

or their members. Their greatest blessing is the shared knowledge that they can do much more together in the Spirit of Christian love than they can alone.

This progressive, ever evolving perspective grounded in a rich tradition persistently prepared to engage the future with courage and intelligence is the genesis and the genius of the Congregational Way.

Our History

Modern Congregational Churches originated in England in the 16th Century, although they were not called Congregational until the 18th Century. Spiritually minded members of the state-controlled Church sought to cleanse it by restoring simplicity, purity of doctrine, and freedom of

worship. Some of these reformers left the established Church and came to be known as Separatists. Those who chose to make the desired change within the framework of the Church were called Puritans.

To escape persecution, several congregations of Separatists went to Holland. In 1620 a group of these exiles set sail for America in the historic Mayflower. They became the Pilgrims of the Plymouth Colony. In time, Puritans arrived from England to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony. There Puritans gave up trying to keep their Episcopal ties with the Church back in England and on congregational principles, joined forces with the Separatists. This laid the groundwork for the founding of many Congregational Churches in the land. The effect of these Churches on American life is incalculable.

About the Author

The Rev. Phil Jackson was a pastor of several NA Churches before serving as the Associate Executive Secretary of the NACCC for Ministerial Services and as the Dean of CFTS. His counsel to seminary students and clergy, along with his deep and abiding faith, gives him an awareness of the diverse theological perspectives represented in our Association. This piece is being published as he leaves his national position to serve, again, as a Congregational pastor.

The NACCC is an association of autonomous Churches bound by our belief that Christ alone is the head of the local Church. With this in mind, we express and discuss theological issues respecting different positions. There is no one document which directs all our Churches, rather clergy and laity are encouraged to establish their own understandings of scripture and congregational life in Christ. This piece represents the views of one of our respected leaders and is submitted to the larger fellowship of Churches for consideration and/or edification.

National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

8473 South Howell

P.O. Box 288

Oak Creek, WI 53154

1-800-262-1620

Fax: 414-764-0319

E-Mail: naccc@naccc.org

www.naccc.org

Congregational Way Series

The Congregational Christian Way of Life

by
Phil R. Jackson,
M.Div.

*"Our adherents believe
that Jesus Christ alone
is the head of His
Church."*

The Congregational Christian Way of Life

What We Believe

The right of every individual to have immediate access to God is one of the fundamental precepts of Congregationalism. Our adherents believe that Jesus Christ alone is the head of His Church; that His Holy Spirit can speak directly to and can act through each member and each congregation without the benefit of bishops, hierarchies, or presbyteries. A church exists based on the teachings of Jesus from Matthew 18:20, "for where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."

A Congregational Christian believes in God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus

A Congregational Christian believes in God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus. God is one whose unity is often expressed in the Trinitarian formula of the early Church - God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The unity of Christendom is not established, but rather recognized, and the unity to be sought is a oneness with Christ.

Congregationalism provides a free and simple way to salvation but it has never been known to be easy or cheap. The freedom offered is not to be construed as freedom to do or to believe whatever one wishes, but rather as the opportunity to be the kind of person God intended one to be. Congregational Christians believe that the human soul is eternal and that our human destiny lies in the choices we make and in our participation in the building of the kingdom of God.

St. Paul states that one who adheres to the Christian faith looks upon the

Church universal as the mystical Body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head.

Sacraments and Rites

Most Congregational Churches observe two sacraments - Baptism and the Lord's Supper. You will also find that most of our member churches practice what is called "open communion" which means that all who love Jesus Christ and seek forgiveness for their sins, are welcome to the Lord's table.

Like many other Christian bodies, Congregational Christian Churches practice at least three traditional rites - funerals and memorial services, marriages, and Confirmation.

Membership in a Congregational Church

Prospective members normally appear first before the Board of Deacons/Deaconesses, although this is not always the case. Upon the Board's recommendation, they are publicly received at a regular Church service in one of three ways: by confession of faith if they are uniting with a Church for the first time; by reaffirmation of faith if they were a member of another congregation but without a letter of transfer; or by letter of transfer from another church.

Congregationalism provides a free and simple way to salvation but it has never been known to be easy or cheap.

In uniting with a Congregational Church, the individual makes a declaration of faith, acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior, and promising to follow Him as the Lord of their life. The seal of this promise is the covenant by which a local congregation binds itself together.

The new member accepts responsibility by faithfully attending and participating in worship services, by sharing in the ministries and missions of the local Church, and by contributing regularly to the financial

support of the Church. Naturally, he/she will be expected to pray for the church and for others and to conduct a personal life in keeping with Christ's teachings.

Our Way of Life

Members speak of their own local Congregational Church as the "gathered" church, made up of

individual Christians in a given geographical area assembled by Christ through their common love for Him. This is a covenantal relationship-that of Christians bound together, not by law, but freely and in a mutually agreeable bond of love, as in the following historical covenant: "We covenant with the Lord, and one with another, and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all God's ways, as the Almighty is pleased to reveal the word of truth to us (*Salem Covenant of 1629*)."

Congregationalism derives its name from the prominence it gives to its local body of Christian believers. Each church or congregation is a self-governing unit, with duties and responsibilities shared equally by all members.

These self-governing Churches work together in local, state and national associations; meeting for fellowship and for consideration of matters of general interest and common responsibility. Such associations, however, have no jurisdiction over the individual Churches

A church exists based on the teachings of Jesus from Matthew 18:20 "for where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."