

*The*

MARCH 2025 [VOL. 177 | NO. 1]

# CONGREGATIONALIST

*Magazine of the Congregational Way Since 1849*

## The Roots Edition





## **Team**

### **Editor**

Maggie Helmick

### **Design**

AWCO Studio

### **Editorial Advisory Team**

Rev. Dr. Barry W. Szymanski

Carol Taylor

Claudia Kniefel

Sandra Leonard

Rev. Robb Tarr

### **Publisher**

NACCC

8473 S. Howell Ave.

Oak Creek, WI 53154-0288

naccc@naccc.org

### **Inquiries**

#### **Editorial and Advertising**

Maggie Helmick

mhelmick@naccc.org

#### **Subscriptions**

NACCC

414-856-1620

naccc@naccc.org

### **Subscription Policy**

A subscription to *The Congregationalist* is provided free of charge to each individual requestor who is a member of a church in fellowship with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. A subscription to *The Congregationalist* is provided free of charge to each church in fellowship with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches and to each accredited theological seminary on the magazine's mailing list.

Read *The Congregationalist* online for free –

no subscription required – at

<https://www.naccc.org/thecongregationalist/>.

*The Congregationalist* is a donor-funded magazine.

We seek and gratefully accept voluntary donations to help keep this magazine in print.

*The Congregationalist* ISSN 0010-5856 is published quarterly by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches at 8473 S. Howell Ave., Oak Creek, WI 53154-0288. Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI, and additional offices.

Subscribing? Moving? Canceling? Call 414-856-1620 or email us at [naccc@naccc.org](mailto:naccc@naccc.org).

### **Postmaster**

#### **Send address changes to:**

The Congregationalist

8473 S. Howell Ave.

Oak Creek, WI 53154-0288

© 2025

*The National Association of  
Congregational Christian Churches.*

*All rights reserved.*

### **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 (NACCC) or its component parts, content does not necessarily reflect policies and opinions of the NACCC.

Neither *The Congregationalist* nor the NACCC has a creed or holds positions on social or theological issues; but we recognize the authority of each local church to do so for itself, if and as it wishes, and we encourage thoughtful and respectful discussion of our agreements and differences.

Content published in *The Congregationalist* may be freely republished by NACCC affiliates, provided proper attribution of the magazine and the content contributor is given. Individuals or organizations unaffiliated with the NACCC wishing to republish content originating in *The Congregationalist* must request permission to do so from the editor. Once permission is granted, the content may not be edited or manipulated in any way that would infringe any copyright or violate any property right of any third party.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5 A Message from Your Interim Executive Director**  
*by Rev. Dr. Barry W. Szymanski*
- 6 An Ocean of Faith**  
*by Daniel Wiita Livingston*
- 7 Just Put Your Compression Socks On and Do It**  
*by Rev. Dr. Marilyn Danielson*
- 8 The Heart of Congregationalism**  
*by David Schimpf & Rev. Doug Gray*
- 10 Puritan Hymnody Holding Us Close While Setting Us Free**  
*by Rev. Dr. Daniel Rodriguez Schlorff*
- 12 Roots: A Hidden Asset in Strengthening Faith, History, Relationships, and Communities**  
*by Lyssa-Ann Clarke*
- 13 Spiritual Formation**  
*by Dr. Lisa Bircher*
- 14 A Boston Congregational Experience**  
*by Nancy Hayes*
- 16 How Does Your Garden Grow: Cultivating Rooted Community Ministries**  
*by Rev. Robb Tarr*
- 18 Rooted in Wauwatosa**  
*by Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith*
- 20 The Unyielding Roots of Hope: A Story of Resilience**  
*by Rev. Charles Sagay*
- 21 God Sees Us**  
*by Rev. Dr. Michael Glidden*
- 22 Anamesa: Growing a Community of Love in the Space Between**  
*by Rev. Ian Macdonald & Rev. Dawn Carlson*
- 24 The Benefits of Being Rooted in God**  
*by Elizabeth Gasko*
- 26 Come and See: The 2025 NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference**

### IN EVERY ISSUE

From the Editor	4
Calendar	6
Pastoral Search	6
Stay Connected	6
Necrology	19

## FROM THE EDITOR

### *Dear Reader,*

In this special “Roots” edition of *The Congregationalist*, we delve into the deep, enduring connections that ground our faith, communities, and traditions. The theme of “roots” invites us to reflect on what anchors us – whether through our histories, relationships, or shared commitment to God’s love. The stories and reflections in these pages celebrate the diverse ways Congregational churches are rooted in space, time, and purpose, offering a rich collection of experiences that nurture both the individual and the collective spirit.

This edition shares the stories of two churches at very different stages in their journeys. Rev. Julie Sheridan-Smith shares the astounding 183-year history of First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, which played a pivotal role in the formation of the NACCC. In contrast, we hear from Rev. Dawn Carlson and Rev. Ian Macdonald of Anamesa, one of the NACCC’s newest members and most recently planted churches, which has crafted its foundation by intertwining its roots with those of others in the NACCC network.

We also encounter reflections on the ways local practices foster a sense of rootedness. Rev. Robb Tarr shares the lessons he’s learned from his church’s community garden, while

Rev. Dr. Marilyn Danielson reflects on the impact of her church’s community outreach through basketball. These stories remind us that rootedness isn’t just about history – it’s about the present, where our relationships and actions today shape the world we build together.

Beyond the local, we gain valuable insights into the wider Congregational tradition. Nancy Hayes takes us into the heart of the Boston Seminar, where she explores how our shared heritage continues to shape our faith. David Schimpf and Rev. Doug Gray discuss the very nature of Congregationalism, while Rev. Dr. Daniel Rodriguez Schlorff offers a historical reflection on the Puritan conventions from which Congregationalism arose. Daniel Wiita Livingston’s poetry exemplifies how our deeply rooted Congregational heritage can continue to inspire and sustain us.

Throughout this issue, we are also invited to explore the personal dimensions of rootedness in God. The poetry of Rev. Dr. Michael Glidden and Dr. Lisa Bircher, as well as the personal reflections of Elizabeth Gasko and Lyssa-Ann Clark, explore the roots of God’s nature, how we might ground ourselves in our individual

relationships with the divine, and how understanding our familial and cultural roots can deepen our faith and strengthen our connection to the local community.

In challenging times, Rev. Dr. Barry Szymanski encourages us to consider how authentic relationship building can ground us, offering strength and support as we navigate uncertainty. Similarly, Rev. Charles Sagay shares a powerful testimony of how faith rooted in hope can empower perseverance through adversity.

In these diverse voices and experiences, we are reminded that our roots, both ancient and new, are a source of nourishment and strength. I hope that as you read these stories, you are inspired to reflect on the roots that ground you – whether in your faith, your community, or your own journey with God. May you find ways to nurture those roots, cultivating them to support not only your own growth but also the well-being of those around you and those who will follow in your footsteps.

Until Next Time,

*Maggie Helmick*

---

# A Message from Your Interim Executive Director

by REV. DR. BARRY W. SZYMANSKI

---

*Dear Fellow Congregationalists,*

Not just the United States, but our world, is in an era of massive cultural, societal, and global change. This can leave us, individually and collectively, in distress. This turmoil also includes our personal religious and spiritual lives. While our individual church communities do not have the power to tame or control these changes, we can manage our attitudes, hopes, and relationships. We can embrace change to bring the power of God's blessings and loving grace on what confronts us – or we can duck under the covers in an attempt to ignore the winds of change encircling us. In adapting to change, we pray with acceptance in the Lord's prayer that His Kingdom come near. Not ours. It becomes clear that it is our job to labor that God's will be done, and,

in doing so, we share His blessings and loving graces. In John's Gospel [9:4a], Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me ..." and trust in Him, as Jesus so often comforts us when he says, "Do not be afraid."

How do we deal with change? Church membership is slipping. Some churches are closing. How did Jesus' ministry grow? For one, he built the foundation of his new Kingdom on this earth through forming relationships. At first, he did so with twelve apostles, then 72 more, then with ever-growing crowds. While most church models are centered around worship, many church consultants think that an alternative model of a growing church is based on relationships: loving, grace-filled covenants to be exact. Churches in this model strive to provide all types of services to promote and build relationships: through daycare, food and meal programs, card game nights, movie nights, fireside chats, educational opportunities, clothing drives, rummages, car shows, trivia nights, concert venues, shared use by other religious groups, local organization meeting sites, recreation centers, food pantries, social and service outreach, and so much more.

Perhaps this is what the earliest small village synagogues, temples, mosques, and churches were all about: forming relationships.

People in close relationships live in love, grace, and a spirit of gratitude for their blessings. All while staying free of judging others.

Perhaps we need to bless each other more to live grace-fully with each other. When a person near us sneezes loudly, most of us turn to them and, in grace for them, say, "Bless you." Might it be time to confidently say [or perhaps even just think] the words of blessing to our spouses, our children, all our fellow congregants – in fact, to everyone we encounter?

I recently received a letter in which the writer, a Congregational minister, expressed this: "It is at a time like this that I appreciate the fact that our National Association is small enough for everyone to learn the names of everyone else and that we can get to know one another." We need each other. Jesus was surrounded by apostles, disciples, friends like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and many, many others. In this time of a change of era, relationships and associations are so very important. Loneliness is considered an epidemic. We at the NACCC want to work together with you as you covenant with your members to bring God's Kingdom near – one relationship at a time if necessary.

*With and in  
Jesus the Christ,  
Barry*





---

# An Ocean of Faith

by Daniel Wiita Livingston

From the harsh toil of winter's wrath,  
Lay half of the landing party,  
With lovers bereft,  
Their breath mingling with the icy wind,  
Faces etched with what hope is left.

With Native generosity,  
Corn planted seeds of curiosity,  
In the frost-kissed soil of a new world.

Today, I look into this puddle,  
Reflecting on our shared legacy,  
The pilgrim stares back up at me,  
Eyes blue, mirroring the vast Atlantic sea,  
A silent testament to you and me.

As churches close their doors,  
Like these evaporating puddles that shrivel,  
Our light lives within us,  
Guiding those who need the love of Jesus.

Once again, our church doors will open  
With the work we do for tomorrow.  
As they did all those centuries ago,  
Where pilgrims' beauty  
is sacrificed through Scripture's glow,  
For a hurting world to see God's mercy  
Eternally bestowed.

---

## CALENDAR



**April 1, 2025**

### JUNE ISSUE SUBMISSION DEADLINE

The deadline for submissions to June's reverence-themed edition of *The Congregationalist*. Submissions can be emailed to Editor Maggie Helmick at [mhelmick@nacc.org](mailto:mhelmick@nacc.org).

**April 27 – May 1, 2025**

### MINISTERS' CONVOCATION, Racine, WI

An annual NACCC event, Ministers' Convocation is a gathering for clergy designed to provide continuing education, spiritual reflection, and rest.

**June 21 – 26, 2025**

### NAPF & HOPE YOUTH CONFERENCE, St. Louis, MO

An opportunity for young people entering 9th grade through age 26 to hear from inspiring guest speakers, enjoy powerful worship, and build new friendships.

**June 21 – 24, 2025**

### ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE, St. Louis, MO

The 71st Annual Meeting and Conference of the NACCC will be a time for learning, worship, inspiration, and fellowship. Join us in person or online via Zoom.

---

## PASTORAL SEARCH



### Is your church seeking clergy, or are you a minister seeking a pastoral position?

Check out our secure online Pastoral Search platform, created to connect churches that have pastoral vacancies with clergy who wish to be considered for open positions!

---

## STAY CONNECTED



### Enjoying *The Congregationalist* and eager for more Congregational content?

Sign up for our bimonthly e-newsletter to receive brief articles and fresh information from NACCC staff and leadership straight to your inbox on the 1st and 15th of each month.



**DANIEL WIITA LIVINGSTON's** journey into Congregationalism began in 2001, marking a significant step in his spiritual and professional life. His dedication to the Mount Hope Congregational Church in Livonia, Michigan, reflects his unwavering commitment to faith and community. In 2020, he earned a degree in Fire Science from Schoolcraft College and continues to expand his knowledge through the Lay Ministry Training Program with the NACCC.

# Just Put Your Compression Socks On and Do It

by REV. DR. MARILYN DANIELSON

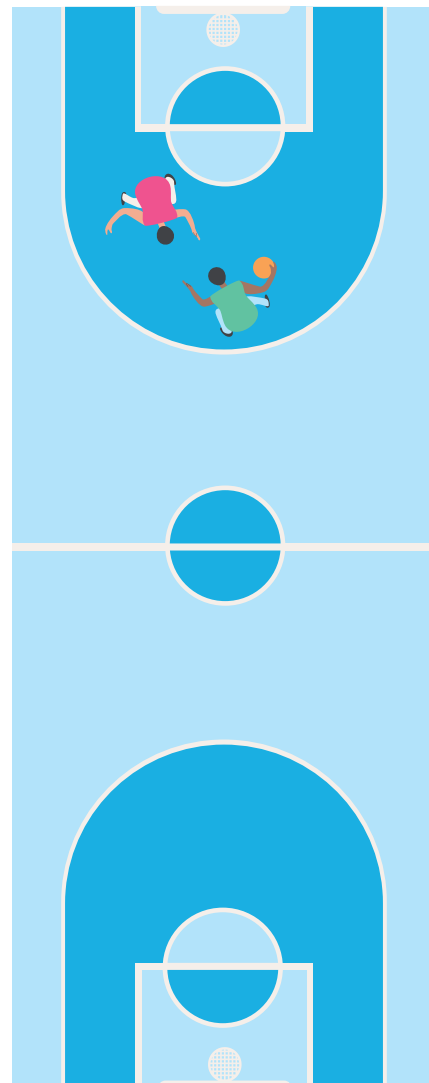
**L**ike so many other Congregational churches, the church I belong to is an older congregation, but don't let that fool you! Underneath the white hair and a few wisdom lines beats the heart of a lion.

I have always wanted to start a children's choral group, which is not so easy when there are no children in the church. Yet, through the generous gift of a gracious donor, our church was given enough to pay a music teacher to teach children how to sing. I'm not sure how many of our church folks thought it would happen – it sounds ridiculous to have a children's choir without children – but never, no, never underestimate the power of God. This childless, aging church now has over 60 children from kindergarten through 8th grade singing with our church's name on their backs – thanks, in part, to a little community outreach through basketball.

We are known as the “basketball church” in our small town for welcoming people of all ages to come and shoot baskets in our new professional basketball hoops. This simple act, seemingly secular in nature, has opened doors to community engagement in ways we never anticipated. The sound of basketballs bouncing on the court

has become a familiar backdrop to the rhythm of our church life, drawing people in who might not otherwise have felt connected. Parents chat on the sidelines, kids laugh and compete, and before long, the court becomes a place of conversation, connection, and sometimes a quiet invitation to join us for a service or an event. In a way, the basketball court has rooted our church in the wider community – a tangible reminder that we can meet people where they are, offering a space for fellowship, fun, and faith.

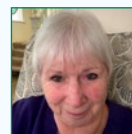
It takes my breath away to see children and their parents fill our pews for rehearsals. They may never officially become part of the church. They may never light the candles or join a youth group. However, the touch has been made. Sometimes, children playing basketball call me grandma when they see me walking across the driveway. At first, I was taken aback by that, but I got to thinking, what a great compliment! This child sees me as someone familiar and comfortable, so I'll take it as a kindness. Our once almost forgotten church is now on the map, and the kids have lots of “grandmas and grandpas” sitting



alongside the pavement around the hoops in the summer and in the seats of the high school auditorium, watching children sing, sacred and secular, during the holidays, because God still calls us to “Let the little children come to Me.”

I guess God doesn't have age restrictions, and neither should we!

**REV. DR. MARILYN DANIELSON** was born in Detroit as the youngest of six siblings. She has three children and eight grandchildren. She holds an associate degree in dental assisting, a Master of Divinity degree, and a doctorate in spiritual formation. Marilyn served as the pastor of First Congregational Church of Portland, Michigan, for 20 years and currently pastors First Congregational Church of Lake Odessa, Michigan.



# The Heart of Congregationalism

An Interview of Rev. Doug Gray

by DAVID SCHIMPF

**DAVID SCHIMPF** Have you noticed how many people can't even say "Congregationalism?"

**DOUG GRAY** It's really funny, isn't it? My favorite mangling of Congregational is when people call it "congressional." I'm like, "No, not that! Then we wouldn't get anything done!"

**DAVID** Then what is Congregationalism?

**DOUG** Congregationalism starts with recognizing that God cares – about each of us – enough that God would send Jesus to experience what it's like to be human – with all that's great and hard about being human – and that God accepts and loves us as we are. That's grace!

**DAVID** Sure, but isn't that true for all Christians?

**DOUG** Of course! But for Congregationalists, we lean into God's caring and guidance as a way to do church together. One of my ministry buddies used to say, "Jesus leads the church in real time." And that's right! But if we put those two pieces together, it means that when Jesus said, "Whenever two or three gather in my name, there am I in the middle," He was saying something radical about how each of our individual relationships and connections with Jesus can contribute to and enrich our lives together. The genius of

Congregationalism is that we honor each person's individual relationship with God, and believe that when we are together, the Holy Spirit will show us the way forward if we will listen.

**DAVID** But how does that work out in real life?

**DOUG** In classic Congregationalism, four things have always been true:

*1. Jesus is the Head of the Church.*

It's not a pope or a king or a bishop or a conference. In the New Testament, each individual church is answerable to Jesus directly.

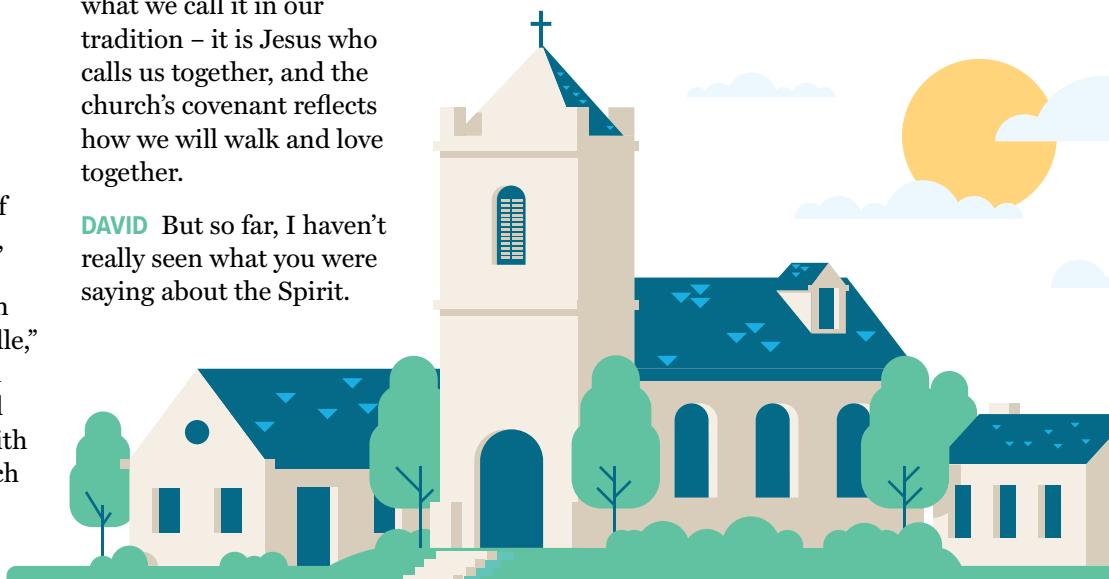
*2. Relationships are made by covenant.* Covenants are mutual promises that set up relationships. Marriage is a covenant, for example. Each of our relationships with God is a covenant. When a church is "gathered" – that's what we call it in our tradition – it is Jesus who calls us together, and the church's covenant reflects how we will walk and love together.

**DAVID** But so far, I haven't really seen what you were saying about the Spirit.

**DOUG** But that's just it. Without the Holy Spirit being at work between us, we would never be able to agree on anything, right? Look at how different we and our views all are. And yet when we really listen to the Spirit within us and the Spirit speaking through the others around us, we do get on the same page. It's not normal, but in Congregationally organized churches and groups, it happens all the time. That's why—

*3. The local church is autonomously organized and run by the congregation.* It's not run by a council or board of directors – the congregation makes all the major decisions, especially on the direction of the church.

*4. The local church is in relationship with other churches.* A church was never meant to be in isolation. We need other churches





for encouragement, advice, and support, and to share resources, especially for things like missions and education.

**DAVID** How does being Congregational change how we actually are together? What does it look like in real life?

**DOUG** One of the biggest ways we could or should see it change us is in making space for each other's differences. A phrase you will often hear in Congregational churches is that we each have "an undisturbed right to our conscience." Even though we may believe differently, still the same God loves us both. In most Congregational churches, you will often find some people who think Jesus was a nice and good teacher and others who think Jesus is the Son of God. You will often have people with very different politics too. The church doesn't tell us what to believe, it helps those of us who seek Jesus to worship and work together because we are all trying to know God better and live more like Jesus would want us to.

**DAVID** Oh! So that's why the covenant is what makes us church, not a list of fundamentals!

**DOUG** Exactly! When we look at how Jesus related to people, he didn't ask people, "Do you believe x, y, and z? Great – come follow me!" Over and over again, we see Jesus just say "Follow me!" and everything

seems to work itself out. Jesus doesn't fence people out according to what they believe. No, Jesus just opens His arms and invites people to walk with Him.

**DAVID** So what makes Congregationalists different than others?

**DOUG** When we get it right, a Congregational church can be tremendously nimble or agile in response to the direction of the Spirit. If the people have an idea, it can happen very quickly. You don't have to check it out with a higher body. I love that so much about us! When we get it right, a Congregational church isn't about power or politics – it's about listening to each other and to how God is speaking through each of us. This means the more people we can get in the room, praying and listening together, the better our decisions and actions are going to be.

**DAVID** If you were going to pick out a few things or people that make Congregationalism special, what would make your list?

**DOUG** I think you have to mention the pilgrims, right? That bunch of Separatists who left England and its church to start a new life in the New World at Plymouth in 1620.

Education – of men and women – is key, too. Congregationalists

founded Harvard, Yale, and a bunch of other colleges. Wherever Congregationalists went, they founded more colleges – Wooster, Oberlin, Beloit, Carleton, Grinnell, and Pomona, to name a few. The idea of Sunday School gets its start with Horace Bushnell in the 1840s!

Women and minorities have mattered to Congregational churches, too. Antoinette Brown Blackwell – the first woman minister in America – was ordained by a Congregational church in 1853. The Underground Railroad and abolitionist movements had major Congregational involvement, as did the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century.

**DAVID** Do you have a "final word" for us about Congregationalism?

**DOUG** Just this, David: I really think the genius of Congregationalism offers our communities and our nation a way forward through these divisive times. It strikes the perfect balance between individualism and community, understanding that the incredible diversity of people and their connections to God are the strength of our system, and at the same time, drawing on people's desire to create a better world as God has envisioned it. Of course, the tricky part is all of us have to be willing to listen to God and each other so that we can do it together!

**DAVID SCHIMPF** is the son of the Rev. Karl and Dottie Schimpf. Karl was the pastor of First Congregational Church of Salt Lake City from 1974–1983. David played on the legendary boys basketball team coached by the indomitable Diane Forster-Burke.

**REV. DOUG GRAY** served NSCC as the associate pastor for education, families, and growth from 1996–2002. He has served the National Association as speaker and co-director of HOPE, a member of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, and the founding chair of the new Lay Ministry Training Program. He wrote/edited *Building Confirmation in the Congregational Way* while he served NSCC, and co-authored "What It Means to Be a Member of a Congregational Church."

*This interview first appeared in the November 2024 issue of North Shore Congregational Church's North Shore News, as part of its 75th Anniversary Celebration.*

---

# Puritan Hymnody Holding Us Close While Setting Us Free

by REV. DR. DANIEL RODRIGUEZ SCHLORFF

---

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a seventeenth-century meetinghouse, its wooden benches stiff and creaky. The air smells faintly of pine planks and damp wool. There, in the New England chill, a small congregation gathers – not to be dazzled by a polished choir or a pipe organ, but to lift their voices in unison, weaving together simple and heartfelt melodies. This scene, repeated countless times, gives us a glimpse into how hymnody became the beating heart of Puritan worship and the culture that surrounded it.

Hymn singing wasn't just a part of church for the Puritans; it was a statement of who they were at their core. The Puritans, emerging in part from the English Reformation, had a bold vision for rethinking worship. They wanted simplicity, stripping away what they considered spiritual clutter – no ornate cathedrals, no stained-glass windows, no golden communion vessels, no showy rituals. Worship, in their eyes, should be rooted firmly in scripture, untainted by human invention. And when it came to music? The same rules applied. Hymns weren't performance pieces; they were tools for devotion.

## A Return to the Psalms

The Puritans were cautious about straying from the Bible – especially in worship. For them, scripture was sacred ground. That's why much of their hymnody borrowed directly from the Psalms, often in metrical form so they could be easily sung. The *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640, the first book printed in the American colonies, is a case in point. Its content wasn't the poetic, emotionally charged hymn lyrics many of us might picture. Instead, the authors valued faithfulness to scripture over lyrical elegance, creating songs that were straightforward, even plain at times.

Take, for example, these lines from a metrical version of a very familiar passage, Psalm 23, in the *Bay Psalm Book*:

*The Lord to me a shepherd is,  
Want therefore shall not I,  
He in the folds of tender grass  
Doth cause me down to lie.*

The language is humble – almost rugged – but it's infused with deep biblical devotion. Singing these hymns wasn't about being carried away by soaring melodies; it was about personal and communal immersion in God's word, a way to unite hearts and minds around shared beliefs.

## Singing as Community

Now, here's where it gets interesting. The Puritans' approach to hymnody wasn't just about personal piety; it shaped the entire community. Hymn singing was a shared experience, with the congregation lifting their voices together. There wasn't a trained choir there to impress or show anyone up – it was the people, and only the people.

This collective act created unity, binding the community in worship. They didn't just hear the words of scripture; they sang them, breathed them, made them their own. The music reinforced Puritan ideals of equality and humility before God. No one had a starring role. Your voice – whether it cracked or soared – was as valid as anyone else's.

Even the singing had its quirks. Without printed music readily available, Puritans often used a practice called "lining out." A leader would sing a line of the psalm, and the congregation would repeat it back. Imagine the scene – voices overlapping as the slower ones tried to catch up, while the faster singers surged ahead. It probably sounded messy to modern ears, but it wasn't about perfection. It was about participation, about sharing the moment of worship together.

## The Theology Behind the Tunes

Puritan hymns weren't just about community – they were brimming with theology. Every verse reaffirmed the Puritans' belief in God's sovereignty, human frailty, and the promise of salvation. Worship through song wasn't a break from faith; it was an extension of it.

One of the standout figures in early Puritan hymnody was Reverend John Cotton, who had firm opinions about church music. He advocated for psalm singing because the words came straight from scripture, which he believed kept worship "pure." Cotton's influence helped standardize how hymns were used

in Puritan churches. Singing wasn't just an embellishment; it was a way for individuals to internalize scripture, reinforcing their spiritual discipline.

This careful selection of hymns mirrored the Puritan commitment to simplicity in all things. For example, songs strictly avoided emotional manipulation or excessive ornamentation. Sure, it might not have been flashy, but for them, it wasn't meant to be. Worship wasn't about how it felt – it was about what it did. Hymns weren't an escape but a guide, helping believers focus on eternal truths.



**REV. DR. DANIEL RODRIGUEZ SCHLORFF** serves Third Congregational Church of Middletown, CT, as Senior Minister and hosts Wednesday Evening Classics on public radio. He also sings professionally with Voce and CONCORA and plays the double bass for the American Chamber Orchestra.

## Hymnody's Lasting Impact

It's safe to say these practices left a lasting cultural imprint. Even as Puritanism evolved into our Congregational Way, the emphasis on communal singing and scripture-rooted hymns remained. The values of simplicity, scripture, and shared experience persisted in many later Protestant traditions, evident in how worship music developed over time.

Looking back, the Puritans' hymnody reminds us of something profound. They didn't need grand productions or professional performers to connect with God. For them, worship was work – not drudgery, but a deeply meaningful labor of love. Through their hymns, they built not just a way to worship, but a culture that reflected their humility, devotion, and resolute focus on God's word.

And when you think about it, isn't there something beautiful about a community willing to sing together, no matter how imperfect the harmony might be?

I leave you with this beautiful hymn text written by Carolyn McDade for the hymn "Spirit of Life":

*Spirit of Life, come unto me.*

*Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.*

*Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;*

*move in the band,  
giving life the shape of justice.*

*Roots hold me close; wings set me free;*

*Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.*

As we consider the legacy of Puritan hymnody while staying attentive to new movements of God, may our hearts be stirred in congregational song toward a compelling future of Congregational worship.



# Roots: A Hidden Asset in Strengthening Faith, History Relationships, and Community

by LYSSA-ANN CLARKE

*“Blood is thicker than water.”*

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Imagine standing on the highest point of a 770-acre coffee and ground provision estate in the lush, green hills of Jamaica. You are at a strategic advantage as you can see all around the estate: the beautiful plain, the great house, and the surrounding hills and mountains that cradle the springs and rivers that give life to so much in the surrounding environment. On terraced land, you can see rich flora and fauna, the indigo plant, and other ground provisions planted nearby. You see the red cherries of the mountain coffee being picked, dried, and roasted as you smell the scent of the local food being cooked, awakening the hunger within.

Visitors to the estate can experience elements of the 19th-century plantation; learn the history of local African heroes, stories, and songs; and immerse themselves in the local culture, food, and environment. They can explore the roots of the early post-emancipation missionary and abolitionist families who once resided in Jamaica – traversing the terrain traveled by

those like Mary Cowles-Heald, Sarah Ingraham, Charles Stewart Renshaw, Julius Beardslee, and Samuel Ringgold Ward. They can experience the same tropical breeze once felt by these important figures and enjoy the natural paradise as they walk through historic sites that echo with stories of courage, resilience, and transformation.

If you are like me, the journey to understand your roots is not just about tracing your family tree – it’s about connecting with a profound and multifaceted heritage that spans continents and centuries. It is

about understanding one’s earthly identity, learning to appreciate the positive aspects of traditional culture, and using that knowledge to disconnect from the more negative elements of the practices of one’s ancestors. Genealogy is important even to God, as we see in how the Bible operates as a history book, connecting families, and in how Matthew Chapter 1 explains Jesus’s roots.

## Cultural and Ancestral Roots

In conducting research for the book *Descendants 1834-2024*, I unearthed many hidden treasures. I realized that I was related to people who I thought were just neighbors and friends and that my maternal lineage was connected to the European plantocracy in Swain Spring Estate, Jamaica, and the Koromantee people of Ghana. Through my parents’ marriage, the Maroons and the Yoruba tribe joined that lineage, as did the Ashanti people, from whom the Jamaican warrior leader Nanny of the Maroons was a descendant.



My eyes popped at these discoveries. While I knew my identity through Jesus Christ, my familial identity and personal history became more important to me as God began to use my spiritual gifts to reveal hidden knowledge about my heritage that even my grandmother did not know. He even gave me a vision of our people being captured in Africa, taken to the coast, and sold as slaves before they were taken across the middle passage to a plantation in Jamaica. My Yoruba ancestors escaped to the mountains, where they became Maroons. Some lived in the mountainous region of eastern Jamaica. Imagine uncovering that your great-great-grandmother was a Yoruba princess or that your lineage includes the brave warriors who fought against colonial oppression. What would you do? For me, these discoveries are more than just facts; they are stories that shape my understanding of who I am.

### **The Role of Roots in Heritage Tourism**

My experience of uncovering my roots exposed me to heritage tourism. The knowledge I gained from my ninety-seven-year-old maternal grandmother connected me to a group in the United Kingdom who were trying to make a Jamaican connection. Through them, I found an extensive database housing charts and important records such as birth, marriage, and death certificates, which aided me in creating a family tree from my children upwards, ending with the owner of the coffee estate in Swain Spring, St. Andrew, Jamaica.

I experienced the benefits of historical, or “roots,” tourism, which involves traveling to historical and cultural sites to experience the heritage of a place and people first-hand, to connect with the past and understand the present through immersive experiences. I realized that roots tourism significantly boosts local economies through job creation, supporting small businesses, and preserving cultural sites. Researching my heritage allowed me to foster a deeper appreciation for overlooked historic local churches and schools and diverse rural landscapes and communities. I saw the need for visitors to not just enjoy Jamaica’s sun, sea, and sand but also the beautiful rainforest and mountainous regions in the east such as Padmore, Red Hills, the Blue Mountains, the Moore Town Maroons, and other popular heritage sites.

Exploring our roots allows us to appreciate the sacrifices and achievements of those who came before us. Delve into your own heritage and create a memoir for your family and tourists as I did. Visit historical sites, and don’t be afraid to engage in genealogical research. By doing so, you not only honor your ancestors but also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. It is our duty to preserve and pass on this heritage, ensuring that the stories of resilience, courage, and hope continue to inspire generations to come.



## Spiritual Formation

by Dr. Lisa Bircher

There’s a light up ahead,  
I can see it from my bed.  
And when I arise, I am  
Caught by surprise when I  
See that twinkle in your eyes.

When you speak, I beseech:  
Help me, Lord, I am effete.  
How does it come to light?  
When I recognize  
and delight...

There’s a light up ahead,  
I can see it in my dread.  
Now I arise, and I am  
Not caught by surprise  
when I see  
That hope in your eyes.

While you listen, I speak  
And I feel the depths of love,  
as I am weak.  
How does it move my soul  
When I recognize  
your control...

Because there is a light  
up ahead!



**LYSSA-ANN CLARKE, B.ED., MBA** is an entrepreneurial specialist, serial author, trained teacher, historian, minister at the Holistic Healing Ministries Jamaica, course creator, and publisher at Creative Bizcoach Jamaica.

**DR. LISA BIRCHER** is a member of Grace Church of Columbiana, Ohio. She served as the interim lay leader of Grace Church from October 2023 to February 2024. She is also a recently retired public school teacher with a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from Kent State University. Lisa is currently enrolled in the Lay Ministry Training Program and is excited for a dynamic future in the ministry.



---

# A Boston Congregational Experience

by **NANCY HAYES**

---

Several years ago, the NACCC Lay Ministry Training Program (LMTP) was successfully re-vamped. I was participating in the “old” program when Rev. Dr. Charles Packer contacted me to ask if I wanted to switch to the “new” program and explained its highlights. When he said that if I joined the new LMTP, I would likely have a chance to go to the Boston Seminar, I was hooked! Ever since I first heard of the seminar many years ago, I wanted to attend. My chance came upon my completion of the three-year LMTP. In early August 2024, I headed to Boston.

The Boston Seminar is an opportunity for ministers and students to spend several days immersed in our Congregational history. Sometimes participants can stay at the Mariners House. The seminar itself meets in the Congregational Library. The experience of being in both these buildings was amazing and brought me a profound feeling of meeting my Congregational roots.

The Mariners House was founded in 1847 as part of the Boston Port and Seamen’s Aid Society. It is located on the Freedom Trail. It provides accommodations for people with ties to the Mariner community. The NACCC is fortunate to have been allowed to utilize these facilities.

Being inside this historic building in the heart of the North End of Boston was amazing. The smells from the many Italian restaurants were overwhelming as we walked the busy streets in the hot, humid days of summer.

In another part of historic Boston is the Congregational Library building, also known as the Congregational House. The library was established in 1853. It began as a place for local ministers to meet and discuss theological and community issues. It was founded with 56 books and now includes over 225,000 items documenting our history. There are over 150 sets of original church records dating back to the 17th century. It is nearly impossible not to feel the Congregational history in this building.

The library houses a diverse array of 19th and 20th-century denominational materials, including those from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, as well as rare materials from the Christian Connection, a small independent American denomination that united with Congregationalists in 1931.

Although many items have been converted into digital format, the original stacks of the library with the paper documents surround

you as you enter the storage area. The impressive history is nearly overwhelming. I felt it deep in my soul as I stood among these items. It was hard to take it all in. I wish I had recorded everything that our guide said about the documents. This library, as the designated archive for Congregational churches, belongs to each one of us as Congregationalists.

Our group was privileged to sit around the same table that ministers and others have gathered around for so many years. We learned about Congregationalism and its history from speakers, library archivists, and fellow Congregationalists from various parts of the U.S. and even the U.K.

Throughout the building, there are fascinating historical items, such as the Kansas City Statement of Faith, the Platform of Church Discipline, and The Confession of Faith and Church Covenant. Behind the building is Boston’s famous Granary Burial Ground, which includes the gravesite of Paul Revere. The library staff can just about recite the tour guides’ speech as they hear it so often in the warmer months when the windows are open!





Although being physically present in this building is awesome, there are also great online options where you can experience the content and various programs offered at the library on their website, [congregationallibrary.org](http://congregationallibrary.org).

We were fortunate to go on a walking tour of Boston. We went into King's Chapel, where we heard the amazing organ being played and saw the red velvet pews. We also toured the Old South Meeting House. Both King's Chapel and Old South Meeting House have some pews that are in sections with small doors. Guess it was easier to keep the youngsters from getting away!

We ventured outside of the Boston area when we went to Plymouth Plantation where the re-creation of life for the pilgrims is portrayed. We saw many wonderful things at Plymouth Plantation. Their brochure explains why it is spelled Plimouth. Much of the known history of the Plymouth Colony is from Governor William

Bradford, who wrote *Of Plimouth Plantation*. Spellings were not standardized in the 17th century and Governor Bradford used Plimouth for what we now spell as Plymouth.

We walked through the village with houses and other buildings that included artifacts from the time of the pilgrims. The farm animals on the plantation are descendants of the original animals that arrived with the original settlers. Being in this village allowed us to immerse ourselves in our Congregational roots.

No discussion of Plimouth Plantation would be complete without mention of the fabulous statue of a cow with the Mayflower ship on it, which is of course known as the Mooflower!

We traveled to Plymouth Rock and the Mayflower II. People often remark that the rock is smaller than they expected and that it isn't where the pilgrims landed. Historians

can debate as much as they like, but I loved the sign that is near the rock. It has a quote from Rose T. Briggs that says "It is the fact that they landed – and remained – that matters, not where they landed. Yet it is no bad thing for a nation to be founded on a rock." Amen to that!

The Mayflower II is a replica of the ship, and is very true to the original, except that they raised the ceilings below deck to allow people to easily walk through (and of course added modern safety features). Talk about roots! What a feeling it was to be inside this ship.

If you ever get a chance to visit the library or any of these historic sites in person, I highly recommend that you go. But even if you never walk these paths in person, you can be aware of this history, and that it exists because of our ancestors, who walked the difficult roads and paved the way for our faith community to be here today. We are the ancestors of the future; let us act accordingly!



**NANCY HAYES** is a member of the First Congregational Church of Royal Oak, Michigan. In June 2024, she graduated from the NACCC Lay Ministry Training Program. In addition to her love of God, family, friends, and church, she is passionate about preaching and hopes to continue to utilize her lay ministry training by providing pulpit supply and leading small groups.

---

# How Does Your Garden Grow

## *Cultivating Rooted Community Ministries*

by **REV. ROBB TARR**

---

**I**n ministry, it can be easy to slip into frequently using metaphors that are popular from scripture. We might be prone to referring to anyone giving a little pushback as a “prodigal,” or someone we could be prone to overlooking as a “Samaritan” because of Jesus’ parables. Agrarian metaphors are also spread throughout the Bible, and they can overtake our vocabulary sometimes, too – whether it’s the receptiveness of soil or the types of fruit our lives produce.

Since we started a community garden on our church grounds in the summer of 2020, it’s amazing how much we can catch ourselves overdoing our agricultural language from the double sources of Biblical language and ministry activity. But it’s also true that a good metaphor is helpful for making a complex idea feel more accessible.

We’ve found that some of the particulars of our gardening activity are useful references for better “rooting” ourselves in the deeper purpose of this ministry: connection, partnership, and transformation with our community. If you and your church share those same goals in living your faith and participating in God’s Kingdom, maybe those same metaphors can be meaningful for your own efforts to “plant a seed,” even if a completely different ministry is what fits your calling and context. (Sorry if the metaphor gets a little “overripe.”)

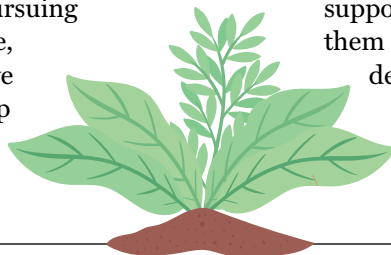


### **Getting the Lay of the Land**

Just like you wouldn’t try to plant a tropical fruit in a wintry climate or start planting anything without charting out the terrain of your plot, understanding context is vital for rooted community ministry. For us, that means discussing plans for any ministry with people and groups we have some relationship with to find out what is needed most and where there is the most opportunity for us to act and connect more deeply with others. That’s how it emerged that our having open land and some folks with garden experience matched with our local food pantry rarely getting fresh produce. Sometimes, we get excited about a good abstract idea but realize it’s taking us away from connection, so patiently pursuing a responsive, collaborative idea ends up working better.

### **Tilling the Soil**

In doing a fine-tuned preparation of the growing environment, sometimes we work on removing rocks or old roots, but sometimes we find we need to test and add nutrients to the soil so it’s most conducive to growing healthy plants. In rooted community ministry, because including others who often feel they don’t have a place and building formative relationships between people is as important as accomplishing tasks, taking the time to cultivate the environment is vital, too. Constructing roles with room for people of diverse gifts and interests, modeling learning over perfection, and prioritizing consensus all help. A church that’s able to embrace a desire to act as healthy soil to support the seeds those around them carry rather than having a desire to make everyone else accommodate its precious, private seeds can have a remarkable impact.





**REV. ROBB TARR** has served as the pastor of Gahanna Community Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio, since 2019. He is a graduate of Florida State University and Fuller Theological Seminary, where he studied the intersections of faith, theology, media, and culture. He and his wife Wendy have two children, Aislynn and Coen.



### Companion Planting

One of my favorite things to learn as an inexperienced gardener is how planting different types of crops together can be mutually beneficial. Some plants deter pests that would be destructive to another or attract pollinators that are helpful. Plants can also be matched if one puts nutrients back into the soil that another takes out a lot of. Not only is this a fascinating example of nature at work, but it is also a powerful metaphor for how thriving ministry is more likely to occur when it is done “with” the people our lives touch rather than just “for” others. Intentionally engaging in ministry that is meant to be partnered rather than proprietary has brought amazing people into our lives who we wouldn’t have encountered otherwise.

### Weeding and Trimming

It may not be everyone’s favorite gardening task, but most people understand why weeding is vital for maintaining the health of crops. The importance of trimming plants themselves may sometimes be missed, but it is also essential because a plant directing its growing energy to what is healthiest rather than spreading itself too thin can make a big difference. We’ve learned about making sure to grow the crops that our neighbors we donate to use most – not just our favorites or the most novel plants. Any “rooted” community ministry needs to view discerning and adjusting to its context as an ongoing, developing discipline. Including a range of people also requires helping people shape the ideas they bring to be complementary without anyone feeling rejected. Well-directed, well-cared-for energy maximizes and magnifies in amazing ways.

### Seasons Turn

Again, when your goals are deeper than just immediate specific task completion – goals like having harvests year over year and not just picking one crop, or cultivating formative, ongoing relationships and not just doing a particular activity – having deep values and long-term plans is necessary. In our garden, we’ve learned about crop rotation from year to year, managing soil amendments, and timing out seedlings and plants we grow inside and outside. For any rooted community ministry, having rhythms of learning, implementation, celebration, and rest, as well as challenging activity, relational care, and personal reflection, proves to support partnerships, community impact, and personal thriving in a similar way.

We have felt called that just as Jesus lived and ministered fully amongst us, we who follow Jesus are inherently called to live and minister with those around us. Just as this incarnational planting is a foundational part of God’s character, we’ve found that rooted community ministry is, in fact, an essential character of our salvation and faith. This has been our best effort as branches to stay connected to God’s vine. We hope you find your connection, too.

If you’d like to explore this topic further, you can find the full video of a presentation we put together on these themes on both the Gahanna Community Congregational Church and Daily Bread Produce Garden Facebook pages. We hope your roots grow deep and support plenty of fruit.





---

# Rooted in Wauwatosa

by REV. JULIE SHERIDAN-SMITH

---

**W**e all have stories to tell. We all have histories as individuals and as members of the communities we belong to. First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa has a rich story, deeply rooted in both its location and its connection to the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the incredible work of Bill Edens, First Church's historian, who could write a book on our church's history. The material I'm sharing today comes from the compilation of documents Bill provided, from which I'll offer a brief overview, and from here on, I'll refer to our church simply as "First Church."

First Church was founded in 1842 when Wisconsin was still a territory. Statehood would come six years later. The land that would become Wauwatosa was forestland until 1835, when Charles Hart built the first log cabin here. The settlement that grew around it was initially called Hart's Mill but became Wauwatosa in 1841 as it continued to expand.

As the area grew, the American Home Mission Society saw a need for a church in the community. In response, they sent two

Congregational ministers: Rev. John Miter of Plymouth Church in Milwaukee and Rev. Hiram Marsh. Together, they founded or "planted" a new congregation. The first services were held in a home near the town's first log school with eleven members, and as the congregation grew, they moved their meetings to the local schoolhouse.

In 1853, under the leadership of Rev. Luther Clapp, the congregation purchased a plot of land for \$50 from Charles Hart in a blueberry patch. Construction began on the church's first sanctuary, which still stands on the current site of First Church.

During Rev. Clapp's pastorate, the church saw significant growth in its membership and outreach. The first youth group was formed, and the Maternal Association (the first women's group) began meeting alongside the Baptist and Methodist congregations in the area. These early efforts laid the groundwork for other active groups that would emerge in the church over time.

One of the defining issues of this period was the Abolitionist Movement, which was strongly supported by Congregationalists. Members of First Church established a local stop on the Underground Railroad, joining with others in Beloit, Milton, Milwaukee, Pewaukee, and Waukesha. During the Civil War, 27 members of the church served in the Union Army, and women in the congregation devoted their time to assisting the war effort.

In the years after the Civil War, both the church and the surrounding area experienced significant change. By the 1870s, Wisconsin was no longer the frontier, and Wauwatosa ceased to be a farming community as it transitioned into a growing suburb of Milwaukee. This growth led to an increase in church membership and a need for additional buildings. As the church flourished, it became a key supporter of institutions like Beloit College, Ripon College, and the Chicago Theological Seminary. Programs such as a Bible school, junior choir, youth Pilgrim Fellowship, and various community outreach initiatives became vital parts of First Church's mission and identity and remain so today.

While there are many more milestones and stories to be told, I want to fast-forward to a pivotal moment in our history – the formation of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. After World War II, the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches began discussions about merging with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This merger, however, sparked a division among those who feared it would erode Congregationalism's self-governing tradition and replace it with a more centralized, presbyterian structure.

At First Church, Dr. Lee and Rev. Neil Swanson, along with a majority of members, rejected the proposed 1948 "Basis of Union" at the church's annual meeting and joined with others in the League to

**REV. JULIE SHERIDAN-SMITH** attended Dubuque Theological Seminary and was ordained in 2013 at North Shore Congregational Church, where she worked in expanding roles during her education at Dubuque. In 2022, following some prodding from the Holy Spirit, she was called to ministry at First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, where she serves today.



Uphold Congregational Principles (LUCP) and the Committee for the Continuation of Congregational Christian Churches (CCCCC).

Although merger talks continued, leading to the formation of the United Church of Christ, a group of like-minded congregations – including First Church – met in Detroit in 1955 to propose the creation of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC). In October 1956, First Church hosted the meeting that finalized the NACCC's basic structure, with Rev. Neil Swanson elected as the Association's first Moderator in 1957.

We are all part of a larger story, one that connects us to the history and ongoing mission of the NACCC. The tenets of fellowship in our relationship with God and each other continue to shape and mold our church community. It is up to each of us to remain open to the spirit of God, to listen, and to speak of how God is present in our lives and where God is moving us as we create history together.



## Necrology



**Rev. Paul Clark** of Sun City, Arizona, passed away on August 26, 2024. Born in Wichita, Kansas, to Walter and Mabel Clark, Paul graduated from The College of Wooster in 1954 and earned his Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Seminary in 1957. He served Congregational churches (NACCC) in Galesburg, Illinois; Fresno, California; Los Angeles, California; and Sun City, Arizona. Paul is survived by his wife Patricia; sons Kenneth, Douglas, and Paul, Jr.; daughter Sharon; five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. He also is survived by his former wife Carol Clark Roberts.



**Rev. Clifford Denton Schutjer** passed away peacefully in October in Norman, Oklahoma, with his wife Patricia by his side. He had been suffering from Alzheimer's Disease. Cliff was born in Tomah, Wisconsin, in 1936. He attended Anderson College in Anderson, Indiana, followed by Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Cliff married his seminary classmate Pat in 1962, and they began their life together in Mansfield, Ohio, where he had accepted a position at First Congregational Church, where he served for 46 years. Cliff is survived by his wife Patricia; children Bryan, Karin, and Kristi; seven grandchildren; and many other dear relatives.



**Rev. Rebecca Mae Andeer** of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, passed away peacefully on August 27, 2024, surrounded by her loving family. Born in 1953 in Detroit, Michigan, Becky was the daughter of Elaine (Accorsi) and Roy Carps. She was a graduate of Wayne State University and became an ordained Congregational minister, serving as a certified hospital and hospice chaplain for many years. Becky was a truly devoted and fiercely loyal daughter, mother, wife, and friend. She is survived by her loving husband of 50 years, Randolph Andeer; her children Eric, Lauren, Rachel, and Carl; and her eight grandchildren.

# The Unyielding Roots of Hope: A Story of Resilience

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11

## The Story of Aime

Aime is now in college, but her journey began in Mission School of Hope Mbang. She grew up deep within the lush rainforests of Mbang, Cameroon, where, in her words, “All we saw daily was the dense forest, and many lives revolved around picking forest products and hunting. There was no electricity, no TV, no radios, and I always wondered if there was nothing more to life than trees and the routine lifestyle I saw in adults.”

“The first thing that struck my mind was the uniform of Mission School of Hope. When I saw children wearing the uniforms, I thought they were outstanding, and I wondered what they were all about. I will never forget the first time my father took me to school. I realized then that in the heart of the jungle where we live lies a ray of hope for the less privileged Baka children. That ray of hope is Mission School of Hope. A sanctuary of learning and love, this school has educated the minds, hearts, and spirits of many of us since its inception.”

Aime’s story, in particular, embodies the unyielding roots of hope that define our remarkable school. She has faced unimaginable challenges in her young life, but she is still

by REV. CHARLES SAGAY

holding on because her roots of hope are deep. Aime’s family, like many in the Baka community, has long been marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. With limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, the Baka people are still far behind in their struggle to break free from the shackles of poverty and desperation.

Despite these daunting obstacles, Aime’s spirit remains unbroken. Since her enrollment at Mission School of Hope at the age of six, Aime has blossomed into a confident, compassionate, and determined young woman. Her thirst for knowledge and love of learning have been very encouraging. “Aime’s life is a testament to the power of hope and education,” says Rev. Charles Sagay, founder of Mission School of Hope. “Despite the many challenges she faces, Aime’s roots of hope run deep, nourished by the love, support, and guidance she receives from our school community and most especially from her trust in the Almighty God.”

As Aime looks to the future, she dreams of becoming a nurse, inspired by the medical missionaries who have served at the school.

Her aspirations are not limited to personal achievement, however. She hopes to use her skills to uplift her community, bringing healing and hope to those around her. “My stay at Mission School of Hope gave me a more beautiful picture of my environment. I appreciate the forest and see my community as a place loaded with endless possibilities. I can say with confidence that we are the roots that will hold fast the tree of hope. As the forest around us is dense and strong, so are our roots of hope in Christ and in God’s word in Jeremiah 29:11. Our dream is to inspire and care for one another, so that our community may flourish like the forest around us.”

Aime’s story serves as a poignant reminder that even in the darkest of times, hope can flourish. Like the mighty trees that tower above the rainforest canopy, the roots of hope can run deep, anchoring us in faith, resilience, and determination. As we reflect on Aime’s journey, may we be inspired to cultivate the roots of hope within ourselves and our communities. May we strive to create environments where all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, can grow, thrive, and reach their full potential.

**REV. CHARLES OMA SAGAY** is a very passionate African missionary with an unwavering desire to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the founder of Mission of Hope and Mission School of Hope located in the East Region of Cameroon.



*We are deeply saddened to share that Rev. Charles Sagay has passed away since the submission of this article. His legacy of service, love, and friendship will live on, and he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.*





Photos of Aime, courtesy of Mission School of Hope.

*“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

EPHESIANS 2:10

## God Sees Us

by Rev. Dr. Michael Wayne Glidden

He sees above

He sees below

He sees my coming

and going

He sees my insides

My desires and thoughts

He knows all my ways

and then some...

REV. DR. MICHAEL GLIDDEN holds an MDiv from Bangor Theological Seminary and a DMin from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Rhonda, live in Portland, Maine, and are members of Elijah Kellogg Congregational Church of Harpswell, Maine.



# RELIGION OF REVOLUTION

*Congregational Voices on Liberty*

VISIT  
THE  
DIGITAL  
EXHIBITION

[bit.ly/religionofrevolution](http://bit.ly/religionofrevolution)



**Congregational  
Library & Archives**

Image: Grant Wood, “Midnight Ride of Paul Revere,” 1931

# Anamesa: Growing a Community of Love in the Space Between

by REV. IAN MACDONALD & REV. DAWN CARLSON

I used to be fascinated by churches with names like “Second” or “Third,” imagining they were sequentially named like siblings, similar to the George Foreman naming convention. However, I later learned that these names often originated from historical church splits. Thankfully, that was not the case with the establishment of Anamesa. Anamesa was not a product of conflict but rather a shared passion and vision for a new kind of community – one that transcends geographical boundaries and embodies the love of Christ wherever people gather.

Our unique church was born from two communities, The Phoenix Congregational Fellowship and New Church Sherman Oaks. Both began as online churches, with the latter also embracing a house church model. The name “Anamesa” is a Greek word meaning “between,” reflecting our belief that God is present in the spaces between you and me. Taking Jesus for his word when he said, “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there also” (Matthew 18:20), we set out to create a community that believes God is truly all around us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, an online lawyer, and the loving support of our combined members, Anamesa began to blossom from

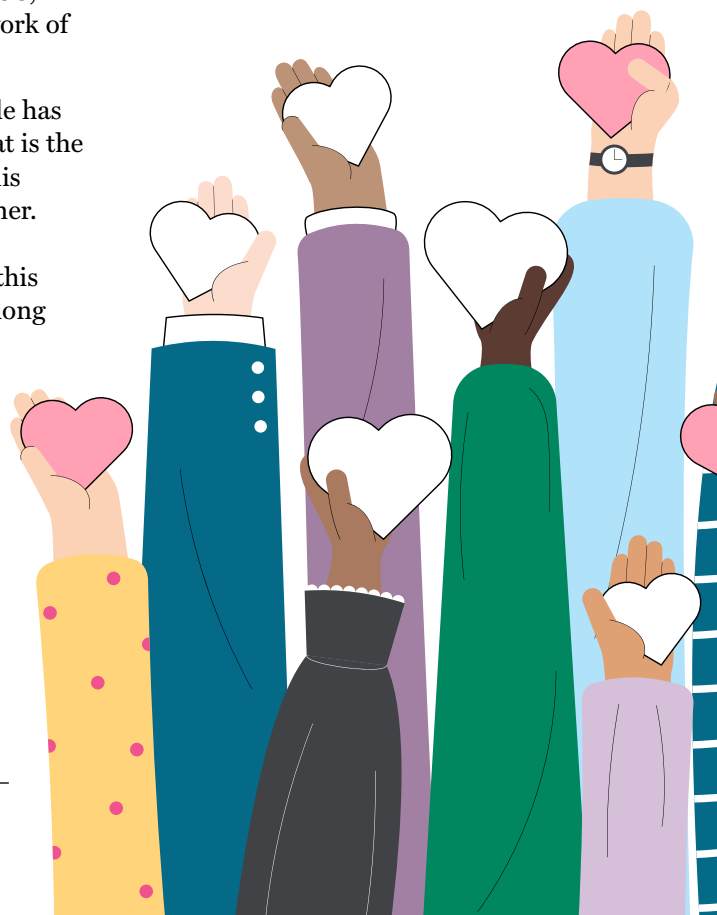
this sacred space between the two churches. It did not take long for our church to spread its roots across the country, both online and in person.

Within our first year, we had twenty-two covenanting members and had submitted our application to the NACCC’s Oak Creek office. Six months later, we received our official 501(c)3 non-profit charity status and became members of our wonderful association. These milestones marked significant steps in our journey, including the joy of one of our ministers joining a sister church in the NACCC, further enriching our network of community and support.

Through it all, one principle has consistently guided us. That is the words of Jesus who gave this command, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you belong to me, if you love one another” (John 13:35). This core teaching, the one that would inaugurate the first church, was the inspiration for our vision: Love God. Love Others. Serve Both. From

the very beginning, love has been the seed we plant, nurture, and harvest. Every day, we do all we can to fill the space of what is and what is to come with the love that God has entrusted to us to share. For us, that is what church is all about – holding each other in love.

During a recent Advent sermon, Rev. Dawn beautifully illustrated this vision using the analogy of the redwood trees of Northern California. Despite their towering height, the roots of these majestic giants do not grow deep into the ground. Instead, they spread



outward, intertwining with the roots of neighboring trees to create a supportive symbiotic relationship. Although they are separate, they work together to support each other. I think one of the main reasons Anamesa continues to thrive is our interconnectedness and mutual support of our covenanting members and the churches we associate with.

Similarly, we see our growth like that of the redwoods – slow and intentional, dropping seeds of love in every nook and cranny. From the very beginning, we made the conscious decision to avoid gimmicky church growth formulas. Instead, we focused on growing organically by remaining rooted in the way of Jesus, who showed us how to plant love, trusting God to nurture it.

This approach has resulted in a small yet flourishing “forest” of individuals who share in our

passion, spreading love within their own circles, including a young man who recently visited our house church location on an “Invite a Friend” Sunday. At the end of the service, he expressed his surprise at the warm and welcoming atmosphere he encountered, but then he hesitated, wondering if it was too good to be true. When he asked, “How do I know this is real?” my response was simple. “Come back next week, and if you experience anything less than love, then there’s no reason for you to return.” It wasn’t a trick or gimmick to get him to come back. I was merely holding myself and everyone at Anamesa accountable to live into our call to produce Christ-like love in real and tangible ways. Not only did this young man come back, but he has become an active participant in our goal to be the visible presence of God’s love in our community.

His story is not unique. Although many of our members came through our merger, others have found us through online searches and word of mouth. Most of these people have stayed, drawn by the authenticity of the love they’ve encountered. As we enter our fourth year, we continue to refine our approach and find new ways to spread

the love of Christ as we balance both challenges and triumphs, sorrows and celebrations from all the different spaces we gather in. Our commitment to embody the spirit of love remains at the core of our foundation, as does our faithful commitment to follow the way of Jesus for the building up of God’s kingdom.

From the start, we have prioritized faithfulness over size. Rather than measuring success by attendance, we have focused our attention on cultivating a loving, supportive community. We have done this by welcoming all people, including many ministers who, for one reason or another, need a safe space to honor their call to serve. We are constantly looking forward – following the Holy Spirit, who continues to reveal to us new ways and technology to meet people where they are. Together, we enter Anamesa planting seeds of love in both the real world and the digital one. Together, we will continue to create an environment where resources and support are shared freely, echoing the ethos of the early church at Pentecost. While this is the foundation that defines Anamesa, it is our hope to share this vision of love and support with all of Christ’s churches within the NACCC and beyond.



**REV. IAN MACDONALD** is the co-creator and co-pastor of Anamesa. He is an alumnus of Fuller Theological Seminary and the Congregational Fellowship for Theological Studies. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, three kids, their dog, and some guitars. His blog is [jesusnotjesus.org](http://jesusnotjesus.org).



**REV. DAWN CARLSON** is the co-creator and co-pastor of Anamesa. In addition to her passion for building online communities, she enjoys writing, weaving, painting, and baseball. She lives in Terre Haute, Indiana, near her son Alex, who has autism and a wicked sense of humor.





# The Benefits of Being Rooted in God

by ELIZABETH GASKO

I have known God since I was born. As I have always attended church at least three times a week, I thought I was rooted in God and His Word, but as I grew older, I realized I knew who God was, but I didn't really know God.

About 25 years ago, I started to crave a relationship with God. I yearned for personal knowledge and an understanding of God and what has happened from creation to this time in history. I feel deeply connected to my familial roots,

history, and tradition, and I wanted that type of strong and enduring relationship with God. I can say that today, I am rooted in God, and I know that through Him, Jesus came, died, was resurrected, and now sits at the right hand of God, our Heavenly Father, interceding for all of us.

I have experienced a fantastic life, both in the every day and especially the spiritual. The darkness I have encountered has been replaced by light. My faith has allowed me to work through anything because I know God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit dwell within my heart and soul. I am rooted with a new strength and certainty that God will never leave or forsake me and that life begins and ends with God. Colossians 2:6-7 tells us, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

I have found that being deeply rooted in God has allowed me to withstand the storms of life. I am not shaken; I am not tossed to and fro with the whims of mankind. I am like the wise man who built his house on a rock – I have a godly foundation.

Just as our bodies need continual nourishment to exist, so does our spirit need to be rooted in God for our faith to continue to grow and flourish. Scripture tells us that those who live and serve are called the "oaks of righteousness" - capable of enduring and persevering like mighty oaks because of the gifts of righteousness and strength from Jesus Christ Himself. This endurance and stability make us pleasing to God, a delight to Him, as it enables us to serve as symbols for living how God wants us to live.

Jesus tells us in John 15:10-11 that as long as we abide in His love and keep His commandments, His joy



## Elijah Kellogg Church

SEEKING: FULL-TIME MINISTER



Located in the heart of historic Harpswell Center, Maine, the Elijah Kellogg Church, Congregational, has been a beacon of hope, love, and community since 1843. Our church spire, visible from the sea, has guided sailors to safety, just as we have long provided spiritual support and fellowship to our community. We are a small, welcoming, service-oriented congregation, and we make a difference. Our parsonage is more than a house – it might be your new home. If you are passionate about ministry and community, we would love to hear from you at [pulpit.committee.EKC@gmail.com](mailto:pulpit.committee.EKC@gmail.com).



will remain in us. I am a joyful person who abides in the love of God. I feel His presence every day because I have given complete control. I am bearing fruit, and I have been able to share the Word and love of God with others.

Fellowship with others has filled a void in me, and now my cup is running over with their amazing and beautiful words and stories.

I delight in the peace that God has shown me. No doubt, no fear, no anxiety can shake me, for I know that I can withstand anything that comes my way. God Himself tells me, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let

your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Each day is a blessing from above. I wake with God, and I go to sleep with God. He knows my yesterday, my today, and my tomorrow. He is always one step ahead, so why should I fear?

Being rooted gives me stability, fruitfulness, joy, purpose, and peace. My purpose in life is to fulfill what God has planned for me, and I will work to do that every second of every day. My roots are grounded in the love of God, and they run deep, assuring me that our relationship is real. I will work to keep them growing stronger. Trust me, life begins when you become deeply rooted in God.

The Apostle Paul tells us that, when rooted, we are unwavering, fixed, and firmly established in our faith. Nothing and no one can pull us away from God. We must maintain a spirit and attitude of commitment and devotion to the truth of God's Word. We must pray, meditate on the Word, and draw close into our one-on-one relationship with Him. It's never too late to cultivate roots that are deep and meaningful. God is waiting. Start your cultivating today.

"My mind and my heart are rooted, fixed, and firmly established in God's Word."

**ELIZABETH GASKO** serves as a lay speaker at Edray United Church (Edray, WV) and White Chapel Church (Woodrow, WV), where she also leads the congregation's Bible study. She lives in Edray, West Virginia, with her husband.

## Come Home to Grace!

### SEEKING: FULL-TIME MINISTER

GRACE CHURCH OF COLUMBIANA, OHIO



Grace Church is seeking a full-time Minister. We are a thriving and welcoming church with an amazing history. Our traditional Sunday service features hymns and an exceptional choir accompanied by piano and a beautiful pipe organ. As one of the city's founding churches in 1814, Grace has made mission a priority by supporting local, national and international organizations for over 200 years. While we have many traditions here at Grace, we are open to new ideas and opportunities for Christian growth and fellowship.

Grace is located in the heart of the charming city of Columbiana, Ohio recently named the "Nicest Place in America" by Reader's Digest. Columbiana is a growing community centrally located between Cleveland and Pittsburgh and is surrounded by several top-rated schools. We share our historical ties with the Harvey S. Firestone family. The beautiful, 68-acre Harvey S. Firestone Park and Town Center at Firestone Farms are part of the city's charm. The quaint downtown features unique shops, a historical theatre, and a variety of dining experiences. Grace Church is an integral part of this delightful community. Learn more about us by visiting our website and social pages below. Inquiries and resumes can be sent by email to:

[gracechurch44408@gmail.com](mailto:gracechurch44408@gmail.com)



Visit us Online!

[gracechurchcolumbiana.com](http://gracechurchcolumbiana.com)

[@gracechurchcolumbiana](https://www.facebook.com/gracechurchcolumbiana)

[@grace\\_church\\_columbiana](https://www.instagram.com/grace_church_columbiana)



*Come and See:*

# The 2025 NACCC Annual Meeting & Conference

Mark your calendars and prepare to be inspired at the upcoming **NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference (AMC)** in **St. Louis, Missouri**, from **June 21-24, 2025**. This year's gathering will be hosted at the Renaissance St. Louis Hotel, bringing together Congregationalists from across the nation for a time of renewal, rootedness, learning, and fellowship.

The theme of this year's AMC is "Come and See," inspired by John 1:46, in which Philip invites and encourages Nathanael to experience Jesus firsthand. This message resonates deeply with the NACCC's vision of sharing the love of Jesus and its goal of aiding member churches and their congregants in fostering connection and deepening their faith. Whether you're attending for the first time or are a long-time participant, the 2025 AMC promises to be an unforgettable experience.



## WHAT TO EXPECT

### A Blend of Worship, Fellowship, and Learning

The NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference is a time to engage in business, but it's also a spiritual journey that invites you to strengthen your faith and reflect on what it means to be part of the Congregational Way. You can expect a rich blend of worship and communion, along with a range of thought-provoking speakers and engaging workshops. These sessions will explore both practical and spiritual aspects of church life, offering inspiration and tools for your ministry.

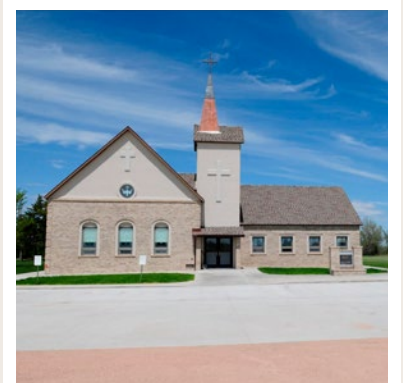
The conference will also feature an opportunity to participate in a mission project, allowing you to serve and make a tangible impact on the local community during your time in St. Louis. Whether you're looking to deepen your personal faith or engage in meaningful service, the AMC provides the perfect setting to do both.

Throughout the event, there will be ample time for fellowship activities that allow you to connect with others who share your faith and passion for the Congregational tradition. In these moments, you'll experience the profound sense of unity that comes from gathering as a community in Christ and sharing in your Congregational roots. You'll join with others in laughter, learning, and giving, all while being reminded of God's ever-present love among us.

## St. John Church

SEEKING: FULL-TIME LEAD PASTOR

St. John Church is looking for a pastoral candidate who doesn't shy away from adventure, has energy and initiative, and yearns for the wide-open spaces of the high plains. Located in the agricultural community of Idalia, Colorado, St. John Church is equidistant from Denver and Colorado Springs. In the tradition of the Congregational Way, we have a church culture that celebrates an expansive faith for every person, nurtures a positive spiritual journey following Christ, and desires our congregation to continue to be a vital part of our regional community. For more information or to apply, visit the NACCC job portal.





## ST. LOUIS

### A City of History, Culture, and Connection

In addition to the spiritual and professional benefits of attending, the city of St. Louis itself offers a welcoming and vibrant backdrop for this year's event. With its rich history, diverse cultural offerings, and beautiful parks, St. Louis invites you to explore and enjoy during your free time. The Renaissance Hotel is conveniently located near iconic attractions such as the Enterprise Center, the University of Missouri – St. Louis, and the lively Delmar Loop.

For those flying in, a complimentary shuttle is available between St. Louis Lambert International Airport and the hotel, making transportation seamless and stress-free. If you're driving, on-site parking is also available for your convenience.

Plan to make space in your suitcase for a banner from your church to enliven our space and allow us to experience the rich artistry and diversity of our member churches!



## A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE DIVINE

One of the most cherished aspects of the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference is the opportunity to experience God's presence through connection with others. As one participant shared from her experience at last year's AMC in Spokane, Washington, these conferences are more than just a time for business – they are a chance to encounter God in unexpected ways.

During her time in Spokane, Dr. Lisa Bircher had a profound interaction with a local gardener while walking along the Centennial Trail. After a brief conversation, the two shared a prayer, and in that moment, she felt a deep sense of peace and divine love pass between them. She described the encounter as a tangible experience of God's presence, echoing the promise from Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them."

This is the heart of the NACCC experience – a reminder that, through fellowship and shared moments of prayer, God's love is made real in our relationships with one another. At the 2025 AMC, you will have many opportunities to experience this same sense of connection and spiritual renewal.

## DON'T MISS OUT

We invite you to come and see what God has in store for you at the 2025 NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference in St. Louis. From inspiring worship to powerful learning and unforgettable fellowship, this event promises to be a transformative experience for all who attend.



Scan the QR code for more information or to register today and join us in June for a time of growth, service, and joy in the presence of God.

*We can't wait to see you there!*



## Gilmanton Church

### SEEKING: BI-VOCATIONAL TEACHING PASTOR

Gilmanton Community Church, located in New Hampshire's famed lakes region, is seeking a bi-vocational teaching pastor. The candidate we seek is a man or woman with an MDiv or significant experience and an emphasis on the expository preaching of God's word. Our church is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of Vermont and New Hampshire, as well as the NACCC. We are a family of believers who truly love God and others in both word and deed. Those interested can send their resume, three references, access to sermon samples, and a short statement of their call to ministry to [gilmantonchurch@gmail.com](mailto:gilmantonchurch@gmail.com).

**Thank you for your generosity.**

All gifts are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.



**PLEASE CUT AND MAIL TO:**

*The Congregationalist*, NACCC  
PO Box 288, Oak Creek, WI 53154

I/We would like to support *The Congregationalist* with the following gift:

\$2,000  \$1,000  \$500  \$250  \$100  \$ \_\_\_\_\_

A check is enclosed made payable to the NACCC

Please charge my credit card  Mastercard  Visa

CARD NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

CVV CODE: \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**OR DONATE VIA PAYPAL OR VENMO BY SCANNING THE ABOVE QR CODE**

YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR CHURCH: \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

*The*  
**CONGREGATIONALIST**

8473 SOUTH HOWELL AVENUE ➤ OAK CREEK, WI 53154-0288

## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### DEAR READER,

I hope this message finds you well. I want to take a moment to thank you for being part of *The Congregationalist* community. Your engagement with our magazine means the world to us – it is what keeps this publication alive and thriving. Together, we've created something truly special: a place where we can celebrate the diverse voices of our tradition, challenge one another, and grow together in faith, freedom, and fellowship.

As you know, *The Congregationalist* is much more than just a magazine. It's a ministry of the Congregational Way where we can share stories, insights, and ideas that help define and shape the future of our tradition. Since 1849, it's been a cornerstone of our community – offering resources to churches, sparking important conversations, and guiding our collective journey in faith.

In 1958, the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches took on the responsibility of publishing and distributing the magazine to member churches and thousands of readers, and we have since worked to preserve and extend its legacy. As enduring of a publication as *The Congregationalist* is, it takes your support to keep it going.

As we do not impose subscription fees for the magazine, we rely on the generosity of readers like you to cover *The Congregationalist's* expenses. Your donation helps to provide for the continuation of this historic and beloved publication – ensuring that *The Congregationalist* remains an accessible, informative, and vibrant resource for years to come.

So today, we ask for your support through a contribution that, no matter the size, will directly sustain the production, printing, and mailing of this magazine – allowing us to continue connecting with you and Congregationalists across the country in meaningful ways.

Thank you again for being part of this community. Your support truly makes a difference, and we're grateful for it – we couldn't do it without you.

### WITH HEARTFELT THANKS,

*Maggie Helmick*

Editor, *The Congregationalist*