pastor.

United Church of Beloit, Wis.,
has called the Rev. Steven Erkel
as pastor.

ORDINATIONS

Hampshire Colony Congregational
Church of Princeton, Ill.,
ordained the Rev. Sarah Lynn
Gladstone with concurrence of a
vicinage council, Jan. 11, 2014.

Congregational Church of the
Messiah, Los Angeles, Calif.,
ordained the Rev. Moegagogo
(Gee) Solomona, Feb. 3, 2014.

IN SEARCH

SENIOR MINISTERS

Ashby Congregational Church
Ashby, Neb.

Church of Christ Congregational
Stony Creek, Conn.

Congregational Church
of the Chimes
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

First Congregational Church
Greenville, Mich.

First Congregational Church
Wayne, Mich.

First Congregational Church
of Barkhamsted
Pleasant Valley, Conn.

First Congregational Church
of Maltby
Snohomish, Wash.

LaMoille Congregational
Community Church
Marshalltown, Iowa

McGraft Memorial
Congregational Church
Muskegon, Mich.

Oneonta Congregational Church
South Pasadena, Calif.

Plymouth Congregational Church
Kenosha, Wis.

SouthCross Community Church
Burnsville, Minn.

Westchester
Congregational Church
Colchester, Conn.

PART-TIME MINISTER

Second Congregational Church
Jewett City, Conn.

INTERIM TRANSITIONAL MINISTER

First Congregational Church
Clear Lake, Iowa

Calendar

June 22-28

NAPF/HOPE Youth Conference
—Nashville, Tennessee

www.nacc.org/CMSUploads/1360_Nashville_promo_andReg.pdf

July 28

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

June 28-July 1

NACCC 60th Annual Meeting and Conference
—Omaha, Nebraska

www.nacc.org/yearbook/annualmeeting_2014.aspx

SAVE THE DATE

June 20-23, 2015

NACCC 61st Annual Meeting and Conference
—Salt Lake City, Utah

61ST ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

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let the mountains sing together for joy”*

—PSALM 98:8