

1. CONGREGATIONALISM IN PARTNERSHIP

Section 1.1: CHURCHES IN PARTNERSHIP

Association of Churches

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is as its title says: a voluntary *association* of churches who claim a heritage and practice in the Congregational Way. As an Association, we do not create hierarchies that oversee local churches. It is from one another that we gain mutual encouragement and support. Ours is a tradition that has deep convictions based upon the Word of God as each person interprets that Word according to the dictates of conscience under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Diversity of Congregations

Since every Congregationalist possesses full liberty of conscience in interpreting the Gospel, we are a diverse group of people united under Christ. Our fellowship of churches embraces a diversity of theological viewpoints.

Primacy of the Local Church

Every member church is fully self-governing and spiritually complete. There is no authority over the local church except for Christ. There is no outside ecclesiastical authority over the local church, including the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Because of this, the Association *does not*:

- require member churches to adhere to a shared creed or statement of faith as a condition of membership
- speak for all the member churches on issues of theology, politics, or social concerns
- credential clergy to ministerial service

NACCC Websites

Learn more about us at our website:

www.naccc.org

If you have questions about anything in this handbook, please do not hesitate to contact your NACCC staff. We are here to assist you in your ministries!

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SECTION 1.2: COMMUNICATING WITH THE NACCC

Communication is Key

The lifeblood of our voluntary Association is *communication* between the local church and the NACCC. Communication is a two-way street: We need to hear from you, and you need to hear from us. We believe that communication is not simply a process of transferring information but, most fundamentally, is a relationship between *people*—personal and important.

There are two main groups of people who handle communication within our Association throughout the year: ***Year-Round Delegates and NACCC staff members.***

Year-Round Delegate

Each member church is entitled and ***strongly encouraged*** to designate a Year-Round Delegate as the main communication link between your church and the NACCC. While others—pastors, church administrators, moderators, etc.—also communicate with the NACCC in important ways, it is the *primary job* of the Year-Round Delegate to keep the lines of communication open and free-flowing to support our partnership.

The Year-Round Delegate should be willing to:

- be the conduit for sharing information from the NACCC to the congregation
- be the person to convey the views and ideas of the congregation to the NACCC
- participate effectively in online exchanges

To designate or change your Year-Round Delegate, send the following form to the NACCC office.

<u>Please Complete this Form to Name Your Church's Year-Round Delegate</u>	
NAME:	_____
EMAIL :	_____
MAILING ADDRESS:	_____ CITY _____ STATE _____
PRIMARY, ALTERNATE PHONE NUMBERS:	_____
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	_____ CITY _____ STATE _____
CERTIFIED BY (PRINTED NAME):	_____
SIGNED, OFFICE HELD	_____
For questions, please contact the Church Services Coordinator, lwright@naccc.org call 414-856-1614 Scan and email the completed form to Laura, or return it by mail to NACCC, PO Box 288, Oak Creek, WI 53154	

Communication Is Vital

Communication involves an exchange of information—the *content* of communication—among NACCC churches, as well as between local churches and the National Association:

Your Yearbook Information

The NACCC maintains an online Yearbook at www.naccc.org with information about our member churches. The Yearbook allows Association members, leaders, and staff to know key facts about your church. ***Please contact the NACCC office to update your Yearbook information when a change occurs.***

Information from the NACCC

There are a variety of ways the NACCC puts information in your hands:

- *YRD Line*: These are regular e-newsletters from the NACCC to each church's Year-Round Delegate, containing important information to be shared with the local church, or necessary information about the Year-Round Delegate communication process.
- *NACCC E-News*: We email a digital newsletter twice a month to all member churches and their leadership, along with NACCC leadership, donors, and many other interested individuals and organizations. Each newsletter contains timely information from NACCC leadership, the NACCC staff, member churches, and global mission partners.
- *The Congregationalist*: A glossy full-color magazine published in March, June, September, and December, it is also available online at <https://www.naccc.org/thecongregationalist/>. *The Congregationalist* contains articles on a variety of topics and events related to Congregationalism, church life, and the NACCC. It is available for free to all member households of NACCC churches (though donations are welcome and encouraged). For more information, see Section 2.2.
- NACCC Website, www.naccc.org: a trove of information on NACCC programs, opportunities, publications, membership, church support, and many other things.
- NACCC Facebook page: www.facebook.com/thenaccc

Celebrating and Praying with and for You

The NACCC staff celebrates significant events with you in the life of your church. We also pray for you, especially in times of challenge and difficulty. Please inform us if you have an ordination or installation of a pastor at your church or if you are celebrating a significant church anniversary or other event. We will make every effort to have a NACCC representative present. If that is not possible, we would like to be able to send a greeting and congratulations. Also, if

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you are facing a particular hardship, challenge, or concern, please let us know so that we can pray for your strength, guidance, and comfort.

Necrology

Every year at the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference, we remember Congregational leaders from our member churches who have passed on. These leaders might be ministers or laypeople active at the state and national levels. Please notify us when such luminaries in your church have died. Submit that person's name to the NACCC office, with a brief description of his or her contribution to your church and the Congregational Way. That person will be included in the necrology ceremony at the meeting.

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SECTION 1.3: NACCC MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Active and Inactive Churches

A voluntary association is only as strong as its members are active and contributing. To be considered an active member of the NACCC, a church must make a yearly financial contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund of the Association. This is the operational fund that supports the administrative expenses of the NACCC. Active churches should submit an annual statistical report for the Yearbook and select a Year-Round Delegate (see section 1.2).

A member church that does not make a yearly financial contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund of the Association is not in good standing and is considered an inactive member church. A church that is not in good standing shall be notified by the Secretary of the Board of Directors that it has been placed on the list of inactive member churches. An inactive church shall be automatically restored to active status by making a contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund of the Association.

If a member church is not in good standing for three successive years, its name shall automatically be removed from the roll of member churches and the name of its minister removed from the list of ministers in the Yearbook. This also terminates that minister's access to continued Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) benefit services through the NACCC. Upon notification by the Secretary of the Association, a church removed from the membership rolls for this reason may reactivate its membership in the NACCC (and reinstate its pastor's name to the list of ministers) by fulfilling all of the following: 1) take a vote to reactivate membership and, should that vote be in the affirmative, 2) send to the NACCC a record of the vote, information to update the church's Yearbook entry, name and contact information for the church's Year-Round Delegate, and a financial contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund.

Required Contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund

As stated above, a member church is considered active by its contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund. This contribution is recorded in the NACCC fiscal year in which it was received. The NACCC fiscal year runs from April 1 – March 31.

A target contribution of "Fair Share" or more is desirable. The Fair Share designation is a per-member amount that represents the contribution it would take to meet the NACCC operational budget (a budget approved by the member churches at the Annual Meeting & Conference) if every member contributed their "Fair Share." **The current Fair Share designation is \$13.00 per**

member. A church is considered to be “Fair Share Plus” when it donates \$15.00 or more per member. You do not need to contribute at the Fair Share or greater level to remain an active church, but you must contribute something to the Shared Ministry Fund.

The Blessing of Giving

Your contribution to the Shared Ministries Fund supports the operation of a wide variety of programs and services which the NACCC provides to member churches. In this way, your church tangibly expresses its support for and encouragement of every other member church. We are stronger and more vibrant together than we are alone.

Contributions may be made online by going to www.naccc.org and clicking on the “Donate Now” button. They may also be made by check, payable to NACCC Shared Ministries Fund and mailed to:

NACCC
P.O. Box 288
Oak Creek, WI 53154

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SECTION 1.4: CLERGY STANDING

The NACCC Does Not Confer Standing

As an association of churches (see section 1.1), the NACCC **does not** confer standing on ministers serving NACCC member churches. Such recognition is conferred by the local church upon its call to that person to be their minister. A minister who is serving an active member church or who is retired from a member church is listed in the NACCC Yearbook. Such listing only reflects the information given to us. It does not signify NACCC “standing.” There are several ecclesiastical designations conferred to individuals by the church, as follows.

In-Care Designation

The “in-care” designation may be given to a member of a church who is entering seminary preparing to enter Congregational ministry. The in-care individual informs the minister and the governing board of their plans. If the governing board sees in this person the gifts for ministry, they recommend to the membership that the church vote to place the individual in care, supporting the individual with prayers and leadership opportunities. Some churches support the individual financially as well.

Licensure

Licensure may represent the next level of recognition for the in-care individual. It may be conferred in the same way as in-care status after the church has seen obvious growth and skill in the training for and practice of ministry. It confirms that preparation is proceeding satisfactorily. Moving from in-care to licensure is also done by vote of the church. This allows both the church and the individual to acknowledge and rejoice in the growing wisdom and skill of the individual. With licensure, the church now grants the individual the privilege of conducting weddings, funerals, and sacraments on behalf of the church.

Licensure may also be extended to lay ministers in the congregation or to clergy who may be members of the church. Licensure grants permission to perform all ministerial functions on behalf of the church and is extended by a vote of the congregation. Steps usually include:

- a recommendation from the minister and governing board to the congregation to license a person
- the recommendation is brought before the congregation at a congregational meeting, including the reasons why this is an appropriate step
- a vote is taken by the congregation

Licensure should be reviewed and renewed annually through the process noted above.

Ordination

- **Local**

- A local ordination occurs when a single church recognizes the gifts for ministry in a person they wish to call as their settled minister or to some other ministerial position in the church. It is called “local” because no other churches are asked for advice and guidance in the process. The ordination is valid as long as that person remains the settled minister of that particular church. When that person leaves, the status of his or her ordination is void. The process followed for local ordination is similar to that of licensure (see above). It is then followed by a service that includes ordination vows and an ordination prayer with the laying on of hands by members of that church.
- Please email or mail copies of the ordination documents to the Church Services Coordinator (lwright@nacc.org) of the NACCC, who will forward copies to the Congregational Library and Archives librarian in Boston.

- **Vicinage**

- A church wishing to ordain an individual to the ministry seeks the counsel and advice of area churches as to the wisdom of their desire to ordain. A gathering of area churches for such a purpose is called an Ecclesiastical Council of the Vicinage (“Vicinage Council”). Ordination that occurs after a Vicinage Council recommends that the local church proceed to ordination is a more widely accepted and recognized ministerial status. While the ordination often takes place in conjunction with a call to a church, contemporary practice has also been for a person’s home church to ordain if preceded by a Vicinage Council. In seeking the guidance of a Vicinage Council, a church is looking for confirmation that they have discerned well the gifts of ministry that make the candidate fit for ordination. The local church is free to act upon the advice given by the Vicinage Council or not. If a Vicinage Council recommends that the church not ordain, this does not prevent the ordination if the church chooses to ignore the council’s advice. It does, however, mean that the ordination is a local one. Ordinations that proceed upon positive recognition of a Vicinage Council are recognized by other churches even when the minister has left the church that ordained.
- Please email or mail copies to the Church Services Coordinator (lwright@nacc.org) of the NACCC who will forward copies to the Congregational Library and Archives librarian in Boston. Documents may include (depending upon whether you call a Vicinage Council):

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- vote of the church to call a Vicinage Council in pursuit of ordination
- letter missive that was sent out to call the Vicinage Council
- minutes of the Vicinage Council
- copies of diplomas for undergraduate degrees and other degrees earned
- candidate's Vicinage paper
- order of worship for the ordination ceremony
- copy of the ordination certificate

Lay Ministers

Increasingly, individuals are entering ministry without a seminary education. Many in these circumstances enter a course of study with a mentor to become lay ministers. The NACCC has a Lay Ministry Training Program available. Upon completion of the course of study, many churches recognize that person with a certificate of completion and invite them to serve as a minister. The church may also license the lay minister to perform ministerial duties (see above process). In some cases, the church locally ordains that person.

Chaplaincy

The NACCC does not do the actual endorsement for chaplains. However, we provide a letter of support recommending an individual who is an active member of a NACCC member church for chaplaincy through the Association of Professional Chaplains. To provide that letter, the NACCC requires the following documents:

- proof of graduation for degrees claimed (college or university, seminary or equivalent ministerial training, other graduate study school)
 - official transcripts directly from the institution
 - official letters
 - equivalent documents
 - copy of degrees
- proof of ordination and type of ordination if claimed as ordained
- proof of or verifiable references for the claim of Clinical Pastoral Education, Healthy Boundaries, Lay Ministry Training Program, or Congregational History and/or Polity Course

Resources

The Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS) is a ministry of the NACCC that provides Congregational education and scholarship to seminarians studying for ministry in Congregational churches. If you have a person in your church who is considering enrolling in seminary or already is enrolled, encourage that person to be in touch with the NACCC for

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support and aid. You may contact the NACCC or go to <https://www.naccc.org/education-programs/congregational-foundation-for-theological-studies/> for more information.

The Lay Ministry Training Program (LMTP) is a NACCC program that equips people for ministry in their local churches. For more information, contact the NACCC or go to <https://www.naccc.org/education-programs/ccl/lay-ministry-training-program/>.

More can be learned about ecclesiastical standing in these resources:

- [*From Call To Settlement*](#), Lloyd Hall
- [*The Congregational Worship Book*](#), Henry David Gray
- [*How to Gather and Order A Congregational Christian Church*](#), A. Vaughn Abercrombie

All may be found online at www.naccc.org

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SECTION 1.5: CLERGY AND LAITY OPPORTUNITIES

Convocation

Every year, the NACCC hosts a gathering for clergy designed to provide continuing education, spiritual reflection, and rest. Convocation usually begins after Easter, a perfect time for clergy to renew themselves. Many churches set aside money to send their pastor to this event, knowing that the spiritual rest their pastor gains benefits the church. Providing a way for your pastor to attend Convocation is not only a show of support but also reminds the clergy person that the church wants and needs a pastor who is mindful of his or her health and well-being. Ultimately, it is the church that benefits from their clergy's experiences.

Regional Retreats

Many state and regional associations also host local retreats for clergy. These gatherings help area clergy stay connected to each other, sustaining vital collegial relationships. Supporting your minister to attend regional retreats will also bless the church with a happier, healthier pastor.

Congregational History and Polity Seminars

This is an especially important seminar if the minister serving your church has come to you from a tradition that is not Congregational. Many times, a pastor from another tradition unknowingly misunderstands the Congregational Way because they do not have adequate knowledge or experience. When this happens, the result can be significant conflict in the church. Many churches require that their new pastor attend a History and Polity offering in the first year he or she assumes the pastorate, writing the requirement directly into the terms of call. Frequently, the NACCC offers a seminar in the Boston area as a way to experience the history and culture of Congregationalism. Churches may encourage their pastor to attend by granting paid time off to participate and providing a stipend to cover or offset expenses. If your pastor is from a tradition other than Congregational, the investment you make in sending her or him to this seminar could save you heartache down the road.

History and Polity offerings are not just for clergy who have come to your church from other traditions. Many laity attend to further their knowledge of and appreciation for their Congregational heritage. Church leaders find the seminar helps them become more confident leaders. Information about upcoming programs is posted on the NACCC's website.

There is also the opportunity to take the History and Polity course by contacting the Church Services Coordinator, Laura Wright (lwright@naccc.org). Launched in 2013, this course is designed in two levels. Level I is suitable for clergy, laity, new member classes, and confirmation. It is an introduction to Congregationalism. Level II is an advanced level for those who wish to learn more. The second level is particularly aimed at clergy who have come to Congregationalism from other traditions. A certificate of completion is provided for each level. There is no cost for course materials. Some additional reading may be purchased by the participant.

Annual Meeting and Conference

The most prominent NACCC event for member churches and their laity and clergy is the Annual Meeting and Conference. The Annual Meeting is an important expression of Congregationalism, where churches send an official delegate to help conduct the business of the assembled churches. The member churches *are* the National Association. It is at the Annual Meeting that churches come together to make decisions important to their common interests. While the delegates conduct the business, there is plenty for others to do. Many people who are not official delegates attend to partake in the fellowship and educational opportunities at the conference. See more about the Annual Meeting and Conference in Section 2.3.

Silent Retreats and Quiet Days

Twice a year, the Congregational Retreat Society (CRS) hosts a silent retreat and invites clergy and laity to attend this time of spiritual reflection and renewal. Quiet Day Retreat is held at the Annual Meeting and Conference. The other retreat typically takes place in the autumn and may occur regionally and remotely.

Members of the Society are available to lead, train, or assist others to lead silent retreats for local churches or regional associations. Standard to all silent retreats are prayer, devotional reading, and work in the quiet.

Continuing Education

The NACCC hosts seminars and webinars on a variety of topics of interest to the church and its members, leadership, and pastors.

The Congregational Symposium

Various churches around the country have hosted the Congregational Symposium. The Symposium brings together gifted speakers who have new insights into the basis and practice

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of Congregationalism. The Symposium allows clergy and laity to be stimulated and challenged in a variety of ways. It also allows new friendships and connections to form. The Symposium is not a function of the NACCC and occurs only when a church is moved to host the next one. If no church emerges to host the Symposium, it does not occur. The Congregational Leadership team can provide coaching and support to any church willing to host the Symposium.

Service on Boards and Committees of the NACCC

The NACCC is an association of churches. It depends on representatives from member churches to join boards, councils, and committees to guide the work and ministry of the NACCC. Opportunities abound! A complete outline of the responsibilities and powers of these officers, councils, boards, and committees can be found in the Articles of Incorporation and NACCC Bylaws. Some of these roles are filled through the nomination process and election by the delegates at the NACCC Annual Meeting and Conference.

Boards and Councils

The **Board of Directors** is responsible for the fiduciary and policy oversight of the Association.

- Moderator – presides at all meetings of the member churches of the NACCC; serves as chair of the Leadership Council and a voting member of the Board of Directors and the Annual Meeting and Conference Committee
- Vice Moderator – assists the moderator and may serve as the chair of the Board of Directors
- Secretary – keeps the current records of the NACCC, including the proceedings and decisions of the Leadership Council and the Board of Directors, and serves as a signatory of the Association
- Treasurer – is the custodian of the funds of the NACCC and submits reports to the NACCC at each Annual Meeting and Conference
- Historian – keeps a written chronology of important historical events and accomplishments of the NACCC and maintains necrology

Leadership Council shall act for the NACCC, ad interim, on matters of program, membership, service to our churches, and vision. The Leadership Council is made up of members who serve by holding other elected or appointed positions in the NACCC. The council is comprised of two members of each Ministry Council, as well as the moderator, vice moderator, and youth representative. The Leadership Council is responsible for:

- casting vision and prioritizing programs and services of the NACCC
- overseeing the Annual Meeting and Conference
- sustaining relationships with the Year-Round Delegates
- tending to churches inquiring about and advancing their membership
- providing ceremonial functions to the churches

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Vitality Ministry Council (VMC) is responsible for the encouragement and support of the churches of the NACCC in their missions of strengthening church life through:

- educational, financial, and spiritual support for seminary students
- ministerial training
- addressing issues relating to ministerial congregational relationships
- enhancing revitalization efforts
- dealing with pragmatic aspects of local congregational ministries as in stewardship education, leadership training, and strategic planning

Mission and Outreach Ministry Council (MOMC) is responsible for the encouragement and support of congregations of the NACCC in their mission of spreading the word and work of Christ in the world – both locally and globally, through:

- advancing global mission partnership programs
- nurturing our partnerships with Olivet and Piedmont Universities
- promoting relationships with other Congregational bodies
- supporting ongoing communication with state and regional associations
- cultivating ecumenical relationships and partnerships as appropriate

Growth Ministry Council (GMC) is responsible for the encouragement and support of congregations of the NACCC in their mission of faith and discipleship through:

- the development of meaningful and God-honoring worship and spiritual growth experiences
- the development of member church ministries with youth
- providing leadership for NACCC-wide youth programs
- providing support and effective use of technology in the member church
- the establishment of new Congregational churches

Task Teams are responsible for the hands-on work required to fulfill program objectives.

Ad Hoc Committee opportunities are created from time to time, depending on needs and circumstances.

Nominating Committee handles nominations for NACCC positions. It is their job to solicit the names of interested people and put selected people in nomination before the delegate body of the Annual Meeting and Conference. They encourage the submission of nominations all year long. On the next page, you will find a nomination form you may copy and use. Please consider who in your church might have an interest in and aptitude for any of the numerous opportunities available. The NACCC is made strong and effective by the work of many people.

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Nomination Form

For Officers, Leadership Council, Board of Directors, and Ministry Councils
NOMINATIONS ACCEPTED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
SELF-NOMINATION WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED

FY2025 Election Deadline is December 15th, 2024, service will begin at the conclusion of the June 2025 Annual Meeting

Forms may be downloaded from our website at www.naccc.org

Due to the nature of our meetings, we require that all elected leaders be proficient with and have access to a computer and the internet.

POSITIONS FOR WHICH CANDIDATE IS RECOMMENDED: (check any that apply)

- Moderator (2-year term- continues from prior election)
- Vice-Moderator (2-year term- continues from prior election)
- Secretary* (1-year term; June 2025-June 2026)
- Treasurer* (1-year term; June 2025-June 2026)
- Historian* (1-year term; June 2025-June 2026)
- Board of Directors (4-year term)
- Youth Representative – Leadership Council* (1-year term; June 2025-June 2026)
- Growth Ministry Council (3-year term)
- Mission and Outreach Ministry Council (3-year term)
- Vitality Ministry Council (3-year term)
- Annual Meeting and Conference Committee Member-at-Large (3-year term)
- Serve on a non-elected committee or task team

Please note: Positions that are shaded are not up for election this year. Those with an asterisk (*) beside them may have an incumbent prepared to continue in office.

NAME OF NOMINEE: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____

CITY

STATE

ZIP

PHONE/ HOME: _____ CELL: _____ WORK: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

OCCUPATION: _____

NOMINEE'S CHURCH NAME: (Church must have active member status in the NACCC):

_____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____

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SPECIFIC SKILLS AND INTEREST LEVEL THE NOMINEE BRINGS TO THE POSITION:

NOMINEE'S SERVICE AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN:

Local Church:

Regional Association:

National Association:

Other community organizations/non-profits:

PLEASE PROVIDE A REFERENCE FOR THIS INDIVIDUAL, IN ADDITION TO YOURSELF:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

Has this individual been contacted and agreed to serve if nominated? YES: _____ NO: _____

Has this person read the position description, expectations, and travel policy? YES: _____ NO: _____

(Please contact the nominee and ask before answering and submitting this form.)

NOMINATION SUBMITTED BY:

INDIVIDUAL CHURCH

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____

PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED FORM TO:
NACCC NOMINATING COMMITTEE: PO BOX 288, OAK CREEK, WI 53154
Or email to: ssobecke@naccc.org
For questions contact: 414-856-1612