

FORESEE



BI-MONTHLY NEWS from the CCCC

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CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE

8941 33rd St North,
Lake Elmo, MN 55042
651-739-1474

E-mail: homeoffice@cccusa.com
www.cccusa.com

www.cccusa.com/FORESEE/

Email: communication@cccusa.com



AT THE CENTER OF THANKFULNESS



WHEN TWO CHURCHES BECOME ONE



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CM COMMENTS



CHRISTMAS CONFIDENCE



RON HAMILTON, CCCC CONFERENCE MINISTER

The word “fulfill” is an important part of the Christmas story. It’s easy to overlook this as we read the story each year and get caught up in the amazing events surrounding the birth of Jesus. A young virgin gets pregnant and is visited by an angel. An embarrassed fiancé is also visited by an angel when he is tempted to leave her. This young couple travels to Bethlehem to be registered for taxes. They can’t find a room and end up staying with the animals. The baby is born and laid in a manger. At the same time, a host of angels appear to a group of lowly shepherds outside the town, telling them that the Messiah has come to their town. They rush to the scene to see if it’s true and are blown away by what they see. They return, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. And on the story goes.

Matthew records a part of this story as he begins his Gospel record. And he makes sure to include that all of this happened to “fulfill” what the Lord promised through the prophet Isaiah over 700 years before this happened.

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“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).” (Matthew 1:21-23)

He repeats this word again and again throughout his Gospel. It is said that Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies. The birth of Jesus reminds us that God will fulfill his promises to us.

This gives us great confidence as we live out our faith each day. God’s Word is true, and His promises will come true in our lives. Let’s rejoice in a few of promises in this season.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

And this is what he promised us—eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:25)

Christmas grows the confidence of our faith as we trust in the promises of God and wait for their fulfillment in our lives.



Meet Jeff & Nancy Bauman Annual Gathering Coordinators

Nancy and Jeff live in Woodbury, Minnesota and are members of the Woodbury Community Church. They have both served in leadership at the church and remain active in the church. They both recently retired from their jobs and are excited to assist the CCCC with providing leadership for the Annual Gathering.

Nancy grew up attending Annual Gatherings with her parents, Bill and Pat Nygren. Bill served as the only lay President of the Conference. Jeff has also attended recent Annual Gatherings as a representative of Woodbury Community Church. They both attended the 2024 Annual Gathering in Warwick to observe all of the activity. They have a deep appreciation for the Annual Gathering and a vision for how this event can better serve the members of the Conference in the coming years.

MIDEAST REGIONAL NEWS

WHEN TWO CHURCHES BECOME ONE

TIM DUBEAU, MIDEAST REGIONAL PASTOR

Too many churches are struggling in our day. Yet, by God's providence, there are times when churches facing difficulties can become lifelines to one another. This is exactly what happened in Stowe PA.

Established in 1886, St. Paul's Church of Stowe became a conference member nineteen years ago. As time moved on, the church experienced lagging attendance and ministry challenges that grew ever deeper. Eventually they made some financial decisions that helped them continue for a few short years and allowed them to call a new full-time Pastor. Still, despite the Pastor's best efforts, the decline persisted. The thought came to him that the solution might be a merger between St. Paul's and a neighboring church.

That church, Grace Covenant, was planted in 2014 as an independent body of believers meeting in a school. Two years ago they began to lease space in a Lutheran church just down the street from St. Paul's. This lease gave Grace Covenant an adequate worship facility but any additional ministry space was unavailable. In God's sovereign plan, it turned out that St. Paul's had a building in generally good condition with LOTS of space for new ministry that could accommodate Grace Covenant's larger congregation.

This was the beginning of a journey that would lead to the birth of Grace Renewal Church, a testament to the power of renewal in the face of adversity. Several months of behind-the-scenes dialogue and prayer occurred between the Pastors of both churches and the CCCC transition team. In early June Transition team members introduced to each congregation the proposed terms of the merger for their prayer and consideration. After two weeks, a Q&A session was conducted at a joint worship service with the actual vote scheduled for the following week. After introducing a few minor revisions to the merger proposal, the final votes in each church were unanimous whereupon the two church bodies united as one.

While such a merger signals new life, it also marks the loss of identities that may not be quite the same again for either church body. Even so, the benefits derived from this rebirth far outweigh what was lacking in both churches – and now, by God's grace, Grace Renewal Church is larger, stronger and better prepared to emerge as a powerful witness for the sake of Christ throughout Stowe and beyond. Please continue to lift them in your prayers as they work out all the details.

2025 ANNUAL GATHERING



ANNUAL GATHERING HOTEL OVERVIEW - THE FLORIDA HOTEL IN ORLANDO

RON HAMILTON, CONFERENCE MINISTER

We are excited to go to the Florida Hotel in Orlando, Florida for the 2025 Annual Gathering. The hotel is an excellent venue for a conference of our size. The entire complex was modernized in 2019 and the meeting space is ideal for our gathering. We have been able to secure a reasonable room rate of \$132, plus tax, and are confident that our members will enjoy these accommodations.

The leaders of the Annual Gathering planning committee recently visited the facility.

"When Orlando was selected for AG2025, I quickly discovered that The Florida Hotel was the best place for us to meet. Attached to the Florida Mall, it offers walking access to restaurants and stores. All of our meeting spaces and exhibits will be on the same level, allowing us to maximize our time together. It will truly feel like an all-inclusive resort!" (Susan Moody, former AG Coordinator)

"We are very excited about this location for AG 2025! The hotel is an anchor for The Florida Mall giving us access to a very nice, large food court with many options in addition to other sit-down restaurants. The mall also provides a great place to take a break for a walk or shopping, all inside an air-conditioned space." (Nancy & Jeff Bauman, 2025 AG Coordinators)

Begin now to plan to attend the annual gathering to be held on August 4 – 7, 2025. This promises to be a time of renewal and encouragement. More information will be shared as we go through the year.

CONFERENCE HISTORIAN



CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH PLANTING IN HISTORY

ALWYN YORK, CONFERENCE HISTORIAN

Church planting is one of the three main priorities of the CCCC. This priority is described in the 4C yearbook this way: "We are working to launch a church multiplication movement to start new, healthy, disciple-making congregations across the nation." In a sense this is a relatively new priority for our conference. This was noted in *Modern Day Pilgrims: A New Generation*, the history of the last twenty-five years of the Conference published last year.

"A missional shift had started in the CCCC in her fiftieth year (1998). Instead of its largely reactionary stance against liberalism and biblical compromise the CCCC was beginning to proactively reach out, plant churches, and extend the Kingdom of God across the nation." (p. 23)

The earlier focus of the Conference was understandable. With the increasing dominance of liberal theology in Congregational churches, the CCCC was formed as an organization devoted to the preservation of biblical Congregationalism. Its early growth was largely due to the movement of existing conservative churches and of previously ordained ministers into the Conference. It was only after the Conference was well established that serious attention began to be devoted to the effort of starting new churches.

While an organized effort to plant new churches is a relatively new feature of the CCCC, it is not something that is new to Congregationalism as a whole. The nineteenth century in particular was a period when Congregational churches joined together in several initiatives to establish new churches.

Nineteenth century church planting by Congregationalists consisted of three distinct phases. The first and largest effort was starting new churches in the new towns on the expanding

western frontier. This was the work undertaken by the American Home Missionary Society. A second phase began after the Civil War. Congregationalists had been very involved in the Abolition movement. After the emancipation of the slaves, the newly freed African-Americans had a need for education to equip them to succeed in American society. The American Missionary Association took the lead in starting schools for African-Americans in the former states of the Confederacy.

The effort to start schools was followed by the founding of colleges and starting churches. A third phase began in the later part of the 19th century with the influx of immigrants from many countries. The American Home Missionary Society sent missionaries to start churches to serve the new immigrants in their native languages. The AHMS focused its efforts on three main ethnic groups: Germans, Scandinavians and Slavic. The work was especially fruitful among one sub-group among the Germans: those who had come from German-speaking colonies within Russia. In the months to come I plan to give a brief overview of these three church planting movements.



CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

NINEVEH NETWORK GATHERING RECAP

BRYAN LONG, DIRECTOR OF CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

A few weeks ago, I spent an evening with my cousin who just left his second pastoral position in many years. He worked for a large church with toxic leadership that always wanted more and always wanted better. In response, he transitioned to a smaller church with toxic leadership who never wanted change and never was agreeable. He completely burnt out, doesn't attend any church, and now works for a non-profit. He says he's never been happier...

A few months ago, I spent an evening with a former coworker who graduated seminary with me. He spent years revitalizing a church with some measure of success. However, it came with domineering oversight, congregation members challenging his authority and character, and eventually self-doubt and confusion of his own calling. He completely burnt out and now works for a non-profit. He says he's never been happier...

At the start of last year, I spent an evening with my old college roommate. He spent years at an influential church in his community. But in preaching the centrality of the Gospel over and against financial and political agendas, prominent members of his congregation turned on him. They iced him out and disparaged his reputation publicly, which led to spiteful social media posts, emails, articles, and even death threats. He completely burnt out and now works for a non-profit. He says he's never been happier...

The longer I'm in ministry, the more these stories are becoming common.

On October 17-19, church planters, coaches, and advocates from around the country gathered for the 2024 Nineveh Network Gathering. We spent three days together in Buffalo, NY to connect and recharge. One afternoon, we took a ride on the Maid of the Mist to get a front row view of Niagara Falls. Evenings were spent worshiping and praying. Our goal over this time is to create space for people to authentically connect, lament, and encourage one another. Ministry life can be hard and lonely. The response was that folks left feeling loved and refreshed.

Church Multiplication is one of the three ministry priorities of the Conference. Our prayer is that a greater number of members get involved in this important work. Pray for our church planters and revitalizers as they continue to build His Kingdom...



NAE DENOMINATIONAL EXECUTIVES RETREAT

RON HAMILTON, CONFERENCE MINISTER

Shirley and I recently attended the Denominational Executives Retreat sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). This annual one-day event includes times of fellowship, worship and mutual sharing. Walter Kim, president of the NAE, and his wife, Toni, led the retreat.

The retreat is based on some common commitments...

As we gather together, we affirm these truths and practices:

- We are united in Christ. Our denominations have many different theological commitments and practices, but we all heartily agree upon our unity in Christ. We are all on a joint mission to share the good news of Jesus.
- We are all equal here. There are no celebrities, only servants. We do not need to prove our worth to each other or to ourselves.
- We are all in process. Let's take this opportunity to share not just our triumphs but also our struggles. We're in this together.
- Everything is confidential. What is shared at the retreat, especially in small groups, must be received and treated as a gift of trust.

There were common themes shared by the leaders.

- We are all working to unify our fellowships around the mission of the Gospel.
- There is common passion for effective ministry at the "grass roots" level, led by healthy pastors and healthy disciple-making churches.
- We are excited about the next generation of pastors and share a common commitment to equip and empower them to lead our denominations.

I deeply appreciate these colleagues and am thankful that we have like-minded denominations who share the ministry of the Gospel.

WESTERN REGIONAL NEWS

ADD ANOTHER LEAF TO THE TABLE

PHIL NOORDMANS, WEST REGIONAL PASTOR

One of our seven guiding values is “A Community that Lives Out Shared Life & Shared Mission.” We enjoy fellowship with Jesus and with one another around our Lord’s Table, and our mission includes inviting to join us at table.

By God’s sovereign design, two roads are converging giving the CCCC an opportunity to add another leaf to the table.

Road #1: ITI (International Training Institute)

While serving in Greeley, CO, God called Steve Oeffling in 2005 to launch Network Beyond, a ministry that specializes in resourcing and equipping global church leaders. This ministry is currently working in 35 countries.

At the heart of Network Beyond’s strategy is ITI – the International Training Institute, which offers a series of eight training modules led by a teaching team and a prayer intercessor.

Road #2: Micronesians in the USA

For several years Micronesians have migrated to the USA. Growing communities now exist in Kansas, Texas, Portland, OR, and more. These communities remain connected.

Historically, Morning Star Institute – Max Vague, Barry Jones, Gary Gardell, and others – have trained pastors in Micronesia. Now, Micronesians in the USA are still looking to Morning Star for training.

And that is where these two roads intersect.

A) The Morning Star Institute invited ITI to conduct an experiment: to offer the first of their 8 training modules to Micronesians in the USA. In August 2024, Steve Oeffling and a few others traveled to Kansas to lead this event which was very well received.

B) In October 2024, a Micronesian congregation in Portland, OR, voted to affiliate with the CCCC.

And so, we will joyfully add another leaf to the table and anticipate welcoming them to participate in our shared life and shared mission

THINGS TO NOTE

AT THE CENTER OF THANKFULNESS

BRYAN* & MOLLY LONG

In the New Testament, the various forms of “thankful” or “grateful” come from the word eucharisteo. Right in the middle is charis, where we get the word grace. Literally, grace is found at the center of thankfulness. It is why when you thank God before a meal, you “say grace.” You’re not grateful for what you’ve earned, you’re grateful for what you’ve been given. Thankfulness is a gospel recognition that we do not deserve any of the good gifts God provides.

However, sin won’t allow us to do this naturally. At our core we are bent on being god—believing that the creation of our hands entitles us to the blessings of our lives. Thankfulness itself is not part of the fruit of the Spirit. It is not a spiritual fruit; it’s a spiritual discipline. It doesn’t just show up in the life of a believer the way other Holy Spirit attributes do. It’s an outlet we must cultivate.

This was a seemingly minor discovery in our family until we began to practice it. We’re learning that it requires us to slow down. One definition of gratefulness is the right “response to one’s environment.” Slowing down allows us to actually see all the grace around us. Last week, we slowed down enough to really observed our two older children practicing their school instruments, while our youngest daughter danced around the kitchen table. Amid a shaky rendition of “hot cross buns” and dodging pirouettes, we were able to recognize that we were sitting in a warm house, having finished a good meal, with three healthy kids – none of it we earned and deserved. Now that’s grace...

If it has been difficult to see the good gifts in your life this year, remember that the greatest grace is that God is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made (Ps 145:13), and though we will have trouble, Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). Let this Thanksgiving be an invitation to slow down, practice the discipline of gratefulness, and have grace at the center.

*Bryan is the Director of Church Multiplication for CCCC

CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SW Harbor, ME	Southwest Harbor Cong Church Ben Wistrom
Allegan, MI	First Cong Church of Allegan Todd Wagner
PASTORAL OPENINGS – CCCC Member Churches	
Tombstone, AZ	Tombstone Community Cong Church (Part-time Associate Pastor)
Bethune, CO	Hope Congregational Church
Sherman, CT	The Sherman Church
Garner, IA	Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church (Associate Pastor)
Emporia, KS	First Congregational Church
Blandford, MA	First Congregational Church
Chiltonville, MA	Chiltonville Congregational Church
Dunstable, MA	Dunstable Evangelical Cong. Church
Essex, MA	First Cong Church (Part-time Assoc. Pastor)
Gloucester, MA	Lanesville Congregational Church (Associate Pastor of Youth Ministry)
Hamilton, MA	First Congregational Church of Hamilton
Malden, MA	Forestdale Community Church (Bi-vocational Pastor)
Middleboro, MA	First Congregational Church
Thomaston, MA	First Congregational Church
Tyngsboro, MA	Evangelical Cong. Church of Tyngsboro
Highland, MI	Highland Cong. Church (Youth Pastor) (Part-time Pastor)
Maple Rapids, MI	Maple Rapids Congregational Church (Pastor of Family & Students)
Mattawan, MI	Mattawan Community Church
Avon, MN	Avon Community Church
Britt, MN	Sand Lake Chapel
Imler, PA	Mt. Zion Reformed Church of Pavia (Part-time Pastor)
Rome, PA	First Congregational Church of West Warren (Part-time Pastor)
Telford, PA	Christ Reformed Church at Indian Creek (Dir. Of Family Ministries)
Zelienople, PA	St. Peter's Reformed Church (Dir. of Youth and Young Adults)
Pawtucket, RI	Darlington Congregational Church
Huron, SD	First Congregational Church
Menno, SD	Salem Reformed Church (Assistant Pastor)
Scotland, SD	Scotland Community Church
Gloucester, VA	Severn Church
Sparta, WI	First Congregational Church of Leon

CCCC CHURCH PLANTING PROJECT– Rochester, MN area
Contact Conference Minister, Ron Hamilton for information

PASTORAL OPENINGS – Non-member Churches

Agawam, MA	Agawam Congregational Church (UCC)
Bingham, ME	First Congregational Church (Independent)
North Conway, NH	First Church of Christ (UCC)
Rochester, PA	St. John's United Evangelical Church (Independent)
East Charleston, VT	Plymouth Congregational Church (Independent)
Winsted, CT	Second Congregational Church (Part-time Youth & Family Pastor)

THINGS TO NOTE

TO CHOOSE AND BE CHOSEN

SCOTT ACHTERLING, PRESIDENT & CEO -
CHRISTIAN INVESTORS FINANCIAL

During the holidays, I am ever more mindful of the blessings we have enjoyed at CIF. We are blessed that our employees choose us, from the many options out there, they choose what we offer, and just as importantly, the mission we live by. It is an honor to serve the Lord together. 1 Peter 2 says our Lord Jesus Christ was chosen and precious in the sight of God, and that we like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. There is abounding life, great vibrancy and godly influence in God's household for the work of Christ's church on earth.

I think of our investors, people and churches that have made a conscious, thoughtful decision to put their money in a faith-based organization to do Kingdom work. They are precious to us. Many stayed through the pandemic and the interest rate changes that followed. They stayed when there were other options clamoring for their attention. The words – God's Word – in this section of scripture are impactful, partly because they draw on physical examples of spiritual realities. "Living stones, a spiritual house," and a few verses later, a cornerstone, referring to Jesus Christ. In the general sense, a cornerstone is something of great importance that everything else depends on. In the building sense, traditionally it was the first stone laid, the start of the foundation, marking the location and orientation of a structure. In the spiritual sense, the Lord Jesus is all of those things for us as believers.

We often say it is not the building that really matters, it is the people and the ministry that takes place in the building, the spiritual house, so to speak. This is where real life is, the living stones who do Kingdom work for the Lord. Solid tangible things like buildings and dollars to purchase, equip and improve them are our tools of the trade to be used by God. There are many ways we can elaborate on how our financial services are on a mission. But CIF is not just numbers on paper or a screen, budgets and balance sheets, risk ratings and so on. It is also our people, our staff, who love the Lord and help define us as an organization. As the world around us seems to be fighting Christian values around every corner, we pray and press on in our labor to serve Kingdom expansion. What a blessing that we as believers are also like living stones, built up and doing work for God's Kingdom.

Wishing everyone a blessed Christmas with family and friends. Thank you for your partnership and support of CIF.