

HISTORIAN'S REPORT

FY2023

In my final year as Historian, I want to thank everyone who has provided information, told stories, and shared news of NACCC folks. Our Necrology, published annually, offers short remembrances of NACCC ministers, their spouses, and clergy and laypeople who have served the NACCC in various capacities. This information comes to us by reports from churches and individuals; if someone is missing, please do contact the Historian and provide the necessary information for us to add to our listings.

Rev. Dr. Mary E. Biedron

NACCC Necrology June 2022-June 2023 (arranged by date of death)

6/14/22

REV. GISELA GERDES

Gisela Gerdes, 87, passed away on June 14, 2022 at age 87. Born in 1934 in Berlin, Germany, she attended seminary, receiving her certification as a teacher of religious education and then teaching in Berlin. She was married to Egon Gerdes from 1958 to 1981. She was a missionary in the Congo in 1961 and taught Christian education in Nashville starting in 1963. Gisela worked for several different churches in Illinois, as youth leader and director of Christian education. She was ordained in 1989 and in 1991, moved to Los Angeles/Glendale and served as associate minister. While in California, she proudly became an American citizen. She served on the NACCC's Christian Education Commission, 1990-94, and the Missionary Society 1996-1999. Gisela is survived by her daughter, Ute, son Eckhard, three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

6/28/22

REV. CLAUDE DUNN

Claude died on June 28, 2022. age 84. He was born on January 29, 1938 in Cary, Illinois. He served in the U.S. Navy, based in Japan, and then at Alaska's Cape Newenham as communications field engineer. Following his tour of duty he moved to California to marry, start a family, and found a business. He was increasingly called upon for lay preaching, eventually becoming the ordained pastor of El Dorado Community Church (Congregational), where he served for 21 years. Claude is survived by his wife, Joyce, children Kathleen Dunn, Deborah Dunn (and son-in-law Keith Yeager), Matthew Dunn, and sister Judy Freyder, and was preceded in death by his son, Michael.

7/12/22

REV. JOSEPH RILEY PENICK

Joseph Riley Penick passed away July 2, 2022. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and Frostburg State University, he was a teacher at New Dominion School for 25 years and filled in as a preacher for various churches and founded New Directions Unlimited Youth Center. In 1992 he was called to serve at the First Congregational Church of Frostburg, MD, and later, Trinity Reformed Church in Rockwood, Pennsylvania. He was also actively involved with the Congregational Christian Fellowship Church in Winchester, Virginia. Penick led Bible Studies at Archway Station in

Cumberland, Maryland, and served as a member of their Board as well as a Board Member of Pilgrim Theological Seminary. He served on the NACCC Mission Committee. He is survived by wife Caroline, son Gabriel, daughter Stephanie (Stephen) Wilt and two grandsons, his mother, Violet Penick; and his brother Charles Penick, Jr (Kim).

8/6/22

REV. RICHARD HOLLIS FREEMAN

Richard Hollis Freeman died on Aug. 6, 2022, age 74. He was born on Aug. 9, 1947, and grew up in Maine, graduating from the University of Maine at Farmington, and later from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. On March 2, 1974, he married Elaine A. Harrell, and the two raised a son, Benjamin Freeman. Dick served as a Congregational Church Pastor, throughout the United States including Etna, Pennsylvania; Lubec, Maine; Pomeroy, Ohio; Kingston, N.H.; Lavallette, N.J., and Pittston, Maine. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Elaine Freeman; son, Benjamin (Lindsay) and a granddaughter.

8/13/22

DONALD STURGIS

Donald Paul Sturgis died August 13, at the age of 90.

Don was born January 20, 1932. He attended American University from 1949 to 1953 where he earned a BA in math/physics, and then at West Coast University, earning a Master of Science degree in management in 1976, and a Master of Arts degree in 1978. In 1955 Don volunteered for the army and served as a mathematical statistician's assistant. After discharge, the family moved to California, becoming active at Pilgrim Congregational Church. Don filled many roles at the church and became involved in the NACCC, serving on the Missionary Society, 2000 – 2004 and the Executive Committee, 2005 – 2009. He was preceded in death by his wife Mandy; son-in-law Rob Thornstrom; daughter-in-law Peggy Sturgis; and brother Fred Sturgis. He is survived by his children Lynn Thornstrom, Steve Sturgis (Stacey), Nancy Sturgis, Mark Sturgis (Sheila), Todd Sturgis, Doug Sturgis (Cheryl) and Tom Sturgis, as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

9/12/22

REV. GLENN LAWSON

Glenn A. Lawson passed away September 12, 2022, at age 75. He was born on April 25, 1947, in Spencer, Indiana. Glenn served as a minister for over 30 years at churches in Florida, Georgia, Wisconsin, and Indiana. He was the outgoing Moderator of the Alabama-Georgia Association in 2004, and served on the NACCC Church Services Commission (2007-09), and the Division for Ministry (2000-04). He was preceded in death by his wife, Linda, and is survived by his daughters, Cecilia Bunker (Tad) and Christiana Jones, his stepdaughter, Becky Curry, several grandchildren and a great grandchild.

9/21/22

DONNA RAFUSE

Donna D. Rafuse passed away on September 21, 2022 at the age of 70. She was born March 4, 1952, in Lamesa, TX, and married Rev. William Rafuse on December 29, 1973. The couple served and ministered in Windsor, MA., Bozrah, CT., Lebanon, CT., and made their final home in at the Rapid River Congregational Church in MI for the last 26 years.

In addition to her husband, Bill, Donna is survived by sons Paul (Caitlin) Rafuse, James (Bobbie Jo) Rafuse, daughters Michelle (Steve Constantino) LaMarque, and Martha (John Hutchison) Blomstrom, as well as her brother, Michael Davis, 10 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild.

10/5/22

REV. HARRY CLARK

Harry W. Clark died October 5, 2022 at the age of 94. He was born on December 24, 1927. He was ordained in 1955, earning advanced degrees from Colgate Rochester Seminary and Wayne State University's theater program, along with honorary doctorates from Olivet College and Piedmont College. Harry served as the minister of four churches, followed by 10 years on the staff of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches as Associate Executive Secretary 1984-94. He also served the NACCC on the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, 1974-77, on the 25th Anniversary Committee, 1978-79, and the Commission on Youth, 1962-1965. He is survived by his wife, Eleanora, daughters Terry Clark Bauman, Laury Clark, and Amy Clark, son-in-law-Rick Bauman, granddaughter in law Theresa Bauman, and great-granddaughter Kivi Bauman.

11/4/22

ROLAND SUTTON, JR.

Roland Sutton passed away on November 4, 2022 at the age of 92. He earned a B.S. Degree from Michigan State University and worked for Burgess Norton Mfg. Co. in Illinois before serving in the Korean War. He and his family moved to Maine, where he co-founded Machine Products Company, became active in First Congregational Church of South Paris, and participated in the NACCC. When the family moved to Florida, he helped establish the First Congregational Church of Naples. A member of the NACCC's 1620 Society, he served in leadership roles including Division for Ministry, 1971-73; Executive Committee, 1975-79; Financial Stewardship, 1988-92, and Moderator, 1981-82

11/8/22

REV. SALLY NOLEN

Sally Nolen died November 8, 2022 two days shy of her 93rd birthday. She studied at the University of Michigan. Upon graduation, she and her husband Art Nolen returned to Lansing and became active members of Plymouth Congregational Church. Sally took on many responsibilities at the church, eventually studying for ministry at Marygrove College in Detroit. She was ordained at Plymouth Church in 1989 and served as an Associate Minister, and then went to First Congregational Church in Vermontville, MI where she served for over two years, then focusing on chaplaincy in Lansing. She is preceded in death by her parents and her brother Richard L. Strauss, her husband Dr. Arthur W. Nolen, and son Michael S. Nolen. She is survived by Jean Corbus (Sam Tumolo); The Rev. Dr. Thomas Nolen (Lisa; Mary Nolen (Brian Sullivan); eight grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

- 11/12/22 ESTELLE GIBBS
Estelle Anderson Gibbs, a longtime member of The Church at Spruch Creek in Kittery, Maine, was born to John and Anna Anderson March 21, 1925, in Lowell, Massachusetts. In 1946, she received her R.N. from New England Baptist Hospital. In 1947 she married Rev. Roy Gibbs who predeceased her in 1978. She was also predeceased by daughter, Shirley Gibbs, 6 sisters, and 3 brothers.
She is survived by daughter Carole Presser (Nathan), four grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren.
- 11/15/22 REV. WESLEY CROCKER
Wesley Crocker passed away Nov. 14, 2022, at age 89. Born in Newcastle, England, Wesley served two years in the Royal Air Force where he was stationed in Aden, Yemen. After completing his service, he became a Methodist minister and served many churches in the north of England. In 1979 he came to the U.S. to pastor the Congregational church in Alamo, Michigan. He also ministered at Rockwood First Congregational Church until retirement. He is survived by his wife, Doris, and his two sons, Stephen and Jonathan as well as eight grandchildren.
- 12/7/22 REV. RICHARD MAPPLEBECKPALMER
Richard Mapplebeckpalmer died Dec. 7, 2022. He was pastor emeritus of Grace North Church, serving there from 1989-2008. He then served as chaplain at the Abbey of Merton St. Ambrose.
- 12/29/22 REV. RICHARD BOWER
Richard Bower passed away Dec. 29, 2022, at age 83. He served the Congregational Church of the Chimes in Sherman Oaks, as well as churches in Bound Brook, NJ, and Kewaunee, WI, and was an interim at Congregational Church of the Messiah, Los Angeles, California. His NACCC leadership include service on Christian Ed, 1965-1968; Executive Committee, 1973-1977; Moderator, 1982-1983; Nominating Committee, 1991-1992; Program Committee: 1998-1999.
- 1/15/23 REV. GREGORY ELLCEY
Rev. Greg Ellcey passed away Jan. 15, 2023. He was born in Blissfield, Michigan in 1937 and attended Johnson Bible College and Concordia Theological Seminary. He served the Christian Church in Denver, IL, Wataga Congregational Church in Wataga, IL, and the First Congregational Church in Marshalltown, Iowa, retiring in 2002. Greg combined his love of the church and nature by leading church camp for many summers. Even in retirement, Greg continued to serve churches in need in a part time capacity and never truly stopped working. Greg is survived by his wife of 62 years, Barb; daughter, Beth Ellcey-Holt of Galesburg, IL; brother, Allan (Delores) Ellcey as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren.