

# Congregational Profiles

Articles from the *Congregationalist*, 1958-1997

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

## FOUNDERS

- Executive Committee Chairmen.* Louis Gerhardt, "The Executive Committee and its Chairmen" 74-6  
*Executive Secretaries.* Cary Mead, "Our First Magnificent Five" 74-06  
*John Alexander, first Executive Secretary.* Karen Hoffman, "Dad & His Church: A Portrait of Dedication" 82-6  
*Malcolm Burton, founder.* John Alexander, "A Prince Has Fallen" 84-6  
*Harry R. Butman.* "The Gospel We Preach" 58 - 2 (the first issue of *The Congregationalist*)  
*John Claxton, founder of CFTS.* "A Memorial Service for Dr. John W. Claxton" 76-11  
*Howard Conn, minister in Minneapolis.* "The Personal Accent On Dedicated Service" 65-01  
*James Fifeld, minister in Los Angeles.* "The Personal Accent On Dedicated Service" 65-01  
*Henry David Gray, first editor of the Congregationalist.* Harry Butman "A Tribute: Henry David Gray" 66-10  
*Henry David Gray, minister.* John Alexander, "World Christian Statesman" 94-12  
*Cary Mead, lay stalwart.* Harry Butman, "Tribute to Cary Mead" 90-10  
*Arthur Rouner, Sr. .* Malcomb Burton, "A Memorial: Rev. Arthur Acy Rouner, Sr." 81-10  
*Philotheos Zikas, missionary.* Henry David Gray, "Tribute to the Reverend Philotheos Zikas" 90-10

## HISTORICAL FIGURES

- Famous Congregationalists, series.* Arvel Steece, Jan., 1961 through Aug., 1968  
*Henry Ward Beecher, preacher supreme.* Harry Butman, "Emporer of American Preachers" 87-4  
*William Brewster, Pilgrim leader.* Eleanor Miller, "William Brewster, Man With Ideas" 69-11  
*Antoinette Brown, first ordained woman.* W.T. Keefe, "Women in the Pastoral Ministry" 82-10  
*Winston & Jennie Churchill, English statespersons.* Sam Ellis "A Great Man\_\_an Extraordinary Mother" 74-3  
*Lloyd Douglas, author of "The Robe".* George Bohman, "Who Was Lloyd Douglas?" 85-8  
*Lloyd Douglas, author of "The Robe".* Gabe Campbell, "The Secret Spiritual Teaching of Lloyd C. Douglas" 96-4  
*Timothy Dwight, Yale president.* Vincent Edwards, "The Chaplain Who Revised the Hymnal" 74-3  
*John Eliot, apostle to the Indians* Marjorie Neagle, "John Eliot's Indian Bible" 65-02  
*John Eliot, evangelist to Indians.* Anobel Armour, "John Eliot of Essex", 3 parts 69-1,2,3  
*John Eliot, evangelist to the Indians.* Stuart Garver, "Apostle to the American Indian" 70-04  
*Washington Gladden, leader of liberalism.* C. George Fry, "Washington Gladden: Congregationalist" 75-3  
*Sarah Hale, inventor of Thanksgiving.* Marie Wood, "Sarah Hale and the Thanksgiving Proclamatoin" 79-Fall  
*Samuel Hidden, early New England pastor.* Harry Butman "The Legacy of Samuel Hidden" 70-02  
*Kaahumanu, queen of Hawaii.* W. Lee Roddy, "Hawaii's Most Amiazing Queen" 66-01  
*David Livingstone, missionary to Africa.* Betty Learmont, "David Livingstone, the Magnificent Failure" 69-02  
*Betsy Lyons, missionary to Hawaii.* W. Lee Roddy, "My Betsy" 65-04  
*Henry Obookiah, native missionary.* "From Hawaii to Connecticut" 69-3  
*Ray Palmer, hymn writer.* Blanche Richardson, "Ray Palmer, Hymn Writer" 68-05  
*Stephen Peet, circuit rider.* Julia McCleary, "From Whence We Grew" 90-6  
*John Robinson, Pilgrim pastor.* R. Tudur Jones, "Congregational Lecture: John Robinson" 85-10  
*Samuel Sewall, Psalm setter.* Albert Butler, "Samuel Sewall, Singer of Psalms" 79-06  
*Charles Sheldon, best selling author.* Harry Butman, "Following in His Steps" 84-6

*Martha Sheldon, missionary to Tibet.* Aldena Greer, "The Story of Martha Sheldon and Her Visit to Tibet" 70-04  
*Squanto, Indian friend of the Pilgrims.* Clinton Parker, "Squanto, the Man Sent by God" 77-11  
*Amos Alonzo Stagg, football great.* Duane Valentry, "Let Me Do My Best!" 68-10  
*Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin".* Peter Bagley, "The Little Lady Who Started the War" 85-8  
*Marcus Whitman frontier evangelist.* Lucille Goodyear, "Missionary Trailblazer" 78-01  
*Roger Williams, Puritan dissenter.* George Bohman, "Pioneer for Separation of Church and State and Man of Conflicts" 77-11

## CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS

*A. Ray Appelquist, NACCC Executive Secretary.* Erwin Britton, "Dr. A. Ray Appelquist: Irenic in Spirit" 85-8  
*Richard Bower, Moderator of the NACCC.* Helen Thuman, "A Man Called Richard" 83-4  
*Erwin Britton, Executive Secretary.* "Britt" 75-12  
*Carol DiBiasio-Snyder, clergy couple.* Mary Woolsey, "A Shared Ministry--A Shared Life" 83-10  
*Richard Ellison, engineer turned minister.* "From Engineer to Minister" 92-4  
*John Green, Maine pastor.* "One Man's Ministry" 66-04  
*Alfred Grey, interim minister.* "Rev. Alfred D. Grey, Interim Minister Extraordinaire" 65-01  
*Mary Lane, academician and minister.* Terence Johnson, "God Has Opened a Way for Me" 77-06  
*Elaine Marsh, minister of education.* Anita Buck, "Elaine Marsh: Traveling on in Her Ministry" 83-10  
*Betsey Mauro (Audette), seminarian.* "My Vocation Was Not Geology" 87-6  
*Harold Ockenga, pastor of Park Street Church.* "Presenting Harold John Ockenga" 66-11  
*Daphne Resch, seminarian.* Judy Herseman, "Daphne Faces Challenge of Parish Internship" 77-02  
*Karl Schimpf, young minister.* Walton Deming, "Profile of a Young Minister" 74-10  
*Gordon Taylor, minister to Indians.* "Prison is His Parish" 81-4  
*Orvin Titus, contractor & minister.* Judy McCleary, "The Tent Minister - 1975" 75-11  
*James Walter, college president.* "James E. Walter, 1906-1989" 89-8  
*Don Ward, minister.* "Our Man for All Seasons" 94-12  
*Edie Winter, seminarian.* "A Preacher in the Family" 82-12  
*Walter York, tentmaker minister.* Douglas Drown, "Down East 'Tentmaker'" 79-01

## LAY MEN and WOMEN

*William H. Ahrens Moderator, engineer.* Richard Kurrasch, "Special Churchman" 93-10  
*Donald Bentley, Moderator.* Elizabeth Bingham, "Math Professor Leads the NACCC" 94-12  
*Helen Joan Berkaw, NACCC stalwart.* Erwin Britton, "In Memoriam: Helen Joan Berkaw" 87-2  
*Josephine Swift Billings, hospital chairwoman.* Janet Elliott, "A Lifetime Commitment to Care of the Sick" 87-4  
*Majken Broby, missionary.* Walter Boring, "A Life-Long Servant of the Lord" 84-6  
*Dave Brubeck, contemporary composer.* Stuart Bullion, "The Light in the Wilderness" 76-02  
*Taylor Caldwell, author & moralist.* John Bennett, "Embrace of Life" 69-1  
*Jerold Cochrane, Exec. Committee Chair.* Robert Coates, "Combines Spirituality, Pragmatism with Humor" 96-10  
*Wayne Crockett, medical doctor.* John Drag, "Meet Dr. Wayne Crockett, a committed Congregational Christian layman" 73-11  
*Keith Deacon, banker.* Nancy Manser, "Meet Keith Deacon" 73-12  
*Helen Eastes, song writer.* "The Musician of Galesburg" 78-9  
*James England, comic.* Jerry England, "J.D. England, the Sit-down Comic" 89-4  
*Sherry Fast, hospital clown minister.* Lois Dick, "In Kansas There's a Rainbow" 84-2  
*George Gullen, business man and academician.* Erwin Britton, "A Man for All Seasons" 67-02  
*Walter Judd, Congressman.* "Dr. Walter H. Judd: World Renowned Congregationalist"

*Lynne Kalbfleisch, aspiring musician.* Roxy Rice , "I Know Where I'm Going" 78-09  
*Anne Kuester NACCC secretary* J. Fred Rennebohm "Call Anne" 92-6  
*Marion Luenberger, Los Angeles activist.* Don Ward, "Thank You, Crumley Cousins" 84-4  
*May McMillan, literacy advocate.* Jane Scanland, "One Woman Can Make a Difference" 76-10  
*Frances McGill, fighter.* Cyril Nute , "Rebel Against Death...Singer of Life" 78-1  
*Terry Meeuwsen, Miss America, 1972.* Michael Halcomb , "Miss America 1972" 88-4  
*Paul Miller, engineer.* Kathryn Calhoun, "Man on the Wing" 66-10  
*George Shangrow, young musician.* Don Duncan, "Music Makes His World God 'Round" 69-12

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the articles compiled for this course, those about people, these Profiles, caused the most anxiety. Who should be highlighted? For what reasons? How accurate a picture of the people of the NACCC do these particular profiles paint?

I do not pretend to have firm answers to any of these questions. It remains for qualified historians, sociologists, and others to conduct a thorough study of the NACCC, weighing the events and personalities from a more scientific perspective. These articles will, however, bring to your attention many people who have been highlighted in the pages of the *Congregationalist*. Whether there has been over the years any consistent basis of selection, I cannot say. Some of those profiled are leaders at the national level. Others are historical figures who someone (the editor him/herself?, an editor just glad to receive some material) thought worthy of notice. Many profiles are more on the order of human interest stories, exemplary instances, or “people in the news.”

What does it say about the NACCC that we honor, recognize, choose to lead us, listen to these particular people? There are certainly lessons to be gleaned by an observant reader. What conclusions do you draw?

**Congregational Profiles**

# Lay Men and Women

## *Profile—William H. Ahrens, Moderator, NACCC*

# Special Churchman

### *Promotes Congregational Way at All Levels*

Every church needs at least one and happy is the church with several ... goodwill ambassadors, that is, those special folk who make everyone, especially visitors, feel welcome and at home. For 39 years, Bill Ahrens has been one of the chief ambassadors among the Congregationalists of Royal Oak, Michigan, and as many of us know, he carries his enthusiasm for our Congregational Way and people in general to regional and national gatherings as well.

He was elected moderator of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches at the 1993 Annual Meeting and will have the primary responsibility for the 1994 Annual Meeting in Des Moines, Iowa.

Having begun our relationship many years ago at Annual Meetings of the NACCC, I know first hand of Bill's warmth, and I have always been struck (even humbled) by the price he paid to attend our yearly gathering ... vacation time! We ministers are more or less expected to attend and frequently have the means to cover most or all of our expenses, but to give up one's vacation time and write his own check just to sit through discussions on the budget in frequently uncomfortable surroundings ... now there is devotion worthy of praise!

I have long honored Bill's wide-

ranging commitment to his church and our wider fellowship. At the national level, Bill has served on (and was chair of) the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, the Nominating Committee, and the Executive Committee, and he has served both the Michigan Conference of Congregational Christian Churches and the Southeastern Michigan Association of Congregational Churches. He was the first Moderator of the Royal Oak Church and for his leadership on many fronts was named an Honorary Deacon.

An engineer by vocation, Bill recently retired from General Motors after 43 years. Now, when not at church, he can be found with camera (ask him sometime about mushrooms) or golf club or bat in hand (he is in his forty-sixth year of organized softball).

Equally delightful, enthusiastic, and committed is Bill's partner of 44 years, Lee. They have two sons and seven grandchildren.

Happy is the pastor, and now the National Association, with such ambassadors and fellow-pilgrims as Bill and Lee who warm the heart and make glad the day. ■

*Profile contributed by the Rev. Dr. Richard R. Kurrasch, senior minister, First Congregational Church of Royal Oak, Mich. who serves on the NACCC executive committee.*



## Profile—NACCC Executive Committee Chairman Prof. Donald L. Bentley

# Math Professor Leads NACCC

## *Long History of Congregational Service*

I first tangled with Don Bentley when he, as chair of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS), and I, as chair of the Division for Ministry, had to come to a compromise on a problem that seemed earthshaking at the time (I no longer remember what it was). In Harry Clark's (former NACCC Associate Executive Secretary) company we talked late into the night during meetings in Milwaukee, and somehow figured out how to make two independent groups agree.

After that we met often at NACCC Annual Meetings and at times in between. We sometimes sparred, sometimes agreed, but most often enjoyed our conversations. When I was elected to the Executive Committee at the 1992 meeting in Mansfield, I was pleased that Don and I would be serving together. This way, I thought, we could end up on the same side of the issue.

He sat next to me at my first Executive Committee meeting in October, 1992, as I prepared to preach a candidating sermon at his church! I agreed with him on almost everything, since he promised to call back home and tell people whether or not to vote for me.

That was the last time we agreed on everything. Not only was Don on the Executive Committee but he also was moderator-elect at Pilgrim Church, Pomona, Calif. Despite it all we guided each other through a

good year for Pilgrim, and I expect that Don as chairman will guide the Association through a very good year too.

His career as a professor at Pomona College has kept him alert to the needs and concerns of young people. Not satisfied to teach five days a week, his service at Pilgrim began in the Sunday School when he and his wife Penny taught second graders for a number of years. They then served as adult advisors to the PF program at Pilgrim, which was an important part of the life of their three children, Jill, Jim, and Janet, all of whom have pursued teaching careers of their own.

Although his hobby of genealogy emphasizes his family history, his Congregational history has deep roots too. He was raised at First Congregational Church of Los Angeles and there met Penny. They lived in Northern California while Don studied at Stanford, where he got his Ph.D., and then went to Colorado and North Carolina. They returned to Claremont, California, where Don has taught in the Math department of Pomona College since 1964. The family arrived at Pilgrim the same year.

Always active in the local church, Don became involved at the national level with the encouragement of the late Rev. Dr. Donald B. Ward when Dr. Ward served as interim at Pilgrim Church. His collegiate background and interest in young people made the Congregational Founda-



*Donald Bentley accepts the Executive Committee Chairman's gavel at the 1994 NACCC Annual Meeting, Des Moines, Iowa.*

tion for Theological Studies (CFTS) a natural place for him. He served as a member and later chair of that division. He was elected to the Executive Committee in 1991, and has served on the Publications, Budget, and Personnel and Administration subcommittees. ■

*—the Rev. Elizabeth E. Bingham  
Senior Minister, Pilgrim  
Congregational Church, Pomona,  
Calif.*

A CFTS graduate and former minister of First Congregational Church, Anchorage, Alaska, Elizabeth E. Bingham was called as senior minister, Pilgrim Congregational Church, in 1992, the same year she was elected to the NACCC Executive Committee.

In Memoriam  
HELEN JOAN  
BERKAW

by Dr. Erwin R. Britton

With the death of Helen Joan Berkaw on September 24, Congregationalism lost one of its most stalwart and articulate advocates. Helen Jo, as she was known by a host of friends, devoted a significant portion of her energies to the Congregational movement from the earliest days of the founding of the National Association to the present. Her contributions touched every level of church life.

With her husband, George, she was an active member of First Congregational Church of Detroit and held a variety of offices including that of moderator. She was involved in the Southeastern Michigan Association and the Michigan Conference.

Her involvement on the national level included the Women's Commission, Christian Education, the Executive Committee, and during the 25th Anniversary year (1979-80) she presided over the Association's affairs as Moderator. She published many articles reflecting her deep convictions concerning the Congregational Way and prepared a study guide for junior and senior high school students entitled "*We Would Be Free*." She traveled extensively in order to tell the Congregational story. No task was too humble to engage her fullest efforts. When asked to accept responsibilities at any level, her ready response was "Yes!"

She did not seek public recognition nor private approbation for her work. In 1980 at the Galesburg meeting, which she moderated, Olivet College bestowed upon her the honorary degree Doctor of Humane Letters.

Her convictions concerning the Congregational Way were carefully thought out and were an expression of her deep faith. In an article published many years ago in the *Detroit Free Press*, she wrote:



Helen Jo Berkaw

"In my church—since I chose a completely autonomous fellowship of which Christ alone is the head—I have an obligation to help make it a mirror for the teaching of Christ, a consecrated fellowship radiating friendship, compassion, and simple honesty. Three of God's gifts I must use to the utmost in the service of his church: The mind to reason, the conscience to be guided, the heart that I may be moved to love."

Devoted as she was to her church, her outlook and interests were never parochial. A graduate of Wayne State University, she was active in the alumni association as well as the Olivet College Women's Board. Other interests which involved her active participation, included the Silver Bay Association (YMCA), the English Speaking Union, the Women's City Club and several neighborhood and civic organizations.

Even though—as this brief account illustrates—she was significantly engaged in a wide variety of activities, her home and family commanded her primary loyalty. In the best sense of the phrase, she was a devoted homemaker. Surviving her, in addition to her husband George, are two daughters, two sons, 10 grandchildren, a sister and a brother.

A Memorial Service for her was held at First Church, Detroit, on Sunday afternoon, October 5. A large number of friends, in addition to her family, attended this service, nearly filling the spacious meeting house.

Her life makes it abundantly clear that she took seriously the Apostle Paul's directive to the Christians in Rome:

"Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the spirit, serve the Lord. (Rom. 12:11)



Josephine Swift Billings

## A lifetime commitment to care of the sick

by Janet M. Elliott

If planes had been flying over the City of Brooklyn, New York, in the early years of this century, the pilot might have thought from the peaked construction of the roof of a certain building that it housed a church. This edifice, the Brooklyn Thoracic Hospital for those afflicted with tuberculosis of the lungs, had been established by women from Plymouth Congregational Church in that city and they wanted even the structure to have a Christian character.

The hospital was opened in 1881. In later years Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims contributed an incalculable service to this hospital through the leadership of two of its members, Jessie Anderson Swift and her daughter Josephine Swift Billings.

The youngest daughter in a family of four children—two sisters, Dorothy and Harriet, and a brother, Warren—Josephine grew up in a warm family atmosphere in which the church to which they belonged, the Church of the Pilgrims, was the center of religious and social activity. It was in the beautiful sanctuary of the church on Brooklyn Heights that Josephine

Swift and George Billings were married, a marriage that has lasted a lifetime.

In 1934 the church to which the Swift and Billings families belonged decided to merge with Plymouth Church, made famous by the ministry of Henry Ward Beecher. The name also was joined and became Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims.

Josephine and her mother, Mrs. Swift, continued to be active in the affiliated congregation. When asked to fill important positions they were willing to accept responsibility. Mrs. Swift became the first woman to be elected to the Board of Deacons in the church at a time when women were first being asked to serve on church boards. Later, Josephine occupied the responsible position as chairman of the Church Executive Committee.

Service in the Home-Hospital for Jessie Anderson Swift had commenced before the merger of the two churches. Outstanding women from a number of churches were represented on the Board of Managers, which was composed mostly of women. In later years several men were elected to share their responsibility. In 1931 Mrs. Swift became the President of the Board. With the brilliant assistance of Dr. Luther Fiske Warren as head of the medical staff, the Home-Hospital

became an accredited hospital with the name "Brooklyn Thoracic Hospital."

It was under their leadership that young Jo Billings began to absorb her initial education in how to administer a hospital.

Of those days Jo says, "I was not only young, I was very shy, but all along the way, Mother encouraged me. She always made me feel I could cope with the next breathtaking position I was asked to assume."

And this slight, animated woman successfully filled a number of important hospital-related positions, until now at the end of a long corridor marked "Administration," an office bears the name, "Josephine Swift Billings, Chairman of the Board of Brooklyn-Caledonian Hospital."

Beginning with a small hospital that was throwing off its Victorian caste was probably the best way to absorb what was basic knowledge concerning hospitals. The insight gained at this time was exciting for it was in this period that amazing advances in medicine were taking place, including discoveries that were applied as curative measures for tuberculosis.

"I recall your mother telling me about lung inflation keeping the lung static and so, at rest, it could heal," I told Jo.

Janet M. Elliott is a free lance writer from Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Another wonderful cure for the lungs was streptomycin," Jo put in. "That came after the Second World War when the United States Government sent us men who had contracted T.B. during their enlistment. We had some city patients, too. It was a wonderful cure!"

"The Federal Government paid us fairly well but the city only paid the munificent sum of three dollars a day," Jo laughed. "It didn't somehow seem as hard to keep the bills paid then as it does now. An account was kept of every penny. I remember in my first years on the Board we had a treasurer named Mrs. Edwards who reported on the price of fish and butter, etc. at every meeting. All our work was voluntary, you know."

And as the time slipped by Josephine Billings was absorbing the intricacies of hospital management. In 1951 when Mrs. Swift felt it necessary to turn over the reins of the Presidency to another, Josephine was the natural choice to succeed her mother. With the enthusiastic support of board members and a professional staff, the Brooklyn Thoracic Hospital continued to progress in modern methods of administration and in methods of restoring health to patients under Josephine Billings' leadership and that of Dr. Warren who was succeeded by Dr. Richard Bennett as head of the medical staff in 1953.

During this period Jo found time to become a member of the United Hospital Fund. In 1955 she was made a vice president of that more than a century-old organization, the oldest of its kind in the country.

During her 50-year membership in the United Hospital Fund Jo became a member of a Visiting Committee, whose function in the words of its founder, Louisa Lee Schuyler, was to be an aid to the State, asking no money or power, except the right of entrance.

The aim of the Visiting Committees was to visit all the City Hospitals once a month.

"We always went in pairs but we traveled by subway mostly. We observed the housekeeping as to cleanliness, and supplies to see if

they had enough on hand. We reported broken windows. I remember once when we had to appeal several times before needed repairs were made."

The findings of the visitors were always reported to the administrator. A cooperative director who wanted to be helped would welcome the committee but sometimes an administrator would be inaccessible.

"At one Brooklyn Hospital the administrator always managed to be in a meeting when we arrived, but I had wonderful rapport with the head of Kings County Hospital, which was the Hospital I was assigned to visit. I visited King Hospital every month for 20 years," Jo said. "It was awfully hard on the feet—that was the way I got my jogging in—but I'm glad I did it. I hope we did some good."

Every year, in addition to this astonishing record, Josephine went from top to bottom of all departments in Kings County Hospital and wrote an annual report.

In spite of the vitality generated in the drive for funds for small urban hospitals during and after the Second World War, it became increasingly evident that the day of the small hospital was passing. One by one they joined their resources with hospitals with more bed capacity. Expensive equipment was out of the reach of the small hospital and doctors preferred a central hospital, eliminating travel from one hospital to another. In 1957 the Board of Managers of the Brooklyn Thoracic Hospital, Josephine Billings, president, decided that the time had come for their hospital to unite with one of the larger Brooklyn Hospitals.

"It was then we were wooed by most of the major voluntary hospitals in our borough," Jo said. "We had approval for 129 beds and we had an endowment of a million dollars.

"However did you get all that?" I asked.

"People had given us gifts over the years. Henry Ward Beecher was one of the early donors and it gradually built up. And then we had the proceeds from the sale of the Brooklyn Thoracic building."

Bidding ran high for this prize among the small hospitals, but when Brooklyn Hospital offered the Board of Managers of Thoracic Hospital a section of a floor to be designated by their name, the choice was made.

Josephine Billings was at once made a vice-president of Brooklyn Hospital. In addition to her duties to Brooklyn, Jo kept up her visits to Kings County. She also took an active part in the establishment of a desperately needed Community Blood Council. This organization held its first meetings in an apartment, but with the help of John Reed and other community-minded financiers they were able to purchase a building.

"After it was re-done the owner told us he wished he hadn't sold it, it was so beautiful," Jo said. "But it was a suitable place where discrimination could be used as to the acceptance of blood donors."

In 1970 John Madden, chairman of the Nominating Committee for the Brooklyn Hospital Board of Trustees, tried to persuade Josephine to take the position of president of that board.

"You're going to do it, aren't you?" her mother, Mrs. Swift, asked.

"My heart says, 'yes,' but my head says, 'no.'"

"Do what your heart tells you," Dr. Grant Adams, executive director of the United Hospital Fund and long-standing friend, advised Josephine.

So following the dictates of her heart, Josephine Billings became President of the Brooklyn Hospital, a hospital of 609 beds. All of her work has been voluntary.

"Granted a secretary and an office and the use of a car, I have never received any remuneration for my services," Jo reflects.

Like a fief traveling over his kingdom incognito, Jo sometimes goes on a little excursion in order to see how the hospital is functioning. On one trip, she came to a patient in a wheelchair and asked him if he would like her to push him back to his room. Noting that she wore civilian dress, the patient asked if she worked in the hospital.

—continued on page 14

### **A Lifetime**—from page 11

"Yes," Jo said, "in administration."

"Well," the patient replied, "I have been in five hospitals lately, and this one is run the best of any of them."

"You have no idea how good that made me feel," Jo said, walking toward the entrance to the Pavilion that has recently been dedicated to her. Just inside the entrance is a citation:

#### **The Josephine Swift Billings Pavilion**

In honor of a lifetime commitment  
To the compassionate care  
of the sick

It was the inspired leadership of  
Mrs. Billings which helped prepare  
the Brooklyn Hospital  
for the Twenty-First Century  
November 8, 1984

In 1982 Brooklyn and Caledonian had merged and become Brooklyn-Caledonian Hospital.

About the present Jo says, "Administration had become increasingly difficult. We are asked such puzzling questions as 'does your hospital have something special to offer?'"

"In order to reply we inquired of the nine groups that make up the hospital," Jo wrote in her report. From Operations which is the lifeblood of the hospital, reporting a thousand patient meals served a day, 400 telephone calls an hour, through all the other groups, doctors, nurses, trustees, social service, community, education, administration to volunteers, who contributed 42,000 hours of volunteer service, came reports of past achievements—achievements born of hard experience. A belief in the future had been voiced.

"Proud and Confident" is the title of the report. "We are proud of our accomplishments and confident of our future," Josephine says.

"A great deal of the accomplishment of the hospital must be accredited to Josephine Swift Billings," says Arthur M. Cristy, a member of the Board of Trustees; "she serves by example." ■

# A Life-Long Servant of the Lord

By Dr. Walter A. Boring

*(Editor's note: On January 6, 1984, Majken Broby, along with a few close friends and associates, met Mayor Fernando Chieng Navarro in his office in La Lima, Honduras. There he presented her with a hand-written certificate making her an honorary citizen of La Lima. What follows is a brief resume of this remarkable missionary and, in her own words, a description of her latest project, reprinted from the booklet Foundation: Help to Children In Need edited by Ruben Moen.)*

Swedish by birth, American by naturalization, a nurse by profession, a missionary by calling, Majken Broby is a life-long servant of the Lord known on several continents as the lady who gets things done.

She began her career shortly after World War II when she joined forces with Pastor Christian Schreiber at Eckernfoerde, West Germany, where he had founded Mission-Kinderheim, a home for war orphans. Majken was instrumental in making the home's work and needs known throughout the world.

Eventually Mission-Kinderheim was to become a home for orphans from far and near. It is now a large self-supporting institution providing professional care for children with special needs.

An outgrowth of Mission-Kinderheim was a new work on Oasis Bou-Rbia in Morocco. While making arrangements there for taking orphans to Mission-Kinderheim, Pastor Schreiber, Miss Broby, and others became so involved with the needs of the people they began to give part of each year to help the people help themselves and to bring them the Gospel of Christ.

Many acres were brought under cultivation, wells were dug, homes were built, a clinic was established. The mission is now served by a missionary couple and a registered nurse.

*Dr. Walter A. Boring is an Assistant Executive Secretary for the N.A. As part of his responsibilities he works closely with the Missionary Society.*

Earthquakes and floods in Honduras drew Majken's attention in 1975. She, a co-worker, and her adopted daughter Christine, went to see what could be done to help suffering humanity in the name of Christian love.

The results of her work are witness to Majken's great vision in which she

sees God able to do anything she is willing to work for herself. One hundred and forty homes have been built, families moved in and presented with the deeds to the property. A whole new village exists with a sewage system and water wells, streets, trees, flowers, and children at play.

*Continued on page 14*



*Majken Broby displays the certificate presented to her by Mayor Fernando Chieng Navarro on behalf of the people of La Lima, Honduras, in appreciation of the work she has done there. The certificate honored her by making her an honorary citizen of La Lima.*

## Life-Long Servant—from page 13

A church has been built and given to the congregation. A large school has been built and given to the community. A sewing school is there, fully equipped, where girls learn how to make a respectable living for \$10, the tuition for a nine month course. Even materials are supplied. Majken pays the teachers even as she pays the salary of the pastor of Emmanuel Church.

There are two large commissaries where village children get a hot meal each day at no charge. Health care is provided at a clinic, built by Majken, given to the community. A medical doctor and nurse are there daily. Majken provides most of the medicines.

The money for all these projects comes from wherever Majken can tell her story. Much of the money comes from Sweden and from the National Association through the Missionary Society. Her work is completely integrated into our N.A. missions program.

I am serving on the board of directors for the new school on Roatan and in May of this year, I received Emmanuel Church as a National Association of Congregational Christian Churches associate member and assisted in the ordination of its minister.

### Help For Children In Need

By Majken Broby

From the little town of Coxen Hole we drive the dirt road which winds along the Caribbean seacoast. The many deep holes that the rugged road has, makes it impossible to drive

faster than 5 miles an hour without damaging the car, but to make sure that nobody is speeding, there is a sign "DRIVE SLOW SCHOOL." The many tiny bridges that we must pass over are made from simple wooden boards, sometimes broken . . . I recommend to keep the truck near the edge of the bridge (naturally there is no railing) as the bridges are not much wider than a truck.

We have arrived at Gravel Bay where our property is located. Our land reaches from the high hills down to the Caribbean seacoast which is surrounded by coral reefs.

An area about 300 feet long is staked out for the building site. The architect and builder, Bill Brady; the former governor for the Bay Islands, Glen Solomon; a board member of the organization Help for Children in Need, Johannes Alsbo and I met at 10:00 A.M. on January 10, 1984 to start this pioneer work.

The sun is baking but hardly any of us feel that we have over 100 degree heat because we are so taken up by this new project and a jubilant joy fills our hearts. Our dreams, our plans during the past years have now become reality. We stand here on the island Roatan, a small group of friends, and break the ground—the beginning of a new mission—a home shall be built where one day girls and boys will receive love, care and education.

I wish that each one of our friends who so faithfully have prayed and sacrificed for this mission in Honduras could have been with us at the ground breaking ceremony and could have experienced the overwhelming joy and gratitude that so many peo-

ple on this island show. Underprivileged children, children who spend their nights in the open will come to a home, the first such home on the Bay Islands.

*"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."*  
*1 Thess. 1:2-3.*

The home for children that we build is about 4700 square feet and includes, beside the rooms for children, also rooms for those who will care for the children, dining-living room, kitchen, storage rooms, laundry room, sanitary facilities. In order to have electricity we must buy a good generator.

We count on having the building ready by Christmas 1984 if funds will allow this. All material for the building must be shipped from the mainland of Honduras and some from the U.S.A. To furnish the building will take a longer time and I do not think we can have the home completed until some time in 1985.

During the ground breaking service we have also in prayer asked for the Lord's guidance in this great entire undertaking, for His blessing on each one who has a part in making this project possible and also that we will be able to reach and help those children who most need our help.

We start this new mission, the first home for underprivileged children on the Bay Island, in complete trust that God has sent us here and that He will guide us.

# The Light in the Wilderness

By *STUART BULLION*

Dave Brubeck dedicated his oratorio, "The Light in the Wilderness," to his children, "for theirs is the generation of them that seek Him."

The 54-year-old jazz pianist and composer has been a celebrated creative presence in American music since the end of the Second World War, and his musical apprenticeship began in early childhood. Today, were his flowing hair not grey

where it touches the collars of his flowered shirt and suede suit coat, it would be hard to guess his age as he chats and jokes or makes music with his three sons, all in their twenties.

Brubeck and his sons, Darius, Chris and Dan, who play electric piano, drums, trombone and electric bass, make up the new Brubeck quartet, "Two Generations of Brubeck." The group was in Minneapolis recently for a two-night stand. A Saturday evening performance at the newly completed Orchestra Hall

was a sell-out. Sunday, every pew in Central Lutheran Church was filled for a jazz worship service featuring the Brubeck combo, the Plymouth Congregational and Bethlehem Lutheran church choirs and the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony performing major portions of "The Light in the Wilderness." The jazz service, conducted by Philip Brunelle, music director at Plymouth Congregational, was presented under the auspices of the Plymouth Music Series 1974-75.

Brubeck is a writer's dream: he interviews himself. As he discusses his oratorio, his philosophy of art and life, his perceptions of faith and humanity, Brubeck's aquiline features and thin, strong hands are as much a part of his expression as his crisp and eventimbered voice. They are constantly in motion, calmly punctuating smiles, frowns, easy laughter. Brubeck's communication over the breakfast table is as thoughtful and creative as at the keyboard.

He explains that his oratorio, which he has recorded with Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, began as a small piece inspired by the death of his 17-year-old nephew. "I wanted to write something that would relieve the terrible feeling in my family," he recalls.

That original piece, "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled," is now one passage among many in the two-part oratorio that takes up to 75 minutes to perform from end to end.

Brubeck started composing "The Light in the Wilderness" not as part of his performing repertoire, but for use in the Unitarian church he attends at home. His wife, Lola, helped him select Bible passages, primarily from the Apostles, and added original texts of her own. The work had its premiere performance in January, 1968, in Chapel Hill, N.C.

The work draws on several musical traditions as well as various books of the New Testament and the Psalms. It has the surging intensity of gospel, the solemnity of spirituals, the dignified pomp of



Handel and Bach and the captivating beat of rhythm and blues. But jazz is at its core, and Dave, Darius, Chris and Dan lace frequent improvisations through the oratorio's 18 sections.

Few great choral works have dealt with the Temptations of Christ. Brubeck's work follows Jesus from His baptism by John through "Forty days alone in the desert, / Days and nights of constant pray'r, / Seeking in the wailing wind an answer to despair..."

Returning from the wilderness, Jesus pronounced the Ser-

mon to be as practical as we can be and as Christian as we can be, but we haven't gone the whole round.

"So you just have to take one little sentence of the text of 'The Light in the Wilderness' and analyze it as to where you are in your thinking, where you are in your community. Where your church is . . . because most churches don't accept this. The average church is proud of the kids who went off to war — there's often a big plaque. So they really haven't analyzed what makes you a Christian.

"In the middle of the night, you might hear a soldier or a train man or a bum whistle something you know was inspired and had great feeling and there could be more in that than in 20 hours of so-called classical music."

Brubeck deplores the blind traditionalism of many churches in their reluctance to experiment with new forms of worship, especially those involving arts not usually associated with the liturgy. "I've been fighting that all my life," he declares.

Alternative forms of worship



mon on the Mount, in which He exhorted His followers, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you . . ."

In their musical form in "The Light in the Wilderness," these words of Jesus constitute "the most moving part of the piece," according to the composer.

To truly love one's enemies, Brubeck believes, is "the one big thing that makes you a Christian.

"This is a whole new concept. Just think if we as a Christian nation really believed 'love your enemies . . . ' We could never be in a war. We'd be putting people in jail because they went to war — just the opposite of what we're doing now.

"We're truly a great country, but we're truly not Christian. We

"This is the toughest thing in the world, to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, yet it's the only thing that's going to keep humanity from destroying itself."

Brubeck is not concerned whether "The Light in the Wilderness" will be remembered along with such works as Handel's "Messiah." History will have to judge whether the work has "true inspiration," he says. Inspiration is what makes a musical work "meaningful," Brubeck believes.

One could fall asleep during a lecture or a sermon by a learned speaker, he says, "but you come outside and hear a bum on skid row say something that was more meaningful than anything you heard from the trained man. It's the same way in music.

involving popular music, dance and other arts that have been rejected by "traditional" churches, Brubeck says, were rejected by "people who hadn't read the Psalms of David." Brubeck cites frequent references in the Bible to the use of musicians and dancers in worship. "It's always the people who don't know tradition who do the most hollering and demanding," he smiles.

"There are different ways to praise the Lord. Most of them are connected with dancing, with the lyre and the drum and the flute."

For Dave Brubeck, the foot-tapping sounds of the jazz piano, the trombone and the electric guitar have just as much place before the altar as the "traditional" organ does.

