

Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

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

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be wakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

The Report of

A STUDY BY

THE COMMITTEE ON

FREE CHURCH POLITY AND UNITY

To

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN

CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES

(The position of the Committee on Free Church Polity and Unity concerning the nature of this study is stated in the Foreword. This study complies with the resolution adopted by the General Council on June 24, 1950. You are urged to read the Foreword with care. It will be found on page x.)

JUNE 1954

This Report is for

INFORMATION ONLY

It does not carry the approval
or disapproval of the General
Council or its Executive Committee



The Spiritual and Theological Basis of Congregationalism as Related to Christian Unity

THE ESSENCE of Congregationalism cannot be found adequately in documents, even in its own documents. Rather it is to be found and seen most clearly in the direction and quality and character of its spirit. Congregationalism is a definite type of Christian experience, finding visible practical expression in our churches and in our polity. Thus our church life, our polity and our organizational structure are finally not of codification, but they are of the spirit. And they have both a surprising, long-term uniformity and a surprising flexibility in the midst of continually changing circumstances.

As the surrounding secular life becomes highly organized so that there are strong institutional pressures in politics and in religion, the authoritative, spiritual freedom of uncoded Congregationalism appears to be at a disadvantage. Actually its lack of rigidity and codification, and its freedom from ecclesiastical centralization are among its greatest strengths. Congregationalism is not the helpless prisoner of its form of polity in this rapidly changing crisis-ridden world. Rather because of our freedom and our lack of rigidity we can ever be ready for frontier adventures in Christian fellowship and in making a Christian impact on the surrounding society. Indeed such ventures have been among our distinctive deeds on the brightest pages of our history in nearly every generation.

Congregationalism is a present day living witness to the continuous on-going existence of a particular pattern of Christian experience and practice which has definite New Testament rootage. It is not accurate to say that the New Testament gives little substantiation for our kind of polity. To acknowledge New Testament validation for it is no more to be avoided than to claim New Testament validation for our personal relationship with Christ, for our polity grows out of that particular relationship. In the New Testament, patterns for carrying on the work of the

fellowship of the churches are seen coming into existence. Certainly the kind of organization and the kind of institutional patterns now utilized by the various churches — from the Roman Catholic Church practices to some of our own patterns — were at that time not envisioned. This is not to say that our institutional life and our organizational patterns are wrong. But where any organizational pattern and institutional life tends to dilute basic Christian experience and prime Christian relationships, then we who believe that our pattern corresponds closely with early New Testament experience have an obligation to re-examine the primary sources of our way and to judge what we do and what we should be doing in their light.

Congregationalism believes that the church begins with redeemed individuals. We do not become Christian by the acceptance of the content of any document or by any ecclesiastical ceremony. Rather we become Christian through our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That experience in which we find in Him our Saviour and our Lord brings us into closest fellowship with Him, and it brings us also into fellowship with others of like experience, so that we come to know the strengthening experience of the fellowship that is His church. In that relation, the experience which first brought us into the fellowship of the church is further purified and re-enforced.

As Christian people our primary relationship is to God in Christ, for it is in that relationship that we are saved. It is because of this relationship that we are part of Christ's church, and not vice versa. Our first and our final loyalty is to God in Christ, the Christ Who is the Head of the church. Our final authority is in Him, and He is always our final court of appeal beyond clergy or ecclesiastical judgment or legal compulsion.

Thus Congregationalism as a pattern of Christian life and experience, in the churches and for the individual, centers in our relation to Christ as the Head of the Church, in our acceptance of the Holy Spirit as guide and source of power and in our belief in the priesthood of all believers. Out of these basic New Testament experiences and convictions come our life, our witness, and also whatever authority we have — the one over the other — the body of believers over the individual believers — and the believers over the body of believers.

We believe that such a gathered group, gathered around the Christ Who said "wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst," has an essential completeness about it, so that the local church is the Church Universal, visible before men at a particular time and at a particular place. Thus the church is not present, nor does it come into being, because there is a minister, or a building, or a bishop, or an ecclesiastical administrative office. The church is where two or three are gathered together in His name.

Congregationalism believes that the church is both local and universal. While the one aspect is not to be stressed at the expense of the other, Congregationalism has always been sensitively aware of the danger of losing sight of the completeness of the local church, which within itself

compasses both the local and the universal. For that reason, while we have emphasized the fellowship (and it is fellowship in Christ), we have insisted on the fact of the autonomy of the local church. This complete autonomy is not a secular permit "to do as we please." This autonomy rests upon a specific binding religious experience — a seeking of and a following of the guidance of the Holy Spirit by the people of this gathered church.

Congregational Christians do not set a doctrinal test as a condition of admission to the covenanting church. This fact is a recognition that no Christian has the right, under God, to exclude another Christian from the church because in his devotion to Christ and in his experience of Christ there are differences in the expression of that experience and devotion. The Congregational Christian Churches have felt that to impose such a test is to distort the relationship between a man and his God made known in Christ. But always the relation between the believers is the binding relationship of having covenanted together in Christ to be Christ's men and women.

(Thus the congregational pattern does the difficult thing of keeping the door of Christian fellowship open to admit into one fellowship sincere followers of Christ between whom there may be wide differences of Christian experience and practice.)

"The glory of our Congregationalism is that we refuse to make the Church of our Lord a theological sect. Our position, which has grown gradually clear through the centuries, has been that the basis of fellowship is common experience of Christ and not identity of thought about Him . . . That exclusion of fellow-Christians would be schism . . . This is the trust that has come down to us, and a stewardship for which in our day we have responsibility; the stewardship of the Church Universal, to save the Church from becoming a sect . . ." (J. S. Griffith, *The Congregational Quarterly*, April 1939, pp. 189 f.)

Congregationalism acknowledges that its experience and practice are one among many, for among the redeemed followers of Christ there are variants and variations in Christian experience and practice. Congregationalism does not deny the reality of any man's claim for his Christian experience, nor the reality of any Church's claim for its Christian experience and practice — if the fruits of Christian deed and character mark them — and if these claims are not exclusive in character implying that they shut other believers off from some essential phase of God's grace and blessing. Congregationalism recognizes, following the New Testament, that it is the same Lord, living, crucified and reigning eternally, the same baptism, the same faith, the same Word, the same forgiveness, the same promise of salvation for this life and the next. We do not find in the New Testament any divine command about exclusiveness or uniformity of experience and of practice when Christ's brethren gather together; but we do find an acknowledgement of the validity of variance, and we find an assurance of strength in the variance, if the units of gathered Christians are directed by a genuine desire for the fulfillment of Christ's purpose. For the units (varying in experience and in practice) are the acknowledged parts of His body, without the parts being able to

claim Christian preference for themselves. And certainly He grants no preference the one over the other — the hand, the foot, the eye. Congregational Christians believe in the equality of the churches!

The belief of congregational churches has been that the gathered church could choose and set aside its own leadership. The man who was consecrated and set aside for this leadership was one who believed that he had been called by God, and in his own living he had given evidence of that fact. In setting him aside the gathered church asked for him a special endowment of God's grace. At the same time he was not regarded as being set aside in a special order called "the clergy" so that he differed in character from so-called "laity." We believe that under these circumstances a man is truly ordained for the ministry of Christ. Even though we may now modify this pattern by calling in the association of churches, the root of the authenticity of our ordination is the power of the local church thus to set a man aside. And today the ecclesiastical standing which the ordained receive are recognitions, not spiritual power-giving relationships. And the authority which this man has in the church is the authority which the people give to him freely because of the Christian character and quality of his leadership among them.

That which is "sacrosanct about the autonomy of the local congregation" comes in the fact that this self-governance arises out of the primary relation of the people with Jesus Christ, in their obedience to sought direction by the Holy Spirit and in their insistence that they as a fellowship, the Church, are representative in time and place of the Church of Jesus Christ, Universal. Therefore those who are of this local fellowship insist that in matters of faith and order and final administrative procedure there is no council or other body or person with the ecclesiastical or legal right of compulsive authority over them. Such authority as exists within the congregational order is the authority of persuasion, suggestion, advice and willing cooperation, which come as the churches of our fellowship work and plan together (on association, state and national levels), seeking a more effective Christian witness and a more enriched Christian experience.

This practice of fellowship without compulsion exerts the most profound demands both on churches and on people. It is perhaps the most difficult of all church patterns to fulfill. Indeed in this life it can never be completely fulfilled. It asks for the highest standard of Christian living, for there must be a desire and a willingness on the part of individuals and of churches to do of their own free will, in their own lives and in the life of the churches, for the sake of what they believe to be God's will, what some are willing to be compelled to do by denominational authority.

In the New Testament the word "church" is used 105 times, 86 times to refer to the local church and 18 times to refer to the universal church. It speaks of "the church in Corinth," and "the churches in Galatia"; it says "Christ loved the church and gave himself for her," and "all the churches of Christ greet you." Congregationalism uses and insists upon this terminology. As it uses this terminology (following what

it believes is the New Testament pattern), it testifies to a "wholeness" and to a universality in the life of the individual local church, a kind of wholeness which churches of the presbyterial order and of the episcopal order do not concede to the individual local church.

Our earliest pattern of church life had no denominational name. Our churches were called simply "the Church of Christ in _____." Our fathers did not want the church ever to be less than the whole Church of Jesus Christ. Congregationalism, believing that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, has always drawn the conclusion that in that fact there is already an established unity of the Church and of the churches. It has steadfastly refused to believe that there was any additional organic connection created with other churches through church officers or through church organization. The unity in which our fathers were interested was essentially the concept of the body of Christ which includes all other bodies who claim Christ as Lord. Thus we are not exclusive, we are inclusive in our understanding of the Church Universal. And no person from any other Christian Church is excluded from membership or from the Lord's Table because of differences in creed, in nationality or in ecclesiastical form. The acceptance and the fulfillment of this inclusive pattern of church life is not a specious refuge from the active sharing of life together between ourselves and other churches of other denominations — in fact, in its inclusiveness it bears a most significant testimony within the Protestant Churches, and is a most valuable contribution to the prospect of the fulfillment in practice of the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Today there is a world struggle, religious as well as national, between the claims of centralization and the claims of an authentic individualism. Over the generations, congregationalism has been a champion of individualism. As to whether or not we continue to support the importance of the individual, and to show that the individual and the small gathered group can function adequately amid today's pressures toward centralization, will depend upon how important we feel are our local autonomy and our understanding of what the fellowship of the churches is, and on how far-reaching we understand our experience of the Church Universal to be.

This type of church life has been described as "the most courageous and most scriptural venture of faith possible to Christian communities, for it takes the promises of God seriously and depriving believers of all external support or control, casts them wholly upon the Spirit. The depths to which it can fall corresponds to the heights to which it aspires. It gives full practical expression to the undeniable scriptural view that the church is the people, and holds it better to run all risks than to sacrifice the principle which makes the congregation of believers responsible for the quality of their own spiritual life." (K. L. Carrick Smith, *The Church and the Churches*, p. 29.)

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IV • 4

Free Church Polity and Unity

Congregational Polity as it is Currently Practiced in the United States

CONGREGATIONAL POLITY in the United States is more than the principles and procedures set forth in the charters, constitutions or other fundamental documents of the churches and their wider agencies. It is *also* the commonly accepted practices followed by those churches and agencies in their relations to each other, and to their shared objectives and work. Therefore, the Committee desires to add to its report a statement of "Congregational Polity as it is Practiced in the United States."

Beginning at its initial meeting in 1950 the Committee on Free Church Polity and Unity has sought to find a means whereby Congregationalism as *presently practiced* in the United States might fairly be described without regard to whether or not these practices might be subject to challenge by councils, churches, or by the courts. An extensive and carefully devised questionnaire was sent to a large number of correspondents in many states early in 1951, but the results were most inconclusive. Attention was next given to discussions held by widely representative geographic panels, on the basis of the "Questions to be Answered" which is also a part of this report of your committee. Then, prior to the 1952 meeting of the General Council, it was decided to seek description of "Congregational polity as it is practiced in the United States" (1) by widespread request for reports of all significant deviations from Congregational polity as presented in the "Statement" which was made on the basis of our constitutional documents; (2) by personal request by letter to all state superintendents, all panel chairmen, and to such persons who were suggested to the committee by either of the above, (3) by personal discussion of our practices with as many Congregationalists as possible, and (4) by committee consideration of all available reports. It is the results of all these inquiries which form the basis of the following report on "Congregational Polity as it is Currently Practiced in the United States."

It should be further noted that the New England, South East, Mid-

west, North West and South West regional panels all have presented group reports, the results of which have contributed heavily to your committee's work. In all, written request was made to 146 persons, as individuals or as panel members. 140 replied. The second draft of this report was then sent to a group of 122, including panel chairmen, of whom 109 replied, many with lengthy and detailed suggestions for rewording.

In the course of their long history, the Congregational Christian Churches have issued occasional statements of polity. This section of our report is, therefore, a "dated" picture of the polity of our churches. It stands in the main stream of our long history, but does not establish a "church law" for Congregationalism. It is simply a description of Congregational practice, A.D. 1954, in the same sense as were the polity statements of prior Congregational Christian groups, e.g. the Cambridge Platform of 1648. This report describes Congregational Christian polity as it is currently practiced and does not presume to say whether or not *what is* is *what ought to be*. With these words of interpretation, we pay grateful acknowledgement to the following for their careful, detailed, and thoughtful responses to our request for guidance; but the committee itself is responsible for these statements.

Rev. Frederick W. Alden, N. H.
 Rev. Thomas Anderson, Ga.
 Rev. Everett A. Babcock, Ohio
 Rev. Z. F. Bednar, Vt.
 *Rev. Morrison R. Boynton, Mass.
 Prof. Harold R. Bruce, N. H.
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 Rev. Kenneth D. Claypool, Wash.
 Rev. Albert Buckner Coe, Mass.
 Rev. Arthur P. Colbourn, R. I.
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 Rev. Allen H. Gates, Mass.
 Rev. Royal J. Gibson, Okla.
 Rev. Thomas A. Goodwin, Minn.
 Mr. Roscoe W. Graves, Kans.
 Rev. Gerald G. Hallauer, Iowa
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 Rev. Richard Hulbert, Minn.
 Rev. John P. Jockinsen, Ill.
 Rev. Harry W. Johnson, Idaho
 Rev. James L. Lancaster, Mass.
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 Rev. James C. Marshall, Mass.
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 Mr. Norman S. McKendrick, N. H.
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 Rev. Paul B. Myers, Mass.
 Rev. N. F. Nordstrom, Ill.
 Rev. Jess H. Norenberg, Wis.
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 Rev. Jesse F. Perrin, Calif.
 Mrs. Hilmer Rud, Minn.
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 Rev. Leslie Rowe, N. H.
 Rev. L. M. Rymph, Kans.
 Rev. M. H. Sangree, N. Y.
 Rev. Walter Schlaretzki, Ill.
 Rev. David W. Sheperd, Ga.
 Rev. Clifford O. Simpson, Conn.
 Mr. M. O. Skarsten, Ore.
 Rev. Harold N. Skidmore, Mich.
 Rev. Richard Stoughton, Jr., N. H.
 * shared in study, but now deceased.

Rev. Cleon Swarts, Penn.
 Rev. Warren Wilder Towle, Mo.
 Rev. Edward S. Treat, N. Dak.
 Rev. William N. Tuttle, Fla.
 Rev. Edward J. Tyler, Vt.
 Mr. Walter L. Upton, Conn.
 Rev. Max H. Webster, Vt.
 Mr. Roger P. Welles, Conn.
 Prof. Hugh Vernon White, Calif.
 Rev. James Brewster Yee, Conn.

MIDWEST PANEL:

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 Rev. Raymond A. McConnell, Nebr.
 Rev. Robert Wilbur Simmons, Colo.)

NEW ENGLAND PANEL:

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 (Members of the panel:
 Rev. A. Vaughan Abercrombie, R. I.
 *Rev. Morrison R. Boynton, Mass.
 Rev. Wilbur Irving Bull, Maine
 Rev. Albert Buckner Coe, Mass.
 Rev. Thomas J. W. Cornish, Maine
 Prof. Edward Curtis Dahl, Conn.
 Rev. John N. Feaster, N. H.
 Rev. Frederick D. Hayes, Maine
 Rev. Ned Burr McKenney, N. H.
 Rev. George W. Owen, Mass.
 Mr. Edward Perry, Mass.
 Rev. Rockwell H. Potter, Conn.
 Rev. Rodney W. Roundy, Maine
 Rev. Joseph J. Russell, Mass.
 Rev. Clifford Oliver Simpson, Conn.
 Rev. Burton B. Smith, Mass.
 Rev. Marshall M. Stevenson, N. H.
 Rev. Arthur E. Wilson, R. I.)

NORTHWEST PANEL:

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 (Members of the panel:
 Rev. Hubert A. Bahr, Idaho
 Rev. Carl Baird, Wash.
 Mr. Herbert Erickson, Wash.
 Mr. Lowell Larson, Wyo.
 Rev. Thomas McCamant, Ore.
 Mrs. A. G. Naundorf, Wash.
 Mr. Egbert S. Oliver, Ore.
 Rev. Clinton E. Ostrander, Wash.

Rev. George A. Pollard, Idaho
 Mrs. Fred S. Richards, Ore.
 Rev. Arthur W. Seebart, Mont.)

SOUTHEAST PANEL:

Rev. Roy C. Helfenstein, Va.
 (Members of the panel:
 Rev. Thomas A. Anderson, Ga.
 Rev. Jesse H. Dollar, Va.
 Rev. Robert Lee House, N. C.
 Rev. Carl Heath Kopf, Washington, D. C.
 Rev. Thomas J. Moore, Va.
 Rev. Louis Schulz, Fla.
 Rev. W. Millard Stevens, Va.
 Rev. Duane Vore, Va.
 Rev. Robert S. Whitten, Va.
 Mrs. W. B. Williams, Va.)

SOUTHWEST PANEL:

Rev. Ralph D. Hyslop, Calif.
 (Members of the panel:
 Mr. William H. Davis, Calif.
 Rev. Herbert C. Gans, Calif.
 Rev. George W. Haskell, Calif.
 Mr. Otto Knudsen, Calif.
 Rev. Raymond A. Waser, Calif.
 Rev. John C. Wiley, Calif.)

COMMENTS RECEIVED IN REPLY TO 1951 QUESTIONS AND FURTHER REPLY RECEIVED IN 1954:

Rev. David N. Beach, Conn.
 Rev. Robert I. Blakesley, Mass.
 Dr. Harold R. Browne, Penna.
 Rev. Harry R. Butman, Calif.
 Rev. Thomas J. W. Cornish, Maine
 Rev. Andrew K. Craig, Iowa
 Mr. Gurney Edwards, R. I.
 Rev. John H. Gregg, Calif.
 Rev. N. Gupill, Mass.
 Rev. Frederick Hayes, Maine
 Mrs. Charles Haynes, Maine
 Rev. J. Henry Hornung, Kans.
 Mrs. Ellis L. Hemingway, N. J.
 Rev. Harry W. Johnson, Idaho
 Rev. Charles S. Jones, Vt.
 Rev. David J. Julius, Wash.
 Rev. John Dunster Kettelle, R. I.
 Rev. Harland G. Lewis, N. H.
 Rev. Winthrop M. Mager, Tex.

Rev. Ned B. McKenney, N. H.
 Rebecca Morton, Colo.
 Rev. George A. Pollard, Idaho
 Rev. C. Eugene Sill, Calif.
 *Rev. Frank Tishkins, Wyo.
 Rev. Edward Y. Vorba, Conn.
 Rev. Paul R. Walker, N. H.
 Rev. Alfred G. Walton, N. Y.

Rev. O. P. Warford, Idaho
 Rev. L. B. Wirt, Wyo.
 Rev. Williston Wirt, Calif.
 *shared in study, but now deceased.

There were in addition other correspondents from whom information was obtained.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. A Church may become a Congregational Christian Church in a variety of ways, but in all instances the church exists as an organized Christian fellowship prior to its recognition by the area association of Congregational Christian Churches (or Churches and Ministers). While the applicant body is not constituted a church by recognition, it is clearly understood among us that recognition establishes a responsible relationship between the applicant church and the association. To become recognized, an applicant body must be organized as a Christian Church, according to the principles of Congregational polity, must request recognition by an association, and must accept the responsibility of mutual counsel and advice.
2. A Congregational Christian Church has entered or may now enter the fellowship in one of the following ways:
 - a. By traditional relationship with other Congregational Christian churches, as in New England churches which pre-date the organization of associations.
 - b. By action of a local group of Christians who organize a church, and then apply for and receive membership in an association.
 - c. By action of a "community church" which applies for and receives membership in an association.
 - d. By action of a conference or association which initiates the organization of a local group into a church, after which the church then formally applies for and receives membership in an association.
3. A Congregational Christian church assumes complete freedom to determine its own covenant, basis of membership, statement of faith (if any), forms of worship, programs of religious education, ownership and administration of property, choice of minister or other leadership, programs of community service, fellowship, music, pastoral work, and all other local religious and civic activities. It is customary among us for the minister to preach the Word and administer the sacraments and holy rites, although the local church may call upon other members to fulfill any or all of these functions.
4. A Congregational Christian church calls its own minister, and in consultation with him, makes all business agreements associated with his acceptance of service as its minister. When a church requests a conference superintendent (or other officer) to help it to find a minister there is no permanent delegation of authority; the superintendent

ent simply makes a recommendation and brings minister and church together, while the church retains the sole power of decision in the matter.

5. A Congregational Christian church may request that an ecclesiastical council "install" or "recognize" an ordained minister as its pastor and teacher (or assistant pastor or minister of education or other ministerial officer), and this practice is now common among our churches. When the council is called by action of an association, at the request of the local church (which is a widespread practice), the minister's recognition or installation by the council also gives him ministerial standing in the association. When the council is called by action of the local church, acting for itself, the minister applies to an association for ministerial standing therein, even though he is the minister of a local Congregational Christian church. The vicinage council called by action of the local church is in as good favor among us as the associational council.
6. A Congregational Christian church may license or ordain its own candidates for the ministry, but while the right to do so is maintained, occurrence is rare; and a locally licensed or ordained minister may exercise his ministry only in a local church which recognizes him as a minister. His local license or ordination does not confer ministerial standing in an association.
7. A Congregational Christian church, or "ecclesiastical society," normally holds title to its property in its own right, and exercises its own discretion in the administration of all its real property or financial interests. But it is now the practice of some churches to place title to their property in the care of the state conference or of one of the national boards, and, in several states, all real and personal property of an extinct church becomes the property of the state religious body with which the church was associated. When title to property is vested in a state conference or national board the local church is entirely free to use the property as it desires, except that the property must continue to be used by a Congregational Christian church. However, the building department mortgage application forms and the administrative rules of the Board of Home Missions and of certain conferences require that a church receiving loans, grants, or other financial aid perform such acts as consultation regarding choice of a pastor, pledge annually to the building department, conduct business affairs in a systematic manner, insure and repair the church property, and remain in fellowship with the denomination.
8. A Congregational Christian church voluntarily accepts responsibilities in connection with the life and work of the associations, conferences, councils, boards, and other organizations outside itself. The local church in our fellowship ordinarily takes its responsibilities to wider agencies quite seriously, particularly with reference to (a) representation at meetings, (b) financial contributions, and (c) dissemination of information. Persuasion is the only authority exerted on a local church.

to accept responsibilities in wider bodies. There is general recognition of the fact that united efforts to further over-all objectives can do much for the cause of Christ which the local church cannot do alone.

9. A Congregational Christian church voluntarily gives to agencies beyond itself the authority to act on its behalf for the achievement of specific objectives, e.g. home missions, foreign missions. Any authority delegated by a Congregational Christian church to any other body or person can be withdrawn by the local church.

THE ASSOCIATION

(Sometimes called a "local conference," "union," or "district association.")
(There are 259 associations listed in the 1952 yearbook.)

10. An association of Congregational Christian churches is a voluntary fellowship of churches, or churches and ministers. The large majority of associations are unincorporated. All meetings of an association are composed of delegates (or "messengers") from the associated churches. A good number also extend membership to all ordained Congregational Christian ministers who hold standing in the association. Most associations are geographically contiguous.
11. An association ordinarily meets at least once a year. The chief business relates to questions concerning church or ministerial membership. In addition, addresses are given, usually by representatives of the conference, missionary boards, or other agencies of Christian life and work beyond the local church. Worship, fellowship, mutual counsel, and sometimes common action form the substance of the association meeting.
12. An association meeting attracts the attendance of delegates by virtue of (a) the sense of responsibility to attend on the part of the local church (b) the fairly common rule (frequently unenforced) that ministers must annually report to the association in person or in writing in order to retain ministerial standing, (c) the strength of the program for the meeting, and (d) the need for fellowship in areas where Congregational Christian churches are few in number. Attendance varies widely, with a majority of the churches represented at most meetings.
13. An association elects its own officers, establishes its own rules of procedure, writes its own constitution, is the custodian of the membership and credentials of its ministerial members, may hold and administer its own property, establishes its own rules for membership, chooses its own paid personnel (if any), plans its own program, and orders all its affairs.
14. The association credentials committee (variously named) is the body before which are brought matters relating to church or ministerial standing. In several conferences one or more of the associations has designated the conference, or a conference committee, to perform these functions on behalf of the association, e.g. Northern California, Vermont; and there are several states in which the conference and association are identical, e.g. Wyoming.

15. The association, acting on the advice of its credentials committee, and in response to the request of a local church, makes provision for the reception of churches into membership in the association, for the care of candidates for the ministry, for the installation or recognition of pastors, for the transfer of ministerial standing from association to association, and for the holding of associational councils in connection with all the aforementioned.
16. The association receives into fellowship as a Congregational Christian church a group of Christian people who have constituted themselves a congregationally organized church with (a) a constitution, (b) a roll of members, (c) officers, (d) a statement of Christian faith or purpose, (e) a stable business condition, and (f) provision for adequate leadership. Many associations, e.g. Hartford East, Connecticut, and Rockingham, New Hampshire, have no constitutional standards for recognition, but in practice apply the above-mentioned criteria.
17. When the association has received an applicant local church into its membership, listing as a Congregational Christian church follows. Such an acceptance into membership is the means by which a fellowship of churches organized as an association, admits new members, by determining whether or not the faith and order of the applicant body are in line with the main stream of our Congregational heritage, and whether or not the applicant body is ready to share with the Congregational Christian Churches in advancing the cause of Christ and of the fellowship of the churches, in so far as conscience will permit. Acceptance into the fellowship has a dual character among us: (1) The association acceptance of the applicant body into membership, and (2) the local church acceptance of the association as its agency of fellowship and concern.
18. The association may withdraw fellowship from a local church for spiritual and moral reasons. While other grounds are provided in our written documents, there appears to be no application of these in practice.
19. The association may cease to be the wider body in which a local church finds fellowship. The most widespread reason for this is change in the theological viewpoint of the local body, often because of changes in its ministry. Ordinarily, a sustained effort is made to keep the church in the fellowship, but when such efforts fail, and if there are no property rights of the association or other wider body involved, the association ceases to list the local church as a member. The church then is no longer listed by the conference or other wider agencies of the Congregational Christian fellowship.
20. The association is the chief agency of the churches for the holding of ministerial standing, and the general practice of our churches is to request the association to act as an ecclesiastical council in connection with "in care of association" status, licensure, ordination, installation or recognition. The applicant person is proposed to the association by the local church of which he is a member, a committee examines

him and/or his credentials, a council of the association is called (often jointly by local church and association), and the action of the council is automatically accepted as the action of the association.

21. The association is not bound to accept the ministerial standing conferred by a council which has been called by a local Congregational Christian church, acting apart from the association, even though the minister thus given standing may continue to exercise his ministry in whatever church is willing to accept him as its minister.
22. The association customarily accepts into membership a minister who has been ordained by another Congregational Christian association, even though its constitution stipulates its freedom to do otherwise.
23. The association examines applicant ministers whose standing is in non-Congregational Christian church bodies, and accepts them into membership unless there are strong moral, spiritual or educational reasons for doing otherwise.
24. The association, on request of a local church, calls a council for the installation or recognition of an ordained minister, and by action of this council, a minister is given standing in the association. There is among our churches no commonly accepted practice concerning the installing or the recognizing of an ordained minister, nor is there universal agreement as to its meaning. Larger churches or older churches generally hold such services, although not always as an ecclesiastical council, and often as a vicinage gathering. These services symbolize the local church's concern for the approbation of its sister churches, and indicate the interest of the fellowship in the well-being of the local church.
25. The association may act as an advisory council concerning any matter on which counsel is requested by a local church. This practice is very infrequent, but it is sometimes of great significance. It may result in "loss of standing" for a minister guilty of misconduct, or in "withdrawal of fellowship" from a church which "walks disorderly" (to use the time-honored phrase). The association has the right and duty to be responsible for the membership and credentials of the churches and ministers in its fellowship.
26. The association meeting is one of the chief means of communication between the churches and the wider agencies of the fellowship, since it is the churches assembled together in council. The association officers cooperate with the state conference leaders, and with the educational, missionary, service, or other wider agencies of the churches.
27. The association, its nature, functions and future, is a matter of widespread concern among the committee's correspondents. Few are satisfied with the association as it now functions, and many experiments are being made concerning: (a) matters of church and ministerial standing, (b) the relationship of association committees to those of the conferences, (c) the channeling of financial help to needy churches through the association, (d) the holding of meetings on Sundays, in the evenings, and at times which will encourage large lay attendance,

(e) the improvement of meeting programs, (f) the promotion of between-meeting fellowship and other activities, (g) the collection of an associational "per capita" contribution from member churches, (h) the merging of activities of the association with those of the state conference, and (i) the provision of travel-expense money for delegates in order to increase the ministerial and lay participation, particularly in such activities as councils of ordination.

THE STATE CONFERENCE

(Usually a legally incorporated body with salaried leadership. Sometimes called a "Convention" or "Union." With a few exceptions our correspondents report that the conference includes all local churches in a geographic area. There are 39 conferences listed in the 1952 year book.)

28. The state conference is an administrative agency of the churches, responsible to an annual meeting of delegates from the churches, and to a board of directors (sometimes differently titled) elected by the annual meeting delegates. The responsibilities possessed by the conferences are such as have been given to them by the churches which created and maintain them.
29. The state conference chief executive is the minister of the conference or superintendent (sometimes differently titled). He is responsible for general oversight of all the conference-wide work of the churches, and is often assisted by a professional staff, or by an office staff, or by both. The superintendent is expected to be "minister to the ministers" and counselor to the churches, especially in matters relating to the ministry. He represents the churches at denominational and interdenominational gatherings on the state level, and frequently in a metropolitan or on a national level. The General Council, the national boards and agencies, and the interdenominational bodies with which our churches are associated all regard the superintendent as the "key-man" through whose office their relations with the local churches are channeled. He is, by virtue of office, a full delegate to the General Council and a member of the Mid-Winter meetings (see below). The superintendent also serves as a liaison person for the churches in relation to governmental and private agencies engaged in socio-humanitarian or educational work. Often he serves as home missions director for the area, and always he is expected to give special advice and help in the development of home missionary projects.
30. The state conference exercises considerable influence among our churches by virtue of its representative character, and in proportion to the competency of its leadership, the adequacy of its financial resources, the cooperativeness of the constituent churches, and the nature of its geographic area. Its powers are administrative rather than ecclesiastical. For a great number of our churches it is the most important and influential link with the Congregational Christian fellowship.
31. The state conference is the cooperative agency of the associated

churches for church extension, missions, aid to weaker churches, social action, education, mutual counsel, ministerial training, standing and placement, investment of funds, holding of property, fellowship and other matters of area-wide concern. Therefore, the churches expect the officers of the conference to act on their behalf, with the power both to plan and to execute all that is necessary to accomplish the above-mentioned ends. The administrative power given to the conference by the Churches can be withdrawn by the Churches which gave it; either by action according to the conference articles of incorporation (in which case the entire program may be altered), or by individual church action (in which case the action taken is effective only for that particular church).

32. The state conference has no authority over the local church. Its present relation to the Churches is well described by Dr. Charles C. Merrill as follows: "This many-sided work is carried on without a book of discipline or a canon law, or a government. There is a minimum of authority. There is a maximum of fraternity. It is a fine illustration of what may be called 'free cooperation.'"
33. The state conference is a vital link in the organizational programs of the Fellowship of Congregational Christian Women, the Laymen's Fellowship, and the Pilgrim Fellowship for youth. The promotion of the national and conference missionary objectives, the calling of meetings for study and inspiration, and the holding of retreats, camps, or conferences constitute the main functions of the fellowships for men, women and youth. Often paid executive leadership is provided at the national and state levels. All three fellowships are national organizations. In addition the men and the women are organized throughout the world under the International Congregational Council.
34. The state conference is financed by endowments or gifts, but chiefly by the voluntary giving of local churches. "Goals" are suggested to churches by some conferences, but no church is known to have been refused full participation in the life and work of a conference because of failure to pay the per capita, apportionment, or other monies. The superintendents report unanimously that churches retain the right to give or to withhold financial support.
35. The state conference receives the financial support of the local churches for the purpose of carrying out specific objectives. Its stewardship of the monies given to it is governed by those objectives, and its stewardship accounting is made to the board of directors elected by the annual meeting of the conference and to the annual meeting itself. The conference is free to expend the monies entrusted to it in accord with its own rules of procedure. In every day practice our churches feel that they retain control over the state conference through delegates, directors, persuasion, and support or non-support. If monies are expended for purposes other than those designated in the articles of incorporation, constitution, by-laws or other fundamental document of the conference, such expenditures may be called in question by the

board of directors, the annual meeting, or by such legal processes as are provided by the individual state government with reference to violations of trust agreements.

36. The state conference, on request, acts on behalf of an association in such matters as (1) collection of an association per capita, and (2) making arrangements for speakers at association meetings (though in more than one state the association collects a per capita on behalf of the conference, e.g. Illinois.)
37. The state conference is the state-level administrative agency of the churches for specific and limited purposes just as the association is the area-wide agency of the churches for specific and limited purposes. State conferences possess written standards for membership of churches, and recognize themselves as the creation of the churches. Their relationship to the associations varies from the single example of the Southern Convention which has the right to "determine the bounds of local conferences" (i.e. associations), to the general practice of mutual voluntary agreement between conference and association concerning such matters as boundaries and functions. In practice, churches have re-aligned themselves into associations by mutual consent, without reference to the conference, and the churches of at least one association (Los Angeles) are considering re-grouping themselves into three new associations. In practice, a group of churches unite in an association and then arrange to participate in the life and work of a conference. The association is the only universally recognized credential-holding body among us, except in those instances where the conference, by specific request of an association or acting as an association exercises this power. While some conference constitutions speak of "recognizing" the associations, the word "recognizing" is not here used as a formal or legal term. Recognition means voluntary acceptance of responsibility for consultation, cooperation, and mutual helpfulness between the state level conference and the area-level association created by the churches as organs of common life and work in their respective spheres. The relationship between these organizations defies legal definition because its essence is the moral and spiritual concern of each unit for all other units. What is "recognized" is the moral and spiritual responsibility of a conference and an association which agree to walk with each other in ways of fellowship and service.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

38. The General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States is a voluntary national-level organization of the Congregational Christian Churches. Its purpose is stated in the documentary section, IV, 3.
39. The voting membership of the General Council is made up as indicated in the "documentary" section of this report.
40. The General Council meets "biennially in the even-numbered years, the exact time and place to be fixed by the Executive Committee,

unless otherwise ordered by the Council." Special meetings are called by the executive committee or when as many as seven state conferences request it. While the primary concern of the biennial meeting is the transaction of the business entrusted to the Council by the fellowship, consideration is also given to matters of common concern.

41. The Executive Committee of the General Council is composed of 18 elected members serving six-year terms, and the moderator, *ex officio*. It acts as the General Council *ad interim* and is required to make a full report of all its doings at biennial meetings. Questions of polity not clearly defined by the Council may be determined by the Executive Committee *ad interim*. While it is not charged with details of administration of the several national agencies, it seeks to correlate their work, and makes such recommendations to the Council as it may deem wise for the more economical and efficient administration of the wider agencies of the churches. It studies the relative needs of the national-level denominational agencies and establishes apportionment percentages. An Advisory Committee acts for the Executive Committee between meetings "with such limitations and powers as the Executive Committee may direct." The advisory committee meets at least once each month, and is "on call" to consider any urgent business of the denomination.
42. The business committee of the General Council is charged with preparation of the docket for business sessions, and all Council business is first presented to it, except the reports of the executive, nominating and resolutions committees. The Council has the right to consider any item presented or suppressed by the business committee, but in practice the crowded schedule discourages actions which are not given a scheduled place on the agenda. The Executive Committee serves as the business committee of all regular and special meetings, and meets on call (sometimes several times a day during a council meeting) to transact business.
43. One of the problems of the General Council meeting is its large size, or its organization (or both): which makes it hard to achieve the kind of consideration and directive action envisioned by the General Council's constitution, its leaders, and its members, and worthy of its representative character.
44. The corporation for the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States is described in the documentary section, IV, 3. The corporation is simply the legal body which carries out the purposes or instructions of the General Council.
45. The moderator (elected by the General Council for a two-year term) presides over meetings of the General Council, delivers an opening address to the Council over which he presides, and exercises the "representative functions . . . of visiting and addressing churches, conferences, associations, and conventions upon their invitation, and of representing the Council in the wider relations of Christian fellowship

so far as they may be able and disposed." While it is understood that his personal acts and utterances have no authority from or upon the General Council or its constituent groups, nevertheless our churches put great value on the advice of the moderator, his influence beyond our fellowship is quite considerable, and his methods of leadership have a profound effect upon committee and Council meetings.

46. The secretary (elected by the General Council for a two-year term) is, since 1938, also the "Minister of the Council." He is available to the committees and commissions for "advice and help in matters of policy and constructive organization." The secretary and minister is the continuing administrative leader of the General Council, whose words and acts are interpreted as representative of our churches. He takes counsel with the Advisory Committee and with the Executive Committee in matters of major importance. In his capacity as minister he seeks to be a spiritual guide to the churches, and to all their agencies. As the chief officer of the entire fellowship it is his privilege and duty to follow the stated or implied instructions of the General Council, and of the Executive Committee between sessions of the council itself.
47. The associate minister and secretary and the treasurer of the General Council are also elected by the biennial meeting of the Council. They are the professional staff of the General Council under the general direction of the secretary and minister. In practice each officer fulfills the functions associated with his office, and consultation concerning special problems is held with each other and with the secretary and minister, with the Executive Committee, Advisory Committee or other agencies of the churches.
48. The General Council biennial meeting is (a) *the churches* of our order in council assembled, (b) *a gathering for fellowship*, counsel, and discussions, (c) *a business session* of delegates for the transaction of such business as may come before a General Council by virtue of its charter or other fundamental documents; and (d) *a corporate meeting* of those boards and agencies of our churches which are related to or controlled by the General Council. Its powers in each of these capacities are defined by the charters, constitutions, by-laws or other fundamental documents of (a) the General Council, or (b) the associated bodies whose official meetings are being held, or (c) the special instructions or memorials of churches, conferences, associations, or other agencies of the Congregational Christian Churches.
49. The General Council is not a legislative body with ecclesiastical authority over the churches, associations or conferences, but states general objectives and makes recommendations which carry the authority of their inherent wisdom and value, and are considered and acted upon on the basis of their practical, moral, and spiritual appeal.

The control of the General Council by the churches is through delegates, the Executive Committee, the Advisory Committee and direct persuasion. More than ninety percent of the delegates to the General Council are now *elected* by conferences and associations in which the

