

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

Articles from the Congregationalist, 1958-1996

Readings in the History and Polity of the National
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE "CHURCH"

Congregationalism is founded on the idea that Christ called his followers into churches, particular communities of believers gathering regularly for worship and service, not into a Church, a national or international organization superior to local congregations and mediating their relationship with their Lord. The very name of the movement, Congregationalism, derives from this conviction.

- Clinchy, Russell. "Why the Congregational Churches Should Live." November '58
Gray, Henry David. "The Constitutional Question." June '59
Stoudt, John, "Are We Still Protestants?" October '61
Commission on the Ministry. "What is a Congregational Church?" November '69
Bohman, George. "What Congregationalism Means to Me." July '77
Wilson, Robert. "Local Autonomy in a Time of Centralization." August, '78
Moe, Ronald. "Congregationalism in the March of History." August '88
Alexander, John, et al. "A Message to the Churches." April '85
Rouner Jr., Arthur. "The Congregational Way as a Call to Pilgrimage for the American Church," 2 parts.
October, December 1989
Larson, Arlin. "Portland as Seen from the Wilderness." August '93
Hall, Lloyd. "Denomination or Association? What Matter is How We Serve Society." June '94
Bailey, Steven. "To Be or not to Be? Religious Mainstream is Denominational." February '95

ECUMENISM

The NACCC was founded in 1955 just as the wider ecumenical movement gained full force. While "ecumenical" in the sense of openness to a wide variety of beliefs and practices, "Continuing Congregationalism" defined itself in opposition to all centralization and bureaucratization. How then can the NACCC be part of the wider Christian community?

- Gray, Henry David. "Congregational Catholicity and Ecumenical Exclusiveness." December '58
Bailey, Harold. "The World-wide Campaign Against Religious Freedom." January '60
Bachelder, Horace. "Whither the Ecumenical Movement?" April '60
Bradshaw, Marion. "Essentially Congregationist." January '61
Butman, Harry. "The Brave Music of Mission." September '63
Conn, Howard. "Congregationalism's Contribution to Christian Unity." October '63
Conn, Howard. "Congregationalists and the Ecumenical Movement." September '65
Hanko, Charles. "The New Protestant Church?" January '66
Couch, Walter. "Who Speaks for the Church?" June '66
Gwaltney, W. Malcomb. "Faith is the Source of Freedom." June '66
Conn, Howard. "Independency in an Ecumenical Age." February '67
Butman, Harry. "A Candle in COCU's Darkness." January '68
Steece, Arvel. Review of *The Ecumenical Mirage* by C. Stanley Lowell. October '68
Swanson Jr., Neil. "Report from Uppsala." October '68
World Christian Relations Commission. "A Statement of Ecumenical Intentions."
June '87

FREE CHURCHES

Churches of the NACCC are not the only "congregational" churches. Kindred spirits are found among Unitarians, Baptists, Disciples, the Community Churches, and others stressing the autonomy of local congregations.

- Pavy, Roy. "A Free Church Movement." April '65
Bellingham, Richard. "Creative Independency." February '69
Steece, Arvel. "What Do you Mean, 'Free Church'?" June '70

ASSOCIATIONS

A Congregational church is not merely independent. Active fellowship with other churches is fundamental. The small size and geographical dispersion of the churches of the NACCC rendered the traditional local and regional fellowships problematic. Tensions also arose between churches continuing to identify with a regional association and those identifying most closely with the National Association, which has no formal connection with the regionals.

- Bohman, George. "The Place of Associations in Modern Congregationalism." May '65
Steece, Arvel. "Polity Evolution and the Future of Congregationalism." March '75
Bellingham, Richard. "Regional Fellowship: A National Concern." February '89

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Early Congregational churches were distinctive in being made up of self-conscious believers, "visible saints," not merely residents of the parish or community, and furthermore, not only believers but believers who could demonstrate proof of their conversion. Membership requirements no longer set Congregationalists apart, but new concerns have arisen.

- Bohman, George. "Safe-guarding Individual Freedom With Congregationalism." November '74
Beinke, James. "Church Members: How One Church Has Dealt with the Problem of Removing Inactive Members from Their Roles." October '88
Vanek, Noel. "Resident Aliens: Find New Direction for Christian Witness." December '96

ASPECTS OF CHURCH LIFE

- Butman, Harry. "How It [*The Congregationalist*] Started." August '62
Butman, Harry. "The Vicinage Council." March '65
Steece, Arvel. "Deacons, Dodos, Dynamics." March '73
Gerhart, Louis. "The Executive Committee and its Chairmen." June '74
Gray, Henry. "Town Meeting, Church Meeting, National Meeting." November '74
Gray, Henry. "American Youth and the Christian Church: Including the Background and Development of Pilgrim Fellowship and Hope." January '76
Ream, Norman. "Ordination Services: Caricature or Holy Event?" April '86
McKendrick, Mary. "Ambassadors: Becoming a part of the CCC/NA's Effort to Serve Churches Proved a Challenge Many Were Proud to Assume." April '88

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Where do we come from? Contemporary Congregationalism finds its roots in three places. One is Jesus' promise to be present "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name." The second is symbolized by the ship Mayflower, which bridged English Separatism and colonial New England Congregationalism. Third are the struggles within the Congregational family resulting in the formation of the United Church of Christ on the one hand and the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches on the other.

- Gray, Henry David. "From Yesterday into Tomorrow." February '58
Howard, Irving. "Covenant Theology and American Thought." February '58
Gray, Henry. "The Savoy Declaration of 1658." September '58
Rouner, Arthur Jr. "A Message from Savoy." 3 part series, November 59 - January '60

Davis, Royal. "The Saybrook Platform: A Warning." October '58
 Shelly, Maynard. "The Undying Fire of the Reformation." October '67
 Stubbs, Harry. "On Recovering the Genius of Classical Congregational Church Order," 2 parts. October '68, June '69
 Abercrombie, A. Vaughn. "The People Behind the Founding of the NACCC." November '78
 Burton, Malcom. "Letter" in response to Abercrombie. Fall '79
 Bohman, George. "Four Centuries of Congregational Growth." April '85
 Bailey, Steven. "Most Important Document: American Congregationalism Based on Cambridge Platform of 1648." December '92
 Rouser, Arthur Jr. "I Saw Them in the Flesh: Hotel Fort Shelby Recollection." July '95
 Alexander, John. "Forward Through the Ages ... At the Call Divine." July '95
 Bailey, Steven. "Reclaiming the Puritans." July '95

THE MINISTRY

Congregationalism has a distinctive view of the clergy as ordinary believers delegated narrowly defined responsibilities for preaching and teaching, while sharing common concerns about such things as qualifications, training, placement, and the ordination of women.

Barrus, Alvan. "The Growth of the Lay Ministry." March '65
 Abercrombie, A. Vaughn. "The National Program of Pastoral Supply." March '65
 Buchman, Richard. "Pastor, People, and God." May, '65.
 Butman, Harry. "Moderator's Statement at the Ordination of John K. Tremaine." February '66
 Britton, Erwin. "A Congregationalist Ponders the Matter of Ordination and the Ministry," 2 parts. October, November '75
 Witzel, Tom. "Laity Arise." June '77
 Brown, George. "In Between Ministers," June, July '81
 Voss, B. Margaret. "Unfinished Business." October '81
 Woolsey, Mary. "A Shared Ministry--A Shared Life." October '83
 Jensen, Mark. "Looking at the Future of the Congregational Ministry." October '89

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The NACCC does not have its own theological seminary, nor, because of its small size, is it in a position to open one. Yet it maintains a commitment to "learned ministry." How can its clergy receive the proper education? How can they learn the peculiar traditions and practices of the Congregational movement?

"Pioneering in Theological Education." November '62
 Steece, Arvel. "Continuing the Tradition of an Educated Ministry." January '65
 Ream, Norman. "Do We Need a Theological Seminary?" June '70
 Currey, Cecil. "Congregational Theological Education: The Future." May '73
 "C.F.T.S Story." October '74
 Clark, Harry. "CFTS is THE Source: The CFTS Story." February '90
 Shultz, Leslie. "Exciting Opportunity: Lay Ministry Training Program Announced." October '93

SOCIAL REFORM

Congregationalists have been in the forefront of social reform, from the establishment of democracy in the New World, to Abolition, to the Social Gospel. The NACCC, however, defined itself in opposition to the type of church-related reform which became prominent in the twentieth century. How can Congregationalists maintain their prophetic consciousness and yet avoid violating local autonomy and personal freedom of conscience?

Clinchy, Russell. "Comment and Reflection." October '65
 Ream, Norman. "A Relevant Religion." June '66
 Conn, Howard. "How Express Our Social Concern?" January '67
 Butman, Harry. "Classical Congregationalism and Social Action." March '68

Tennies, Arthur. "Church Leaders as Activists: Good or Bad?" October '71

Conn, Howard. "Christian Conscience: A Plea from Some Members Within a Congregation." October '71

Lange, William. "Washington Gladden Society: A Response to the Social Justice Debate." Summer '79

INTRODUCTION

How do the churches of the National Association of Congregational Christian churches understand themselves? In many ways they are typical of other mainline Protestant churches. A person comfortable with the worship at a Presbyterian, Methodist, Christian or United church would most likely be comfortable worshipping with Congregationalists. Congregational clergy receive their training in seminaries sponsored by many denominations. When, however, it comes to polity, church organization at the national as well as local level, Congregationalists have distinctive ideas.

It began with English observers of the Protestant Reformation, such as Robert Browne and Henry Barrows, who believed there was another step to be taken. This was a return to the type of organization envisioned by Jesus Christ and reflected in the earliest New Testament writings, especially the book of Acts and Paul's letters. These early churches were diverse, autonomous, lacking central authority, and required a high degree of commitment. To these English Reformers the shape taken by the Roman Catholic Church was more that of Caesar's empire than of Christ's kingdom. The newly formed Church of England, while independent of Rome, seemed compromised by its retention of a similar structure.

At great risk to position, property, and life, the English reformers set about to "purify" the Church of England. The more radical reformers formed unauthorized "Independent" or "Separatist" congregations. Many fled first to Holland and then to the British colonies in North America. As founders of a new society in America the Pilgrims and Puritans entered a new phase with the authority of government behind rather than against them. This new position as the established church of the New England colonies posed new challenges regarding questions of church membership, tolerance of religious diversity, and the relationship between religious and civil authority.

With the passage of an American Constitution embodying a "separation of church and state," the expansion of the frontier, and the waning of evangelical fervor, Congregationalists gradually lost the dominance they enjoyed in colonial New England. Losses were exacerbated when one wing, the Unitarians, split off to form their own denomination. Questions of denominational identity and cooperation across regions came to the fore. By the end of the nineteenth century Congregational churches had moved away from Calvinism, embraced modern ideas about science, and, while local autonomy was still affirmed, put a national structure into place.

The founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (1955) reacted against what they perceived as an un-Congregational centralizing trend which would deny basic Congregational convictions about the church. A proposed merger of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church into a "United Church of Christ" would result in a more centralized "presbyterian" system. Proponents saw it simply as a more efficient form of organization which would retain essential principles.

When the great majority went with the new United Church, the “Continuing Congregationalists” were left with redefining themselves and Congregationalism (a name which the majority, tellingly, did not retain). Many of their reflections on Congregationalism in the twentieth century are recorded in the NACCC’s *Congregationalist* magazine. This book contains a selection of those writings. They are arranged by topic, and within topics chronologically.

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

THE MINISTRY

The Growth *of the* Lay Ministry

*Alvan Barrus
Cornish, New Hampshire*

In 1961 there appeared in *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* two inspiring articles on the lay ministry by Dr. Harry R. Butman. Since that time interest in the lay ministry has increased, more articles and books have appeared, and now more laymen are becoming engaged in an ever-expanding ministry. One writer has expressed the belief that it would astonish most people to know just how many pulpits across our land on any Sunday morning are filled by laymen.

This activity, curiously enough, is in the face of the decline of the institutional church, and the attack upon it. Hendrik Kraemer has written: "In all our criticism and sometimes near despair of the institutional church, it should never be forgotten that many powers and possibilities really exist in it, but often in captivity; they exist as frozen credits and dead capital." Possibly it is this resurgence of the lay ministry that is thawing these credits and resurrecting this capital.

The revitalizing of the modern Church requires more than a new liturgy and new symbols. Only the Spirit of the living Christ in living men can restore for our time the mighty power of the apostolic Churches which was revived for a time in the Pilgrim Churches.

Laymen at Work

I have been asked to write a little about the activities of some of these dedicated, and usually unsung, men of our Churches, using material gathered from many sources, and from my own experience of more than ten years as a member of the

New Hampshire Lay Preachers Fellowship.

New members have constantly entered the fellowship, there being some twenty individuals who have served Churches this past year, mostly for interim periods of a few weeks. The number of calls is ever increasing, and a growing proportion of the men are active nearly every Sunday.

Elsewhere in our Congregational Fellowship growth of the lay ministry is evident. The movement should receive a further impetus from the publication of the *Manual for Lay Preachers*, by Walter James Vernon. This is a plain but thorough guide which should encourage even the most inexperienced layman to heed his call, and accept his responsibility, for Dr. Butman says that he has long felt the lay ministry is the only hope for the country Churches.

Other strong hands and minds are lending their time and influence to our work. At the First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, the pastor, Rev. Norman S. Ream has organized a group of about twelve men and helped them train for service in Churches all over Wisconsin. They usually go as teams of three; one man preaches, one man conducts the service, and the third man acts as critic in the congregation.

The Seattle, Washington, Congregational Church, although new and small, has doubled its membership in the past year, and on Laymen's Sunday the entire service was conducted by laymen.

The Plymouth Congregational Church of Spokane, Washington, at a communion service on November 8, 1964, received new members bringing its total to over 500. This Church had been organized less than ten months, and it is reported that this entire growth has been the result of lay leadership!

The First Congregational Church of Burlington, Iowa has two laymen who do outstanding work in the preparation and delivery of sermons. They have preached several times in their own Church, and have supplied in other Churches in Iowa and Illinois.

Galesburg, Illinois has a new Church known as the Pilgrim Congregational Church of Knox County. Most of the organization and much of the preaching has been done by laymen. The first communion service was conducted by Mr. Carlisle Smith, a Congregational layman from Knoxville.

The Wachogue Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts has two experienced lay preachers in the persons of Albert H. Spry and Carleton Cassidy. Widely read and well educated they have preached and served as interim pastors at a number of Massachusetts and Connecticut Churches. They have preached stirring sermons on the Congregational Way.

The McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Evangelical Congregational Church has an active men's fellowship, where, in addition to the usual men's work, they often take part in the morning worship service, and go out to other Churches as lay preachers. On Remembrance Sunday, November 29th, the closing prayer printed in the church calendar was by layman James Martineau.

Other laymen do more than preach. At Plymouth Congregational Church in Wichita, Kansas, parish visitors supplement the visitation done by the ministers.

The State Fellowships Also Active

The Pennsylvania Laymen's Fellowship has a growing membership with strong Congregational emphasis, and have been doing more than "talking" about lay ministry. When the First Congregational Church of Beaver Falls, Pa., needed help after the sudden death of their pastor, the Reverend John F. C. Green of McKeesport, Pa., issued a call to laymen of three Churches in the western area Laymen's Fellowship to conduct services for this congregation until the time they could obtain the services of a full-time minister. Through the efforts of Dr. Green, seven laymen from three Churches in the Southwestern area of Pennsylvania conducted worship services and preached Sunday mornings at Beaver Falls from February through October 1964. Not only did

these seven laymen give the Beaver Falls Church an interim security, but gave all the Churches in the Western area of that state the satisfaction of knowing that the lay ministry is available to them should they ever want or need this service.

Wisconsin is of course among the leaders, with several lay people serving as Wisconsin Council Camp leaders and counselors. The Illinois State Fellowship of Congregational Churches has a large representation of lay people among its officers and executive committee.

The Massachusetts Congregational Fellowship has a dynamic leader in Carleton D. Cassidy, elected moderator in October 1964. He had the distinction of being ordained into the lay ministry of the Congregational Christian Church in 1962. Although his formal education was limited to two years of high school, his desire to serve God and his fellowmen has caused him constantly to study and grow in knowledge and experience. A list of his activities include: 1. Nine months as interim minister of Wachogue Congregational Church in Springfield, Mass. 2. Nine months as interim minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Chicopee, Mass. During both these periods he made all sick calls, attended Church meetings, performed marriages, administered baptisms, and conducted funeral services. 3. The remaining Sundays have been filled with guest preaching all over Massachusetts and some in Connecticut. He has served for three years as Western Regional Representative of the Massachusetts Fellowship prior to becoming moderator. He is also Vice-Moderator of the Northeast Regional Fellowship of Congregational Christian Churches. Besides all this Mr. Cassidy works five days a week to make a living; and to any layman who feels inadequate or lacking formal education he says: "You can do it too!"

Where Does the Lay Ministry Lead?

The experience of Carleton Cassidy causes us to examine further the paths into which the lay ministry may lead, and makes us realize that once a man has set his feet to fol-

low Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit there is no limit.

One beginning lay preacher in New Hampshire took a two-week interim assignment at a small Church back in 1953, and is still there, serving nearly full time. He has served six years on the local school board, and been moderator of both Baptist and Congregational Associations.

Another N.H. man has preached more than four hundred sermons in over one hundred different Churches in his state, and many in other places. His studies have led him to learn seven languages including Russian and Hebrew. Recently he was invited to preach in Salzburg and Vienna, Austria and in Germany, where he delivered sermons to large congregations in their own language.

Women Are Laymen

Let us not think for a minute that the lay ministry is confined to men. We have long known that some of the most effective ministering has been done by the women.

Some of our most effective lay preaching is done by women. The New Hampshire Lay Preachers Fellowship has had several women members over the years. One has gone on to seminary, and one courageous young woman, whose pastor-husband died suddenly, took over his ministry in the Church with great

effectiveness and increasing acceptance.

Another woman preached a well-ordered sermon with such vitality and oratorical command at the September 1964 meeting of the New Hampshire Fellowship as to cause one of the men to remark, that in his opinion, if St. Paul could have heard her preach he never would have written to the Corinthians that women should keep silent in Church!

The Dangers of the Lay Ministry

Every great work, even Christian service, has inherent in it certain dangers. Lay ministers should be especially aware of these.

First, they should remember that the lay ministry is one of the last careers to enter for personal glory. Many lay preachers rise early on what could be a leisurely Sunday, to travel long miles in the heat of the desert, and the below zero cold of snow storms, to bring a message to small Churches where the audience, week after week, may number from two to ten, at a remuneration which hardly covers travel expense.

Should the fortunate layman find himself in demand, he could well heed the words of Rev. Charles H. Hall of Machias, Maine, a strong supporter of lay ministry, who says that, "lay activity needs to be coached in love and respect for

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Pictured above, the laymen who are active in the lay ministry in Western Pennsylvania. L to r: William E. Miller, South Hills, Pittsburgh; Charles J. Dunlap, South Hills, Pittsburgh; Donald A. Kuhns, Evangelical Congregational, McKeesport; William Beckman, Evangelical Congregational, McKeesport; Calvin Weissert, Evangelical Congregational, McKeesport; William Craig, First Congregational, McKeesport; J. W. Donaldson, First Congregational, McKeesport.

Continued from page 13

other members of the Church, rather than being an outlet for selfish influence and realness of individual power."

Then there is a danger that the layman may think of himself as a second quality or imitation minister, whereupon he should recall the opening words of Dr. Butman's article in the November 1961 CONGREGATIONALIST: "Strictly speaking, every Congregational minister is a layman." The layman must remember that he has an authentic witness, and that there is no place in his "other vocation" for role-playing or imitation ministry.

This brings up one other danger which the lay minister will keep in mind. Is the lay minister a threat to the regularly trained pastor? The writer well remembers attending the examination and ordination of a well educated candidate who had many years of Church and social service in his background, who had served successfully as a full time parish minister, and who had tutored intensively for his ordination. Yet, one ordained minister protested vehemently and voted against his ordination in the ecclesiastical council on the ground that he had not graduated from seminary and had no BD degree! Although this man proved his qualifications by continuing to serve with distinction, as have other laymen who have been ordained, it should be understood that lay ministers are not trying to use their opportunities merely as a "back-door" entrance into the ministry.

When we enter the "ministry" do we indeed achieve a character with the fragrance of divinity about it? Of course not. Our ministry is derivative of the ministry of Christ. We minister in His name. The word might better be expressed as a verb, "ministering". To enter the ministry is an act of humility. The only status is that of servanthood to God and man. Rights and privileges are as out of order today as they were the day James and John asked for the right and left-hand places in the Kingdom.

With these words ringing in our ears, we laymen may consider ourselves free to "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling". ■

The National Program of Pastoral Supply

*Rev. A. Vaughan Abercrombie,
Executive Secretary*

One of the significant accomplishments of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is its national program of pastoral relations.

The old denomination never did succeed in providing the Churches with a truly nation-wide, and Congregational program of pastoral supply. The excellent example of the old New England Board is an historic mile-stone in the development of the Congregational Way. It was conceived in the highest ideals of non-paternalistic service to Churches and ministers, and it sincerely tried to do whatever it could for those outside New England who sought its help. For a few years a pastoral relations office operated in the Middle-west, but by and large the Churches outside of New England were dependent upon Conference superintendents in their search for pastors. Some superintendents were able to maintain a commendable degree of objectivity as they tried to play the conflicting roles of counsellors in pastoral relations, and promoters of a quasi-diocesan program. Many others were not so successful, and, perhaps inadvertently, built an ecclesiastical machine to which both Churches and ministers became subservient.

The National Association department of Pastoral Relations has been patterned on the principles of the old New England Board of Pastoral Supply. Its compilation of dossiers on Churches and ministers is maintained on a strictly voluntary basis. It does not *recommend* ministers to Churches, but makes available information about ministers and



Churches. It is not a placement bureau, but a clearing-house of vital information for Churches seeking ministers and ministers seeking Churches.

Dr. John Claxton, Secretary of the Pastoral Relations Office, describes its function as being "one of assisting in the process by which Churches seeking ministers and ministers seeking Churches may be enabled to know of each other, thereby giving God's will for each the opportunity to find expression."

The procedures followed usually entail the reporting by Churches and ministers of up-to-date information about themselves, including recent references which can be followed up by all concerned. The Office has information blanks for this purpose. "Such information", says Dr. Claxton, "frequently enables the Pastoral Relations office to assist in bringing the 'right' minister to the attention of a pastoral committee, thereby resulting, without undue delay, in a happy and fruitful pastorate."

Day in and day out the Pastoral Relations Office is also giving valuable assistance to pastoral committees by counselling with them at the beginning of their quest for a new minister as to those procedures which have been found helpful by many other Churches in like situations.

We can be proud that the National Association is able to provide the Churches and ministers of our fellowship with a truly national and Congregational office of pastoral supply. ■

Pastor, People and God

THE REV. RICHARD P. BUCHMAN

Minister, Cadman Memorial Church, Brooklyn, New York



Richard P. Buchman

Mr. Buchman is a native of Columbus, Ohio and is a graduate of Western Reserve Academy and Yale University. Before entering Union Theological Seminary, he served as a destroyer officer in the Navy and as a salesman with the Republic Steel Corporation. He was ordained by the Presbytery of New York in 1959 and was Minister of Youth at the Hitchcock Presbyterian Church in Scarsdale until 1962 when he joined the staff of the First Congregational Church in Wauwatosa. In September, 1963, he succeeded the Rev. Dr. Arthur Acy Rouner as Minister of the Cadman Memorial Church in Brooklyn, New York.

If a Congregational clergyman discusses the problem of "ministerial standing" at all, he does so only when there is absolutely nothing else to talk about. Or when he has agreed to perform a marriage for which he needs a permit and the Deputy Clerk in charge of Ministers at the City Hall tells him to bring a denominational yearbook or something with his name in it to prove that he is, indeed, a minister. The National Association has such a yearbook, which lists member Churches and their ministers, and although this often satisfies the Deputy Clerk, it does not officially grant standing to the ministers listed therein, because the National Association does not at this time grant such standing. There are those who insist that ministers continuing in the Congregational Way, having forfeited the standing once given them by Congregational Associations or, in the case of those who have left other denominations, by Presbyteries, Conferences and the like, are no longer ministers in the full sense of the word. They are saying, in effect, that neither ordination nor the possession of a pastoral charge makes a man a minister but that he must have the official recognition of some body outside the local Church competent to grant standing. Some Congregational ministers apparently agree that this is the case and have either maintained their memberships in Associations which are now acting as Associations of the United Church of Christ, or have formed new Associations.

In his book ironically titled *The Law of Congregational Usage*, William F. Barton wrote in 1915 that the view "formerly held, that membership in a Congregational Association had nothing to do with ministerial standing . . . became thoroughly obsolete under the ruling of the National Council in 1886." Barton's thesis is that the custom and practice of early New England Congregationalism, which gave to the local Church the power to ordain and install its minister and to declare to the community that this man was officially a minister, had given way through a process of necessary evolution to a system under which these powers were reserved to Associations of ministers who, in Barton's words, are responsible for "guarding the door of entrance to the Congregational ministry." Strange language, in the literature of the autonomous Churches.

Necessarily or not, Congregational polity certainly did evolve in these past two hundred years, and at the time of the merger controversy was hardly distinguishable from the polity of presbyterian Churches. Those of us who have welcomed the rebirth of the free Church are, in a sense, without recent precedent as we seek to work out our understanding and practice in this area. Shall we accept the "necessity of evolution" and continue in the patterns drawn by the pre-merger Congregational Churches, or shall we seek a way that will best affirm and implement the freedom that we have won?

When I cast my lot with the National Association in 1962, I asked the Presbytery to which I belonged to dismiss me, not to the National Association, but to the local Church which I was to serve. It neither surprised nor disturbed me that the Presbytery refused to do this, for I felt then and still do that I am a minister because I have been ordained and because the gathered members of a Church have elected me to minister to them and with them. *This is all the standing that I require.* I am a minister because the people who share that ministry with me declare that I am. And the people who share my ministry most immediately are the members of my Church, not my fellow ministers. The free and autonomous Church can join in association with other Churches for fellowship and for any number of cooperative purposes, but it ought not to delegate to such an association its responsibilities concerning the ordained ministry. A Congregational minister is a member

of the Church he serves. More important, his ministry has meaning only in the context of that local Church where he is one of the people of God, where he meets needs, and where his needs are met.

When the Board of Deacons of the Cadman Memorial Church decided last fall to plan a Service of Installation for me, I spent a good deal of time considering my ministry in terms of my Church and I shared these concerns with the Board. Installation services have troubled me in the past because they tend to stress the role and the position of the ordained minister while generally ignoring or touching only superficially the relationship that exists between him and his people. American Protestantism has suffered and continues to suffer from this emphasis of the importance of the minister. It was my desire to stress the ministry of the whole Church—a ministry which involves the man in the pew as well as the man in the pulpit, each contributing to every area of the Church's work in accordance with his training and ability. *No group of ministers from other Churches, however friendly and sympathetic, could properly fulfill this commission.* The responsibility was obviously that of the gathered members of the Cadman Church, and it was one that could not be passed on to others.

Acting on these basic principles, the Board proceeded to arrange a Service of Rededication, to which neighboring ministers and laymen would be invited. But the service was to be led by the people of the Church. The purpose of the service was to challenge the congregation to understand and to accept the critical situation in which the Church finds itself in 1965 and the mission that will be ours in the years ahead. A young Deacon, Joseph H. Brown III, whose parents have been active members for 40 years and who was himself baptized in the Church, agreed to preach a sermon which would underline the responsibility of every Church member to pick up his share of the burden which God has placed upon us. After the sermon, I committed myself to the people to do those things which are primarily, if not uniquely, my responsibilities, and Mrs. E. A. Callaghan, speaking

for the congregation, committed her fellow members to work at this ministry with me. The service ended with a Litany of Rededication.

Those who were present at this service heard a realistic and totally un sentimental appraisal of the Church's condition and mission from the lips of a man whose interest in the Church is not professional. He said things that people expect the minister to say, but they could not dismiss them as easily as they might have had the minister said them. He told them that each one of them was like the rock on which Christ would build his Church and that none of them could evade this burden. He described the Church as that agency through which God works in this world and he set the minister in the midst of the people, leading them while at the same time seeking their leadership. The service generally had the effect of focussing the concern of the people not on the pulpit, nor on the traditions of the past, but on their common responsibility for the vital future of the Church itself.

Free Churches, using their freedom, may from time to time disgrace the ministry by calling incompetent or immoral men to their pulpits and granting them standing. That is our inherent weakness. But we can prevent the debasement of Congregational principles by *taking the risks of freedom* and by guarding it zealously. That is our greatest strength, and it is worth preserving.



Dr. Butman with the Rev. and Mrs.
John Tremaine

MODERATOR'S STATEMENT

at the ORDINATION OF JOHN K. TREMAINE

KILOLANI CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Kihei, Maui, Hawaii

December 5, 1965

by The Rev. Harry R. Butman, D.D.

What has taken place today is a rare thing in modern Congregationalism—an ordination by a local Church without a vicinage council. This ordination, which is valid within the bounds of this Church, and as long as the pastoral relation shall last, has deep historical roots. The first ordinations on American soil were those of Pastors Skelton and Higginson of the Church in Salem, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1628. These men were already ordained Church of England clergymen, but being persuaded that ordination by the hands of a bishop was scripturally invalid, they submitted to reordination by the local Church, with hands laid on their heads by laymen, chief of whom was John Endicott, governor of the Colony.

While early Congregationalism, in such basic documents as the Cambridge Platform published in 1649, and the account of the constituting of Second Church, Hartford, in 1669—particularly in the second and third articles—defended the position that Church power was resident only in the local Church, it was soon seen that the exercise of the power of ordination was most wisely done when sister Churches were called together to aid the local Church with affectionate counsel. Thus *the vicinage council*—a gathering of the Churches of the neighborhood—came into being. But whenever in the course of the centuries, the vicinage council, or the local association sitting as a council, attempted to exercise ecclesiastical authority over the Churches, the Churches resisted these encroachments on their rights. Famous cases resulted from these attempted impositions of external control. When Horace Bushnell was virtually excommunicated by the Hartford North Association for writing his revolutionary book, *Christian Nurture*, his Church was a strong tower of defense to him; when the Brooklyn Association attempted to unfrock Henry Ward Beecher, Plymouth Church stood by its preacher; when the Suffolk West Association refused to install George A. Gordon because of his liberal theological views, Old South Church in Boston went ahead in its own right. Statements like the one in the 1947 Congregational manual, which declared in effect that the Churches delegated the powers of ordination and installation to the larger bodies of the fellowship, rest upon the flimsiest of historical foundations. I would like to see a single record of a Church which actually called a meeting for the express purpose of giving away power, and proceeded to do so by formal vote. What actually happened was that pastors and associations picked up and kept a treasure the Churches had ceased to value.

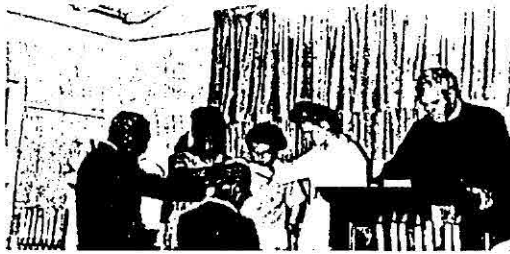
During the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly after 1913, the local associations and the state conferences began to develop great ecclesiastical authority. This was seldom reflected in the formal instruments—the charters and constitutions. It was not in the documents, but in the usages, that the gradual accretions of centralized power began to be manifested. We make no effort to explicate the process in detail save to say that whereas originally the neighboring Churches simply *assisted* the local Church in ordaining, it came to pass that the power of ordination became vested solely in the association, to the hurt of true Congregationalism. In practice, and in the thinking of many pastors, Congregationalism became semi-Presbyterianism. In the great merger struggle, control of the associations became essential to the promotion of the union, and every effort was made to turn the association into a presbytery, which could exert powerful leverage on stubborn Churches and pastors, and carry large Churches into the merger by majority vote of the association. By the time of the gathering of the National Association in 1955, it was clearly recognized that any power in the hands of a regional or national body was a violation of classical Congregationalism, in which the seat of power is in the local Church and in the local Church alone. In 1956 the Commission on the Ministry proposed to the Annual Meeting in Los Angeles that the historic right of a local Church to ordain be voted as National Association policy. This was done, and so remains. It must be granted that a local Church can make an unwise use of this power, but this is an inherent risk of freedom and must be faced.



Left to right: Old Mission Home 1821, Printing House 1823,
Chamberlain House 1828. Honolulu, Hawaii.

It must ever be remembered that Congregationalism has two basic principles: the independence and autonomy of the local Church, and the fellowship of the Churches. The local Church has the power to do as it pleases under its own roof; it does not have the power to impose its will on other Free Churches. With the power of self-government, it has also the duty of fellowship with other Churches; it must live and work with them, and have a proper regard for their good opinions. This is an exceedingly complex and delicate relationship, and enough problems concerning ministerial training, ordination, and standing have arisen in the first decade of National Association existence to necessitate the formation of a Revision Committee to study the Articles of Association and Bylaws with a view to the easing of these problems. This committee, consisting of two laymen and a pastor—a professor, a lawyer, and the present speaker—is already at work. Congregational freedom forbids the writing of hard and fast rules which limit the power and completeness of the local Church under the Headship of Christ. On the other hand, Congregationalism is not anomic, lawless, anarchistic. Essential things must be done decently and in an order, which is subject, not to the legalisms of a book of discipline, but to the Spirit. One possible key to our problem is the concept of acceptance. A local Church may be and do what it will, but the sister Churches have the right to decide whether or not they will accept that Church and approve its actions. Full and essential Congregationalism is more than local autonomy: Congregationalism is not separatism or independency, with each Church starkly isolated. As simple as this truth is, many pastors, scholars, and officials have forgotten it, or ignore it. Therefore, it must be incessantly said that our way is a way of fellowship in which Churches and pastors walk together in a free relation of affection. In a day of en-massment and conformity and ever-increasing rules, we must tirelessly proclaim our unique witness of freedom and fellowship.

In this infant Church in Kihei we have revived a great tradition. Because Christ said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," we are bold to declare that where there is a covenanted gathering of the faithful, however small, assembled in Christ's name, there is a true, essential, and complete Church. This is the spiritual core, the very lifeblood of Congregationalism. By its power men and women of long ago braved the anger of kings and bishops and proud prelates. This power lives today. John Kaena Tremaine has been ordained a local minister by an ancient and valid Congregational usage. The Church power exercised here this afternoon is the same which was displayed in far-off yesterdays in the white-steepled meetinghouses on the granite hills of old New England. God grant that all which has been done today in this little Church by the palm-fringed sea may be to His glory, to the advancement of the Congregational cause, and to the hastening of the dawn of the blessed tomorrow of Christ's kingdom. ●



"Laying on of Hands"

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

Ordination Service of John K. Tremaine

The meeting convened immediately following a short opening worship service, called to order by Mrs. Carol Szakacs, Church clerk. All members of this Church were present, the company of fellow worshippers of Maui Churches was about 127. A brother Deacon of Mr. Tremaine's from Kawaihau Church, Honolulu offered the constituting prayer in Hawaiian.

A presentation of the records of this Church was made, showing Mr. Tremaine had been called by a full and unanimous membership vote to become their ordained pastor with service limited to this Church, on August 8, 1965. Mr. Tremaine was next asked for his credentials, and these containing proof of membership, and other facts pertaining to his service in this Church, were accepted. A vote was carried acclaiming both the records and the credentials.

Mr. Tremaine then gave a full statement of his life, his background in the Church, his education, his historic and Church affiliated ancestors, his service in the Churches and this present Church, his aims and hopes for the future, and his dedication to our Congregational standards and fellowship in this Church and others of the islands and the mainland.

Examination of Mr. Tremaine was brief, with only two questions. Being satisfactorily answered, a vote was unanimously accepted upon this examination.

Members then proceeded to the act of ordination. Prayerful responses were made to the solemn charges read to Mr. Tremaine and the members by Dr. Butman. Then as members gathered for the "laying on of hands" upon their pastor, John Tremaine, Dr. Butman gave the beautiful Ordination Prayer.

After Dr. Butman extended the right hand of fellowship, Mr. Tremaine was presented his ministerial robe, a gift from his Church. A Bible, gift of a dear friend, now deceased, was dedicated to Mr. Tremaine's use in his service as minister of this Church.

Dr. Butman gave a clear statement regarding the centuries old polity of Congregationalism, as it has originated from the times of the first New England and Virginia Churches. Faced with circumstances of obtaining a minister, when none were available, they chose from their ranks—and this has been decreed by the Congregational fellowship as still a rightful and legal method today, and entirely plausible for the position of Kilolani Church which stands free, alone and isolated from services by any other Congregational Pastor. Dr. Butman's statement on practice and policy of Congregationalism in its rightful usage was a source of enlightenment and inspiration to both Kilolani Church and the many island Churches of Congregational faith represented there that day.

A vote was carried to close this meeting. Rev. Tremaine then proceeded to administer the sacrament of Holy Communion to those present. The closing hymn for the day was "Nu-Oli!" Sung in Hawaiian, the words mean "Glad Tidings" and it is a favorite song of great joy in all Hawaiian Gatherings.

Submitted in faith to our members and our fellowship

Carol A. Szakacs, Church Clerk, Scribe.

A CONGREGATIONALIST PONDERES THE MATTER of ORDINATION AND THE MINISTRY

The Reverend Erwin A. Britton, D.D.
First Congregational Church
of Detroit

Thirty-six years ago I was ordained to the Christian ministry. I was the first candidate to be ordained by the Medina Association (Ohio) sitting as an Ecclesiastical Council. In the light of subsequent events, I should be prouder to claim that I had been the last person to be ordained by the First Congregational Church of Avon Lake, Ohio, which I was then serving as student minister, in concurrence with the Association or a Council of the Vicinage. The strong pressures brought to bear on me to be ordained by the Association were generated from those same sources and ideologies which sought in later years to make over the nature of Congregationalism into something quite different from and foreign to its historic polity.

Interest in the whole subject of ordination, by whom, under what authority, bestowing what privileges, how terminated and related issues, has been rekindled by my serving on our Association's Credentials Committee, by discussion with colleagues considering ordination and by the recent controversy surrounding the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church. While I shall make further reference to that controversy — because it raises some interesting questions — my chief concern is to discuss the subject of ordination from the point of view of Congregationalists, to examine some of our positions and procedures in our past and to present some conclusions which I believe are valid in our current situation.

Webster thus defines the verb *to ordian*; "to invest officially (as by the laying on of hands) with ministerial or sacerdotal authority." The word *ordain* itself suggests or-

der. It refers to the orderly transfer of ministerial or priestly authority. Ordination rites are supported by venerable Old Testament tradition, New Testament sanction and through many generations, carefully spelled-out procedures in canon law and custom. It is, then, basically a procedure. Historically in the Christian community it has been a procedure for assuring that the churches will be led by persons of competence, character, godliness; that the ministers thus chosen will be truly shepherds who will lead and defend the flock rather than wolves who will devour it.

After dealing with a host of nettlesome problems in the Corinthian congregation, including the place of women and speaking in tongues, the Apostle Paul declares, "but all things should be done decently and in order." (I Cor. 15:40) The process of ordination grows out of that kind of concern.

Let me begin by pointing to a couple of Old Testament references. The transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua is recorded in Numbers 27:18ff. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hands upon him; cause him to stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority that all the congregation of the people of Israel shall obey'... And Moses did as the Lord commanded him... And laid his hands upon him, and commissioned him as the Lord directed through Moses." Ordination as here described is commissioning or investing with certain authority and *in the presence of the congregation* a person in whom the spirit is already manifest. Temporal authority, then, is transmitted by the act of laying on of hands. But spiritual authority or divine sanction had preceded that act.

The investiture of Elisha by Elijah seems not to have been even that formal. Elisha was in his field plowing with twelve yoke of oxen when Elijah passed by and cast his mantle upon him. (I Kings 19:19ff.) As described the act seemed very casual. Apparently Elisha's authority was initially only that of a deputy, and he did not come into full command until Elijah's transfer to heaven via the fiery chariot. What is distressing about the story is that the newly-acquired responsibility and authority of the prophet did not seem to improve either his self-image or his disposition. When taunted by some small boys on the subject of his baldness, "He cursed them in the name of the Lord, and two she bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys." (II Kings 2:23ff.)

In what may be a fifth Servant Song (Isaiah 61:1-6, there is the suggestion that Zion's mission, when fulfilled, designates "that [her people] shall be called the priests of the Lord, and men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God." (Was the prophet anticipating those of our contemporary churches which list as "ministers" all members of the congregation, with special assignments to the staff?)

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible states that, "the Jews did not make a doctrine out of succession, or stress the need of an uninterrupted series of ordinations." Nor did the Early Christians appear to have such an interest either, being more concerned with the eschatological hope of the early return of their Lord from heaven. It was the threat of schism and the rise of heretical teaching which created the concern for an identifiable succession of leaders with authority to speak for and preserve the faith, "delivered once and for all to the saints." This felt need for specially appointed leaders to define and defend the

