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Making Church Work: 
Successful Practices of Congregations

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Faith and Practice

I’m excited about the theme of this edition of The Congregationalist: “Making Church Work: Successful Practices of Congregations.” It’s something we can all relate to, and something (things?) we all want to know.

Take the first part: “Making Church Work.” What is it that makes a church work? Now take the second: “Successful Practices of Congregations.” What are the practices of successful congregations?

Diana Butler Bass, among others, addresses these themes and questions in a recent series of books: Practicing Congregations: Imagining a New Old Church; From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations; and Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith.

In all three books, she speaks of faith and practice. That faith that works, and faith at work, is practice. This is as true for Christians as it is for churches.

And what are these practices? Butler Bass lists ten that both define and measure congregations:

- **Hospitality** ............... the welcoming of strangers
- **Discernment** ............... listening for the truth of God
- **Healing** ....................... restoring peace and wholeness
- **Contemplation** ........... practicing prayer and meditation
- **Testimony** ................. sharing stories of faith
- **Diversity** ................. creating community
- **Justice** ....................... engaging the powers
- **Worship** .................. experiencing God
- **Reflection** ............... thinking theologically
- **Beauty** ................. touching the Divine

Taken all together, she says what “makes” a faithful church — is practices. And even more, what “grows” a faithful church — is practices. It is also well to note that her research (“Project on Congregations of Intentional Practice” funded by the Lilly Endowment) says that this is true for every church, regardless of its polity, theology or tradition.

For those who are looking to “fix” their churches, she cautions against pursuing these practices as a kind of prescription or remedy. What she does is remind us of who and whose we are. And that is, children of God and followers of Christ, whose life together is a long and steady practicing of love for God, for others and for one another.

It’s often said that “practice makes perfect.” And we all know that there are no “perfect” churches. But practicing the list above can help us all, as Christians and as churches. The good news, and the promise, is to those who will.
Transitional Thoughts

Making Our Magazine Work

This issue we look at successful programs in churches, so let’s talk about how The Congregationalist works, for our magazine is a team effort. If you’ve scanned our masthead on page 3, you’ll see folks from all over the country who team up to put out each issue.

I’m the Transition Editor, here to pull the team together each issue while we also make a successful transition (thus the title) to a more stable editorial and business model. I choose and assign stories (often based on inquiries and ideas I receive from readers), edit copy and provide broad general direction to our graphic designer.

Tressa Stein and Linda Miller in our NA office are Contributing Editors, providing “NA News” and “Missionary Society News and Needs,” respectively. Tressa is now on disability and our prayers are with her as we await her replacement.

Lisa Dembkowski is the NACCC Publisher and she’s the business manager of the magazine, handling advertising, printing and billing. Her good work is evident as you may have noticed the increased advertising.

We outsource design to Jay Chow of Milwaukee who has given this issue a bold and fresh approach which fits a 21st century magazine. We also depend upon Debbie Johnston of Livingston, Mont., who as proofreader corrects our occasional error. (Okay, our more-than-occasional errors, um, errors.)

The Editorial Advisory Committee is appointed from the Communication Services Committee (two people), the editor (two people) and the NACCC Executive Committee (one person) on a rotating basis to advise me on broad editorial direction of the magazine.

Of course, our writers are critical to our success and they largely come from our readers. Please consider this an invitation to pitch a story. It’s best to send me a story idea instead of finished copy.

Overall, it is my intention to “connect” our magazine with our movement. This magazine needs to be our magazine, so it certainly is the product of more than one person. But then, that’s merely Congregationalism at work: relating to each other in covenant as God has related to us in covenant.

The Rev. Samuel Schaal
Transition Editor

Letters to the Editor

We welcome your comments!

e-mail: schaals@FirstChurchTosa.org

Mail: Letters to the Editor
The Congregationalist
1511 Church Street
Wauwatosa, WI 53213

Include your name, address, congregation and e-mail, or daytime phone number. Letters up to 150 words are appreciated. All letters may be edited for clarity and length. We regret we cannot publish or respond to all letters.

Note to Librarians

Several university libraries have inquired about missing issues. In 2007 we published only three issues: Vol. 167, Nos. 1, 2 and 3. We are now a quarterly publication and you will receive four issues in 2008, Vol. 168. Thanks for your interest in The Congregationalist.
"I Can Believe Whatever I Want!"

Some one in every church I've served has said something like that at one point or another. But it just isn't true.

A Congregationalist is someone who is part of the Free Church tradition. That is, a member of a church which acknowledges Jesus Christ as the head of the church and affirms the freedom of conscience and tolerance for differing theological viewpoints as essential for living one's faith to the fullest.

For over 40 years the NACCC published a small pamphlet entitled, What It Means to be a Member of a Congregational Christian Church. On page three Dr. Henry David Gray writes: “We do not accept any formal statement of faith as binding upon all members of our churches. This is not because we think creeds do not matter, but because we think sincerity of conviction requires full opportunity for intellectual freedom and personal experience. Thus every Congregationalist possesses full liberty of conscience in interpreting the gospel.”

In Congregationalism there is freedom of conscience for interpreting the gospel. There is no freedom to ignore the gospel. From the earliest of days in the history of our Way, respect for a learned ministry and laity has been profound.

Clergy and laity gathered in the 17th century in New England to articulate the essentials of our Way in the Cambridge Platform (1648) and in old England for the Savoy Declaration (1658). Both gatherings, according to Williston Walker in his monumental work The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, affirmed the theology of the Westminster Assembly. Walker writes (page 350): “Like the Congregationalists of New England, they (those gathered at Savoy Palace) had nothing but approval for most of the doctrinal work of that famous body (the Westminster Assembly/Confession).” Clearly, creedal articulation was acceptable to those who gathered at Cambridge and Savoy. However, those at Savoy also stressed the need for individual tolerance of differing views as well.

There was an overwhelming Calvinistic consensus as to theology in early Congregationalism. That consensus broke down in the 19th century. Theological liberalism came to dominate Congregational thinking in the late 19th century and throughout most of the 20th century. Individual perspective became more and more acceptable and affirmed as necessary. But Congregationalism has never articulated a perspective that one can believe whatever one wants.

We have freedom to explore all aspects of faith so that we might know and articulate what we truly believe. We are called to study the Scriptures and theology until we can state what we believe with clarity and reasoned articulation. In an age of sound bites and 30-second infomercials, we are to be people who use freedom of conscience to “own our faith” by knowing and fully articulating what we believe.

An inarticulate faith mocks the freedom of our Way and dishonors the strong theological tradition of Congregationalism. Therefore, let us use the freedom we enjoy as Congregationalists by affirming:

- It is only as individuals develop and articulate what they believe by study of the Scripture and theology that they honor the heritage of freedom that they enjoy in Congregationalism.
- The development of a personal creed is essential for faithful living, while maintaining tolerance for different beliefs which may emerge from others.
- The willingness to articulate one's faith is understood to be a key spiritual discipline without which faithfulness cannot result.
- The exercise of the freedoms of the Congregational Way is the means by which Congregationalism becomes what the founders of our Way intended, which is, a Biblically modeled church that calls and encourages individuals to develop a viable, articulate and relevant expression of Christianity in the contemporary context in which they exist.

Therefore, there is no more un-Congregational statement than to say, “I’m a Congregationalist and I can believe what I want.”

The Rev. Dr. Patrick D. Shelley is Senior Minister of Lake Country Congregational Church in Hartland, Wis.
"God moves in a mysterious way," the poet William Cowper once wrote. Many believing people will readily attest that his words ring true. I’m one of them — especially since participating in a phone call on Nov. 30.

NACCC Executive Secretary Dr. Tom Richard and Branching Out Campaign Administrator Diana David had set up the call for the purpose of discussing the NA’s upcoming Branching Out campaign with Congregational ministers in Maine. During the call, we were introduced to the Rev. Dr. Bernie Johnson of Edina, Minn., a Presbyterian minister who is senior executive consultant with RSI, the company with which the NA has contracted to oversee the campaign.

We all got on the line and exchanged the usual pleasantries. At one point Diana asked, “How’s the Maine weather?” “Cold and snowy,” I replied — at which point Bernie Johnson responded, “I remember New England winters very well. I was brought up in north central Massachusetts.”

Surprised by this bit of news, I replied, “I’m from north central Massachusetts. What’s your home town?” “I was brought up in South Ashburnham,” he said. I was stunned. “I’m from Ashburnham.”

Ashburnham is a little town about 25 miles north of Worcester. During my childhood, its population was only about 2,600.

“My home church was the little Congregational church in South Ashburnham where Hugh MacLean was pastor,” he replied.

By now my jaw had dropped to the floor. “That’s my home church.”

Within a few moments it came to me who Bernie Johnson was. Bernie and I are several years apart in age; he was in prep school by the time I entered elementary school.

I knew his parents, but if I had met him at all, it was in 1957 or thereabouts, and I hadn’t seen him since.

Now for the part of the story that would really delight William Cowper: I had been in Ashburnham the week before and had paid a visit to a dear old friend from my home church, Frances Godfrey, who was celebrating her 95th birthday that day.

As she and I talked and reminisced, I asked, “What became of the Johnsons who lived up the street from the church? Didn’t they have a son who became a minister?” She responded, “Oh, yes. I don’t think he’s a Congregationalist, though, and I don’t think he’s in the pastorate any longer. Seems to me he’s in fund raising or something like that.” Then she added, “You did know, didn’t you, that my niece is married to his brother?”

Well, I did find out about that following the conference call. Bernie and I linked up by phone immediately afterward and talked for an hour, then made a subsequent call later in the day and talked equally long. Between these two delightful conversations, Bernie had phoned his sister. “The Drowns?” she said. “Of course I remember them. My father-in-law worked for Doug’s father.” My dad was a supervisor at a state mental hospital, and I remembered meeting a Mr. Godfrey several times during my childhood, but never made the connection.

Bernie Johnson, and I, however, plan to connect at some point in the future. It’ll be like Old Home Week.

“Small world,” they say. I say (with a wink), “Smaller church.”

THE REV. DOUG DROWN is Minister of the Congregational churches in Bingham and West Forks, Maine.
The Benefits of the Long-Term Pastorate

What nurtures healthy ministry over time?

by Noel Vanek
Do our churches have something to gain by promoting longer pastoral tenures? Years ago, a member and friend gave me a copy of Richard Brown’s *Restoring the Vow of Stability: the Key to Pastoral Longevity*, with the exhortation, “Read this, it’s important!” It was his way of saying that in this day of so many conflicted pastor-parish relationships, both parties need to make a commitment to make the relationship not only peaceful and productive, but long-term.

Research on long-term pastorates by the Alban Institute notes that their potential benefits (stability, opportunity for in-depth trust, greater leadership, more effective contact with the larger community, and a plus for the pastor’s own family) usually outweigh negatives (the greatest of which is stagnation). These benefits are potential but significant. Plenty of long-term ministries are stale and boring, and some short pastorates are wonderfully exciting. But when all is said and done, more is possible over the long haul.

So what makes for nurturing good long-term ministry?

This spring I sent out a survey to 15 NACCC clergy who have pastored congregations over the long haul, and received 12 responses. I aimed for a breadth of theological perspectives; half of the respondents would be generally considered by their peers to be conservative, half more liberal. They are in all parts of the United States except the deep south. Survey participants ranked the factors that helped them to survive many years of ministry with one church (ranging in years of service from 15 to 47, with an average tenure of 26.5 years — quite remarkable in these days when the average pastor serves a church about seven years).

Factors that may affect long-term health and well-being in a pastorate included: good fit to begin with, growth within the pastor’s spiritual life, spiritual discipline, friends either in the church or the outside community, regular time off, regular continuing education, close working relations with other clergy, sabbaticals, good pay and benefits, a supportive spouse, trust in God’s purpose in keeping the person there, and efforts by the church to communicate and listen to clergy needs.
I suppose no one need be surprised that the highest-ranked factor was a good initial fit between clergy and calling congregation. The second highest-rated factor turned out to be trust in God’s purpose, “the sense that God wants you here, in spite of your many doubts.” I interpret this to be the hard work of prayer, soul searching and asking God for the strength to persevere through difficult times as well through good times.

Along this same vein, growth in the pastor’s spiritual life also ranked high as a sustaining factor. Rev. David Claasen, pastor for the past 32 years at Mayfair-Plymouth Congregational Church in Toledo, noted, “No one can stay in the same place for very long without growing in Christ.” Things that pastors do to build their faith include daily devotions, regular spiritual friendships and meetings with a few other clergy, time alone just to “breathe” and talk to God, and nurturing mature reflection about the ways of God with humankind through study, reflection and discussion with others. Nothing surprising here, as these are the same things that most pastors recommend to laity. But I wonder how often our congregations think to encourage and support these activities among our clergy, rather than just assume they are happening automatically.

A supportive spouse registered as the third highest supportive factor. One minister shared about the pain encountered during a divorce with the attendant sense of shame and failure, and his great sense of support from the church he served, which not only refused his resignation, but insisted on praying regularly for not only him but the wife who left. Nationwide statistics tell the story: clergy today divorce at a significantly higher rate than the average population. It’s difficult to sustain healthy marriages in a fishbowl, especially when clergy are tempted to shortchange their spouses and their families with the gift of their time.

Rev. Brad Smith, pastor of Sandstone Congregational Church in Jackson, Mich., for the past 28 years, described how his family was supportive. “People don’t choose when crisis occurs. Availability is something your own family needs to support, with the understanding that you will find a way to make it up.”

Equally contributing to family support is the ability of long-term pastors to isolate regular time off and guard it jealously. Rev. Carol DiBasio-Snyder, co-pastor along with her husband Ralph at First Congregational Church in Oshkosh, Wis., for 20 years, called the weekly day off sacred. While none of the clergy ranked a spouse’s employment as a decisive factor in their decision to stay, several noted the great benefit of adequate money for a family to live on. It’s not uncommon for a clergy spouse to bring in as much income into the family as the person called to pastor.

What factors ranked lower in long-term clergy well-being? Few admitted that sheer inertia, the difficulty of looking for a new position and the hassle of moving, entered into their decision making process. “Good pay and benefits” ranked relatively low in the responses. It’s not clear whether they were simply not highly motivated by monetary gain and good benefits, or if they concluded that moving to another church to better their compensation was more fantasy than reality. But if I had to bet, I’d place my money on the latter interpretation.

Last place in the surveyed factors was sabbaticals. This question evoked a great diversity of response, depending upon whether the pastors had actually received at least one sabbatical in their tenure of ministry (five had, and found them very helpful) or not (which was the situation with all the others). One clergy reported that the pastor-church relationship was a strong one, but noted with sadness that requests to consider granting a sabbatical had been refused several times. I personally am a strong advocate for sabbaticals. In the 16 years I’ve served The Church-in-the-Gardens, I’ve been fortunate to receive two sabbaticals. Each was spent very differently, each felt like a personal life-saver, and each brought me back to the life of the church with restored enthusiasm and new vision.

Few of the clergy reported many intentional efforts by their congregation to nurture their long-term well-being. One who did, Rev. Mark Jensen from North Congregational Church in Farmington Hills, Mich. (28 years’ tenure), noted that his church aided his ministry by providing adequate financial support, sabbaticals and regular continuing education time, by supporting the travel of his spouse along with him to conferences and denominational gatherings, by sending church laity to National Association conferences to share the experience with him, and by attending to any potential conflicts proactively and positively. His short list might well be taken to heart by every Congregational personnel or pastor-parish relations committee. These simple strategies do work in promoting clergy well-being over a long period of time.

The highest-ranked factor was a good initial fit between clergy and calling congregation.
“It’s difficult to sustain healthy marriages in a fishbowl, especially when clergy are tempted to shortchange their spouses and their families with the gift of their time.”

“After 32 years here, my congregation knows me, and I know them, pretty doggone well, warts and all. (I’m tempted to say that in some respects we know one another better than we want to know one another.) And yet, and yet, there’s a very genuine affection there. That is grace.”

By ending with an emphasis on grace, do I imply that efforts by churches to nurture and keep their pastors healthy for the long-term leadership and fruitful ministry in the church, are mostly ineffectual — that it all depends on grace? Not at all. Good Calvinist theology tells us we are wise to “prepare to receive grace.” The things we do intentionally, both pastor and congregation, to strengthen ourselves for long-term commitment, are important in God’s providential care. As one pastor in the survey noted, “It’s all intentional. It’s all grace.”

The Rev. Noel Vanek is Minister of The-Church-in-the-Gardens in Forest Hills, N.Y.

What supports long-term ministry?

1. Good initial fit between minister and congregation
2. Trust in God’s purpose
3. A supportive spouse
4. Time off
5. Pastor’s spiritual life & discipline
6. Friends
7. Continuing education
8. Close relations with other clergy
9. Good pay and benefits
10. Sabbaticals
MAKING CHURCH WORK:

Projects, Prayers, Pressures and Pizza

A Fourfold Approach to Youth Ministry

by Don Bliss

Given that volumes have been written about ministering to youth, the possibility that an original thought will be expressed in a brief how-to article on youth ministry in The Congregationalist is fairly remote. Huge publishers compete with each other for your scant resource dollars churning out books, CDs and DVDs, all aimed at “completely transforming your approach to ministry” and quadrupling the size of your church. The products they produce are slick in design, content and marketing, and are generally effective if used properly. But the unintended result of this market-driven approach is a well-resourced corps of youth ministry volunteers with an intention deficit. Companies like these are long on the “how-to” and short on the “why,” which, in the long run, is more important to establish.

Effective youth ministry begins in your congregation when its importance is shared by the whole congregation. Broad inclusion in the planning for youth ministry increases the number of stakeholders in the resulting efforts. Help everyone to understand how the whole congregation is served by an effectively functioning youth ministry. You may be surprised at the opinions that you encounter, but you will also be thankful for the opportunity to establish a dialogue among all members of your congregation about a facet of congregational wholeness that has been neglected for years.

God’s model of congregational wholeness is provided in Luke’s description of the early church (Acts 2:42-47). Within this brief description, we can recognize different, equally important benchmarks of the faithful church: engaging in community, worshiping, serving others and learning. This four-faceted approach seeks to build a youth-oriented community in the midst of the congregation rather than a youth recreation program that operates as an adjunct to your faith community. Every teen needs to grow in discipleship, social maturity and spirituality. “Projects, Prayers, Pressures and Pizza” is an approach that accommodates those needs.

Let’s start with pizza. Pizza is iconic for the fellowship aspect of youth ministry. Just as the early church broke bread together, most of us would readily admit that the after-worship fellowship hour is as important to the life of our faith community as anything else that we do. Youth groups should be spending 25 percent of their time in the pursuit of food and fun. Pizza parties, cookouts, progressive fast food meals, make-your-own ice cream sundaes, the ubiquitous snack bowl, baking cookies, etc. are de rigueur. To paraphrase Napoleon — a youth group travels on its stomach.

Fun games such as the old standby “sardines” (sort of the opposite of tag), video tag (don’t get caught on the video), volleyball, balloon ball, broomball — are fun and active. “New Games” (from the New Games Foundation, Main Street Books, 1976) are competitive and fun everybody-wins games that are suitable for groups of all sizes. They are divided into categories relative to number of participants, space needs and degree of activity. Game playing affords leaders insight into the abilities and tendencies of young people. Game playing promotes cooperation and problem solving. Most importantly, playing games provides young people with laughter and unforgettable good times.

The prayer component is vital. At the end of each meeting, dim the lights and light a prayer candle. Initially the prayers will be stilted and brief, but eventually the teens will begin to share in prayer more of the concerns of their daily lives, from school struggles
in prayer more of the concerns of their daily lives, from school struggles to family crises. The more you encourage the giving of these concerns to God in prayer, the more spiritually engaged your young people will be. They will begin to reflect on the importance of prayer in their daily lives, and will begin to seek God’s presence on a daily basis. It is important to observe the strictest rule of confidentiality regarding prayer time. Make time to participate in the worship of the church as a group. Visit other churches as well. Have a prayer time in the food court at the mall.

Pressures is a reference to the need of young people to leverage youth group experience into social and emotional maturity. Youth group offers young people a chance to try out ideas and theories that are still in formation stages. Young people today are exposed to more of the adult world than ever before. The importance of giving them a forum to explore their reactions and mores has never been greater. Teens will want to express many aspects of youth culture, but also will delve into topics that are too uncomfortable for them to raise with their own parents. An effective youth ministry will accommodate this process, giving young people an opportunity to experience God’s wisdom on relevant cultural topics. Topical Bible studies are among the effective tools along with video discussion curricula and resources such as Devozine from Upper Room.

Projects are the most effective ways to help your young people grow into a mature sense of discipleship. There are three kinds of projects that, together, ought to comprise 25 percent of your youth programming time: fundraisers, servanthood projects and mission projects. Fundraising is important because the cost of youth ministry should be born by both the congregation and the youth group, and not by the participants’ individual families. Servanthood projects are tasks performed by the group around the church or members’ homes. Serving at church suppers, raking leaves, washing houses and painting are excellent opportunities for members of the congregation to experience the presence of the youth group in the life of the church.

Mission projects are also vital and effective ways of transforming the personal faith of each youth in a hands-on way. Mission trips and projects expand the consciousness of teens and give them a sense of self worth. These projects range from trips to places such as Mission Mazahua or Indian Trails to local missions such as food drives, serving lunch at the local soup kitchen or volunteering for one-on-one ministry at a nursing home.

Ideas of what to do with young people in your church fill volumes of books, but ultimately, the most successful ministries will be those which rely on the Scriptural model of wholeness in a faith community. By paying attention to “Projects, Prayers, Pressures and Pizza,” you will ensure that your young people are getting a bona fide experience of what it is to be an active member of a deeply committed community of faithful Christians.

THE REV. DON BLISS is Pastor of the East Freetown (Mass.) Congregational Christian Church. He formerly served churches in Boston and Cape Cod in youth and family ministries and has consulted in youth ministry with conferences and churches in many traditions.
The First Congregational Church of Anchorage has unanimously voted to invite the NACCC to help celebrate our 50th anniversary by hosting the 2010 Annual Meeting. Whether you want to walk on glaciers, visit the tallest mountain in North America, fish, watch whales, ride the Alaska Railroad, or work on a Habitat For Humanity Project, come to the 2010 NACCC Annual Meeting early and stay late so we can show you our home.

Especially, we want to show you what kind of stewards we have been with your largesse. In 1959, eight people asked NACCC about founding a new church in Anchorage. In response, First Congregational of Wauwatosa, Wis., sent Dr. Howell Davies of the Missionary Society to Anchorage to provide advice. With additional assistance from the Congregational mission to the Tsimshian Indians in Metlakatla, Alaska, First Congregational Christian Church of Anchorage was formed in August 1960.

The children of First Congregational Church of Spencer, Iowa, provided materials for our Sunday School. The congregation in Hancock, N.H., provided us with our first communion set. With support from congregations in Wisconsin, Wyoming, Iowa, and California, a minister was called to serve FCC Anchorage in 1961.

The Missionary Society received donations for building our church from congregations in over 30 states. A volunteer work crew representing congregations in eight states spent the summer of 1966 erecting our building. The NACCC Commission on Women’s Work sold Eskimo Cook Books nationwide to pay for the furnishings. A New Jersey Congregationalist used 200-year-old cherry lumber to make the pulpit for our new church, which was dedicated in 1967.

In 1982, our sanctuary burned. With insurance proceeds and donations from congregations throughout the nation, FCC Anchorage financed construction of a substantially larger sanctuary in 1983. Though repaying this large mortgage kept FCC Anchorage looking inward for a number of years, as payments have become less burdensome, we have increased our participation in the greater church. In 1996, we ordained one of our children, William Gentry, to ministry, and three members of our church are currently serving on NACCC committees.

Now we look forward to 2010 when we will see you in Anchorage!
Think BIG!

The meeting of a lifetime

by Rev. Wendy G. Van Tassell — Chair, NACCC Executive Committee

If you’ve ever anticipated a family reunion which gathers scattered family members from all over the nation to celebrate the milestone in one member’s life, then you will catch the reasoning behind the NACCC’s Executive Committee’s seemingly bold move to vote to hold the 2010 Annual Meeting of our association in Anchorage, Alaska. One of our family members, the First Congregational Church of Anchorage, will be celebrating 50 years in Congregational Christian ministry in 2010.

This church has had extraordinary participation in the programs of the NACCC, including those of NAPF and HOPE. Lay and clergy from the Anchorage church have served countless years on various positions of the Leadership Team. This, of course, means that many miles have been flown to attend meetings in the lower 48 states.

The members of the Executive Committee carefully considered the Anchorage invitation. At first doubtful that we should entertain the idea, we began to catch a vision of what a meeting in a once-in-a-lifetime destination like Alaska might mean for our association. We pictured the enthusiasm of new delegates who have never before attended the Annual Meeting, looking forward to, planning for, saving for and gathering in Anchorage. We imagined groups, with two years’ lead time, making plans to join together on cruises, either coming or going from the meeting, and people being delighted by the breathtaking recreational opportunities available in Alaska. We imagined what a blessing the Annual Meeting would be to the local Anchorage church and the ministry opportunities we would have to the Anchorage Interfaith Council through the opening of our Bible lecture and other workshops.

Would it be more expensive? Yes and no. Alaska has no sales tax, so food, beverages and souvenirs would be cheaper. The church is working with the Anchorage Convention and Visitor’s Bureau and with Alaska Destinations to prepare a package that will reduce the costs as much as possible. They have said that anyone wanting to come to Anchorage will find it impossible to do so for less, unless they know someone with whom they can stay.

Meeting in Alaska gives us an opportunity to see a part of the United States which is no less significant than well-traveled Congregational regions like New England, Wisconsin or Michigan. One member of the Executive Committee shared Christ’s words, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

If we think puny thoughts we can expect puny results. The Executive Committee is thinking big and anticipates big results. Join us in our enthusiasm and begin spreading the word to the families of your congregation that just might want to make this their trip of a lifetime. It will no doubt be a meeting of a lifetime!
More than 400 years ago, Jesus gathered some folk together and gave them to believe that He was looking for folks who did not need to be spoon-fed, could think and discern for themselves and had a deep desire to serve in His vineyards, as adults. He wanted folks who could follow the model of the church that He established and is historically described in the Book of Acts. He called these folks Congregationalists.

So began the opening devotional meditation titled “Grown Up,” in a new program called The Church Alive. Created and facilitated by the Church Assistance and Development Committee of the Fellowship of Connecticut Congregational Christian Churches, The Church Alive has been replicated four times over the past year in four geographical areas of the fellowship, which has churches from five states. There are plans for another version of the program to be done five times in the coming year in a like fashion. The focus of the program is church renewal and revival.

The program is totally funded by the fellowship, including the costs for dinner and childcare. Beginning with dynamic worship, the program moves to four workshops that are repeated, allowing attendees to benefit from two workshops followed by a simple supper and closing devotions. Childcare is provided for the Sunday afternoon program so that all folks can attend. The schedule for the program, 2:30-7 p.m., is strictly kept so that the program adjourns on time.

Worship features music led by the praise band from the Bozrah Centre Congregational Church, and is contemporary and upbeat. The Scripture lesson is from Romans 12. Following a break, there are four workshops:

1. **The Congregational Way** is facilitated by the Rev. Stan White, Pastor of Preston City Congregational Church and Executive Secretary of the Connecticut fellowship. It discusses our historical background and focuses on what it means to be a Congregationalist Christian.

2. **Music** for worship is facilitated by members of the Bozrah church praise band. It introduced the idea of moving from the exclusive use of music from centuries ago to at least a mixture with more contemporary music. This is based on the premise that many of those in worship may not be familiar with the traditional hymns of the church but are more attuned to more contemporary music, and that there is a plethora of praise music and contemporary Christian music.

3. **Youth**, the third workshop, is facilitated by the Rev. Lee Edwards, Pastor of the Bozrah church, who is one of the ministers in residence for the fellowship’s summer youth programs at Fishers Island and a longtime youth leader. This workshop provides strategies for starting, sustaining and growing youth programming in the local church.

4. **Church as Family** is a workshop I facilitate. I developed a similar workshop for the 2007 NACCC Annual Meeting under the auspices of the Commission on Youth. This workshop provides strategies for churches to become more family oriented. The deep belief that life is not meant to be lived alone, that one need not die alone, and the need for the family of God to act more like a family are the driving forces behind this workshop.
Throughout the space are kiosks with displays of Sunday School materials used by the various churches and missions material from the NA and Connecticut fellowship churches. Also included are materials on the services of the fellowship including grants and low-cost loans for building, programming, moving clergy to full time, formal education of clergy and laity, sabbatical leaves, and services with conflict resolution, stewardship, pastoral search, expansion/rehabilitation of buildings and programs, and the summer youth programs. More than half of the 40-plus churches of the fellowship have participated in one or more of these programs, some returning to gather more information at another session.

A number of churches have altered their music to include a variety of traditional, gospel, contemporary and other types of music. South Congregational Church in Hartford has developed a praise band. The summer youth program is over-subscribed and additional sessions have been added. Several churches have increased their fellowship programming and have focused on including members without family resources into other families. They have become much more sensitive to the needs of others. Other churches are exploring a course on Congregationalism for their congregation. Networking between the churches has also been fostered.

The cost has been minimal and by geographically moving the sessions, a larger number of churches has been able to participate. As we go into another year, we will make changes where appropriate but will continue to offer churches the opportunity to learn new strategies, to remember what has worked in the past and to fellowship with other travelers on the same road. The program seeks not to tell churches what to do but to offer new ideas, possibilities and support for the journey. Faith, freedom and fellowship make The Church Alive.

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MAKING CHURCH WORK:

Interview with Anthony Robinson

Being Church in a Post-Christendom Culture

Anthony B. Robinson is the author of several books including the bestselling *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003). He is also a frequent contributor to *The Christian Century* and other journals. As president and founder of the Seattle-based Columbia Leadership Network he travels throughout the nation working with congregations and church leaders on congregational renewal and transformation. Ordained in the United Church of Christ (UCC) he has served four congregations and in 2004 he completed 14 years of ministry at Plymouth Congregational Church (UCC) in Seattle, Wash.

During a February weekend retreat at First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa, Wis., he spoke of the difficulty mainline churches are having as our culture shifts away from the era of Christendom. Since Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century (bringing Christianity and kingdom together), the church has often enjoyed a position of power and prestige in society. This changed when the 1960s and 1970s ushered in an age of greater religious pluralism and distrust of traditional authority. Without the culture to prop up what could be called civic faith, congregations struggle to stay vital. Transition Editor Samuel Schaal and Tony Robinson engaged that issue.

**The Congregationalist:** In your travels around the country, talking to churches, what do you see congregations most commonly struggling with?

**Anthony Robinson:** I think a lot of churches are struggling with being a church in the period after American Christendom. Many of our churches were established and experienced success in the era of 1870 to 1950. They worked quite well during the period of American Christendom when the church had significant cultural support and when clergy had a particular socially defined role. That era has pretty much ceased to exist and churches which experienced a great deal of vitality and strength in that period are struggling now.

Walter Brueggemann had a great line when speaking to clergy: “The world for which you have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from you, by the grace of God.” That’s a wonderful and painful truth.

**Given** the history of Congregational churches (whether of UCC or NA variety), many of our churches were the first churches in a community, so they sometimes have what could be called “First Church Syndrome,” where they act like they’re still dominant even though the world has changed. **Has the end of Christendom been even more difficult on Congregational churches?**

What’s gone on in culture the last 40 years has involved a loss of power, place and clout for the mainline churches. And it has something to do, frankly, with the passing of the “White Anglo Saxon Protestant” establishment in this country. We are becoming, like it or not, an ethnically, culturally and racially diverse culture. Many of those First Churches were (and this is not a bad thing) standard bearers of that WASP world and elite. Part of post-modernity is that there isn’t one elite anymore. It’s always shifting.

I think we need to figure out a way to make our history lemonade as opposed to lemons, to carry it forward with us, and have some continuing value in it, without using it as a point of social superiority… to balance an identity that is both traditional and contemporary. I think the UCC has tried to do this recently through an aspect of the
“God Is Still Speaking” campaign. One of the things that came out of that is a new way to frame the denominational story that wasn’t so much Mayflower and Pilgrims but that we are a tradition of firsts — and much of this applies to NA churches, too: We’re the first church to ordain an African American. We’re the first church to ordain a woman. So there’s a church of firsts that does make an authentic connection but claims it in a way that has a contemporary relevance, a way that avoids your “First Church Syndrome.”

There’s the great line from Jaroslav Pelikan: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” Our Mayflower/Plymouth/Puritan story needs to be reshaped, repackaged if you will, for a new season, a new time.

In adapting to a new environment, what do we need to risk and to lose?

When I was weighing the call to Plymouth Church in Seattle, they sent me a copy of their church history which is called “Seeking to Serve” and I read it and subsequently members of the search committee called me and I said I thought it had been mistitled and should have been called “Seeking to Rule.” So I think part of what we have to risk is this perceived social position and be more inclusive economically and racially.

With that, I think there’s a theological reformation implied in which the church is not a gathering of the righteous. It’s a gathering of sinners in need of grace. I say occasionally that the church has been successful often in inviting our noble self, but not necessarily our real self. Nobility is a good thing when it’s genuine, but we’re trying to invite the real self into the presence of God. We are far better off if we figure out ways to be honest about our brokenness and our need for grace. Therefore we become a hospital for sinners, which is different than the First Church Syndrome.

Anything else you think is necessary for a successful church in this cultural environment?

To some extent the mainline Protestant world has not been very good or successful at fostering strong and capable leaders in the last generation or so. We’ve underestimated the importance of leadership and confused it with authoritarianism. We have not encouraged people who have leadership gifts.

I’ve never seen a strong, successful, vital church that didn’t have leadership — not one leader, but a leadership team. You really need to have pastors and laity who value leadership: who value those who will make the key questions prominent and push the matters of purpose and vision, and ask the hard question. If we think we can pastor our churches without that, I think we’re wrong. Does that mean hero worship or “she-ro” worship? No — I like to say good leaders do not have big egos, they have strong egos. Sometimes we confuse the two. We need people with strong egos who are committed to Christ.

That’s a good final word. Looking to the future, what’s your next book about?

My upcoming book is Changing the Conversation: Third Way Congregations, due later this year from Eerdmans. It’s a sequel to Transforming Congregational Culture and is a little more prescriptive as well as recording what I’ve learned since the last book. In the book are 10 conversations you and your church leadership need to have in order to walk across the bridge from the established church of Christendom to a culture of discipleship, or more intentional Christian community.
Adult Christian education is as old as Christianity. Early followers of Christ saw the need to provide a safe learning environment where seekers and believers alike could grapple with issues of faith and life. The human capacity to grow is lifelong and the church is a learning community, a place where we can derive support and encouragement from others, try to make sense of our life experiences, and learn the full meaning that our lives can hold.

At Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, we encourage meaningful questions, thoughtful debate and respectful support as we discern and embody the teachings of Jesus Christ. As stated in the familiar Rilke quote, we embrace the mystery of the unresolved with patience and try to love the questions.

Through the efforts of our clergy and the Committee for Religious Exploration and Connection, Adult Forum Committee, and Spiritual Enrichment Committee, programs are offered on a variety of topics every Sunday and throughout the week. Adult religious education is an opportunity in our church for adults to meet and share knowledge and insights with one another.

As Congregationalists, we accept responsibility for our own religious and spiritual growth. We recognize that no one has a monopoly on truth, and that all of us have valuable knowledge and experience to share. We are grateful that we continue to grow in our personal spiritual journeys and as a religious community.

As a large, liberal urban church we have a variety of adult educational needs. Three different committees respond to those needs by offering a variety of programs and learning experiences.

The Adult Forum Committee plans Sunday morning forums on a variety of topics relevant to living in today’s world. With attendance that ranges from 30 to 150, participants grapple with issues such as aging, faith and politics, and worship and arts.

The Spiritual Enrichment Committee oversees a number of retreats and programs specifically geared toward spiritual formation and development. Retreats on subjects such as the Enneagram, hope, spiritual eldering, and celebrating the sabbath were offered this past program year. We also offer retreats off-site especially designed for men, women and couples. This committee also oversees yoga and tai chi classes.

The Committee for Religious Exploration and Connection offers programs such as Living the Questions, Compassionate Communication, a visiting scholar program and the Jesus Seminar.

Our adult education program’s success relies on using a variety of methodologies and experiences that meet the needs of adult learners. Within our covenantal relationship, we hold in creative tension the unresolved questions and our assurance of faith. It makes a dynamic educational program.

... have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves ...

— Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

THE REV. PAULA NORTHWOOD is
Minister for Education and Family Life at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, Minn.
Branching Out

Strengthens Stewardship

Through the Branching Out campaign for leadership and growth, congregations throughout the country are finding opportunities to strengthen stewardship and renew their relationship to the NACCC. Since the beginning of the year, regional campaign efforts have been taking root in California, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York and Wisconsin, guided daily through 35 prayer partners in 14 states.

Two Wisconsin churches — North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point and First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa — have led the vanguard of campaign efforts nationally by conducting their own Branching Out mini-campaigns. Through informational gatherings hosted at the churches and in private homes, as well as early participation in the Branching Out National Offering, members of these congregations committed to providing resources for future leadership development and church growth in the NACCC.

Another way churches are participating in Branching Out is by doing their own RSI-guided capital stewardship campaign. Heritage Congregational Christian Church in Madison, Wis., began their own campaign with a goal to replace their furnace and retire debt. The NACCC covenanted with each church to pay for the RSI-guided campaign. As part of the covenant, each church will give a tithe of the amount raised through their campaign to support the two Branching Out campaign initiatives: the Center for Congregational Leadership and the Fund for Congregational Growth and Renewal.

By the time this magazine reaches you, the National Association will have conducted its first National Offering, chaired by immediate past moderator Dr. Helen Gierke. The National Offering provides an opportunity for individual Congregationalists throughout America to invest in this historic venture through a one-time gift, a three-to-five-year pledge, or deferred giving options. If your church has not yet participated, it’s not too late to support the campaign through taking an offering. Please call me at 1-800-262-1620, ext. 25, or e-mail ddavid@naccc.org to get started.

An updated report on the Branching Out — Advancing Leadership, Growing Churches three-year capital campaign will be presented at the Annual Meeting in Plymouth. If you are attending, please help us celebrate the campaign’s progress by joining us at the Congregational Foundation’s annual reception for donors on Saturday at 5:30 p.m. You can also visit our display table during scheduled hours to chat with campaign leaders and pick up more information about the campaign.

DIANA DAVID
Branching Out Campaign Administrator

Sixth Symposium in Brooklyn

The Sixth Congregational Symposium, Congregationalism in the Public Square: Past, Present and Future, is scheduled Oct. 30 through Nov. 1 at Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn, N. Y. Symposium speakers are Anthony Robinson, author of eight books including the best seller Transforming Congregational Culture, Debbie Applegate, author of The Most Famous Man in America, winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Biography, Peggy Bendroth, Frank Decker, David Fisher, Gabriel Fackre, Karen Fisher Younger, and Steven Peay.

“There was a time when Congregational churches were major players in the public forum in this country and it’s time to take a look at the role, if any, we should attempt to play in the future,” said David Fisher, minister of Plymouth Church. The congregation was gathered in 1847 and called as its first pastor Henry Ward Beecher, beginning what was to become one of the most prominent ministries in the second half of 19th century America. Rev. Beecher and members of Plymouth Church became influential voices in opposition to slavery with deep connections to the Underground Railroad. The church was known at the “Grand Central Depot” of that secretive network.

For information on the meeting and affordable lodging in the area, contact David Fisher at d.fisher@plymouthchurch.org or call (718) 624-4743.
North Shore Commissions Caregivers

The Christian caregiving ministry at North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point, Wis., has grown as six new Stephen Ministers were commissioned April 6. They are: Myla Hadcock, Ruth Reindl, Marina Rosenberg, Barbara Schmidt, Dave Syverson and Mary Tornetta. These new lay caregivers join 11 Stephen Ministers already commissioned and serving at the church.

Stephen Ministers offer care and support for people experiencing life difficulties such as the death of a loved one, job crises, aging, separation or divorce, long-term illness, or for those needing the support of a Christian friend. They have received 50 hours of intensive training covering topics such as effective listening, feelings, confidentiality, the stress of hospitalization and utilizing community resources. They will continue to receive twice-monthly continuing education and supervision support sessions as they strive to offer the highest quality Christian caregiving.

Accompaniment Hymnal Ready

Our new hymnal, *Hymns for a Pilgrim People*, is now in its second printing. Sales continue to go very well, with new churches adding themselves to the roster of who are singing from our hymnal each month.

Many of you have asked about an accompaniment version, and our publisher, GIA, has been working toward that end. I’m pleased to announce that the two-volume *Accompaniment Edition of Hymns for a Pilgrim People* is now being printed and will be available for purchase by the time of the Annual Meeting in Plymouth, Mass., this June. Order there, or on the GIA website, www.GIAmusic.com

Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita

Double Installation Service

Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita, Kan., installed both their new Senior Minister, the Rev. Dr. Don Olsen, and new Associate Minister, the Rev. Lisa Dembkowski, in a service April 20.

Dr. Olsen is the former Associate Executive Secretary of the NACCC, and Rev. Dembkowski is Publisher for the NACCC, including *The Congregationalist* magazine. In that capacity, she is business manager for the magazine overseeing advertising and printing. The Rev. Sue LeFeber of Fox Point, Wis., represented the NACCC, and the Rev. Steve Peay, Ph.D., of Wauwatosa, Wis., preached the sermon and moderated the vicinage council on April 19.
Again this year, a few brave bicycle riders are joining Pastor Craig Walker of Desert Congregational Church in Twentynine Palms, Calif., in the Pilgrim Ride. The riders will trek from the offices of the NACCC in the Milwaukee suburb of Oak Creek to the Annual Meeting in Plymouth, Mass.

To spur on the riders, contributors are asked to donate funds that will benefit the Joe Polhemus Endowment Fund, established to support the ministry of The Congregationalist. The ride began on May 31 and will end 1,200 miles later in Plymouth on June 21. The Pilgrim Riders will bring a copy of the Mayflower Compact, which they will carry back to Plymouth where it was signed 388 years ago.

Donations to the Polhemus fund are tax deductible. The Joe Polhemus Endowment Fund has just reached $20,000 and the goal of the ride is to raise an additional $30,000 so that the fund is at the $50,000 level. For more information, contact Pastor Walker at (951) 285-6650 or PilgrimRide@aol.com.

### Yes! I’ll support The Congregationalist by contributing to the 2008 Pilgrim Ride:

- $1.50 per mile ($1,800)
- $1.00 per mile ($1,200)
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Visiting Missionaries at Annual Meeting

Every year, the Missionary Society brings missionaries from two of our sponsored international missions to attend the Annual Meeting. These missionaries visit NACCC churches before going to the meeting and share their stories of faith.

Asociación Civil Cristiana Congregational

The Rev. Dr. Harding Stricker, Director of Asociación Civil Cristiana Congregational, Argentina, will be visiting churches in June in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

In the north-east corner of Argentina, in the small city of Jardin (Garden) America, stands the mission of a local Congregational church — the Asociación Civil Cristiana Congregacional. For over 30 years, Rev. Teodoro Stricker and his wife, Teresa, have served thousands of people living in poverty on the outskirts of their city. His work continues through the efforts of his son, the current director, Rev. Dr. Harding Stricker.

Their work started by bringing the Gospel, education, health care and a self-enabling food source to the people of the favelas. A church building stands on mission-owned property. A well in front of the church provides clean water for those who can carry it away. With seating for over 400 hundred people, the church is nearly full for most of three services each week.

An onsite mission clinic offers medical and dental assistance to the impoverished and the elderly. Dr. Stricker serves as its physician/director.

An off-site, mission-owned farm called “God’s Garden” helps people to grow their own food. Livestock is kept on the property to provide fresh milk and eggs for the children.

An elementary school on the mission grounds consists of six classrooms. Basic skills in math, reading, writing and science are taught along with daily Bible lessons. A lunch of bread and soup is served each day. In addition, more than 90 children receive clothing, food and educational assistance through a program called “God’s Child.”

The mission’s primary goals are: To bring the life changing news of Jesus Christ to all people through preaching the Gospel, to share the love and compassion of Christ through spiritual nurture and material assistance, and to help families become self-sufficient and gain self-respect.

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Pilgrim’s Presence, Kenya

Geoffrey Lipale, Director of Pilgrim’s Presence, Kenya, will be visiting churches in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

The Pilgrim’s Presence Mission of Kiwawa is located in the West Pokot District of Kenya, north of Eldoret in the Great Rift Valley. Only 4 percent of the land is arable. Much of the people’s lives revolve around caring for their livestock. The Pokot people form one of the most marginalized communities in Kenya.

Pilgrim’s Presence became a mission of the NACCC in 1992, referred by the Colonial Church of Edina, Minn., in cooperation with World Vision. In the Spirit of Christ, the goal of Pilgrim’s Presence is to help the Pokot people transform their lives in a changing world.

Some of the challenging issues facing Pilgrim’s Presence are:

• Ongoing warfare between neighboring tribes due to cattle rustling.
• Food scarcity.
• Literacy — 97 percent of the population served by Pilgrim’s Presence do not know how to read or write.
• Girls’ Education — 93 percent of girls are not in school and 99 percent of them are forced into early marriage.
• Poverty — 60 percent of students in secondary school drop out due to lack of school fees.

These major difficulties have hindered progress in terms of evangelism and outreach. However, the ministry has been expanding in terms of meeting the needs of the people.

Bible classes are held daily, and church services are held twice weekly, in the Pilgrim’s Presence church. There is a scholarship program for girls’ education.

They offer a medical clinic, the only facility in a very large region of Northwest Kenya.

If you would like to have Harding or Geoffrey visit your church and you are in the areas where they are visiting, please contact Linda at 1-800-262-1620, ext. 13, or e-mail lmiller@naccc.org.

Donations to our missions may be forwarded to:

The Missionary Society, NACCC P.O. Box 288 Oak Creek, WI 53154

For a complete listing on NACCC mission projects, please go to our website at www.naccc.org and click on “Missions” or call Linda at 1-800-262-1620, ext. 13, or e-mail lmiller@naccc.org.

The First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, is seeking an individual with a passion for ministry to fill our associate minister position within an exciting university community.

If you are interested in more information, please visit our website at www.fccannarbor.org or email us at search@fccannarbor.org.
In early May, members of the class of 2008 at Piedmont College donned cap and gown and marched across the platform to receive their degrees. My regularly assigned seat for this festive occasion placed me a few feet away from each graduate before he or she climbed the steps. Because our residential population numbers only 400, most of the traditionally-aged students are known to me and my close proximity to them in their last few seconds as Piedmont students (soon to be alumni) precipitated myriad emotions.

Sometimes the image of a shy freshman awkwardly moving through orientation or a giggling student in Religion 101 flashed through my mind, and I celebrated the poised adult who now stood tall and ready to make a contribution to society. At other moments, worry overtook cheer for as soon as the robed person crossed the stage and descended the stairs with diploma in hand, all of the predictability that has characterized life thus far evaporated. We who have organized schedules and encouraged these individuals to excel for four years suddenly applauded their plunge into the great unknown. I longed for them to hold a plan for the future as detailed as the course selection forms they delivered to the registrar’s office every semester. As the students strolled past, two concerns swirled into a haze of melancholy: not only do we have little idea of how these graduates will fare personally and professionally, we also cannot say with accuracy who will continue their association with the school. A line from hymnody came to mind: “They fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.”

But I soon realized that this image of our students disappearing into the skies is not completely accurate. Not all fly away and are forgotten. The dean of school education posts e-mails announcing that a graduate has been named teacher of the year in a particular school or county. Currently, northeast Georgia is dotted with signs urging people to vote for an alumnus who is running for the state legislature. Others, like him, hold positions that enable us to remain aware of their movement via the media — the coach of an Atlanta soccer team and a district attorney. Some graduates work in the area of mass communications so we see their bylines in the newspaper or hear their voices on the radio.

Intermittently, familiar faces appear on campus. The incoming class always includes a few students whose parents attended Piedmont and they show up on move-in day bursting with stories of 20 or 30 years ago. Earlier this year, during alumni weekend, some of the graduates of the 1950s and 1960s came back to Demorest for the first time since being awarded their degrees. They wanted to know if we still have mandatory chapel (we haven’t for over 20 years) and laugh that the building now called the “old gym” was the “new gym” when they were here.

A good number of alumni return to the fold. All of the college support services such as admissions, student affairs, and the business office as well a few academic departments employ former students. Several Piedmont graduates serve on the board of trustees and attend meetings at least twice a year (among them NACCC executive secretary Tom Richard). One alumnus from the 1950s only visited Piedmont once between graduation and his 50th reunion. Yet his connection with the school grew stronger than ever when he donated multiple pieces of his art collection to be displayed in the newest building, the Swanson Center.

It is an emotional privilege to watch and work with college students as they make the transition from late adolescence to adulthood. Predictably, commencement day this year was again bittersweet. My delight at the graduates’ accomplishments settled into the sour aftertaste of farewell. Equally true to form, this sense of loss will soon be assuaged by unexpected news from points near and far, or the extra special treasure that is unearthed when those who once walked our halls as students decide to participate anew in the Piedmont College family.

**The Rev. Dr. Ashley Cook Cleere** is Chaplain and Director of Church Relations at Piedmont College in Demorest, Ga.
The Congregationalist

arriving in September

Getting the NA Out of the Box
What is it in our history, organization and culture that helps and hinders our mission?

News from Annual Meeting 2008
Plymouth, Mass.

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The late Rev. Dr. Harry Butman, known to many as “Mr. Congregationalism,” was one of the founders of the NA and served many leadership functions over his long life. He served churches in New England and California.

Benediction
by Harry Butman

“No one can say for certain whither the Congregational Way wends. But that it is a Way, a process, a journey, and not a static, reactionary resting upon the past, can be said with assurance. Our good tradition gives us pride and power to press onward as did our founders nearly four centuries ago, ever expecting more light to break forth out of God’s holy Word. It is our task to walk and witness in an age which, if less physically dangerous than theirs, is far more complex and tempting. The only safety we can know lies in obedience to the Spirit. Our great text tells us that where two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, he is there in the midst of us.”

From The Lord’s Free People, p. 197, published by the NACCC, updated for inclusive language.
Congregationalism has shaped the faith of our nation. To remain vital, we must:

• Replace more than 160 ministers and lay leaders trained in the Congregational Way, as 40% of our clergy will retire within 10 years.

• Plant new churches, maintain historic sanctuaries and nurture church growth.

Branching Out will:

… create a Center for Congregational Leadership at Olivet College as home for the Dean of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS) to provide theological education to a new generation of clergy and lay leaders.

… endow a Fund for Congregational Growth and Development to resource church growth and development.

Support this historic endeavor. Contact Campaign Administrator Diana David at 1-800-262-1620, x25 or ddavid@naccc.org