

MODERATOR'S COMMENTS
1977 ANNUAL MEETING

By

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Last year, while serving you as Assistant Moderator, one of our young ministers asked me from where in the world I had come. He'd looked in the Yearbook and found that my name isn't listed among those more notable people who founded the National Association.

My first reaction was only a little short of embarrassment. I'm not one of those dedicated people who in the face of a great challenge breathed new life into the historic Congregational Way in Detroit in 1955. During those years I was busy elsewhere and not at all concerned about what was happening in Congregationalism. That was a different ball game being played in somebody else's ball park. It didn't matter to me then, but it does now, and in this brief address I want to tell you why.

At the founding of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, I was snugly ensconced in the solid security of a well established denomination. I couldn't have had it better nor been more comfortable being afflicted with a feeling of being hemmed in by some boundaries that were very real and not a part of my imagination. I was growing restless but didn't really know what to do about it. I knew I was changing in certain ways. I tried to convince myself that I was growing; some of my minister friends said I was "back-sliding"; looking back over about eighteen years past I now know it was simply a need for more latitude to respond to the free Spirit of the Lord which was moving in new ways upon me. I guess Boring was a-borning to the Congregational Way long before he knew it.

My opportunity for freer expression came in 1961. While working as a missionary pilot in the area of Mexico's Ixtepec Peninsula, I received a call from a Community church in California where I had preached a few times while on brief furloughs. This church is affiliated with the Council of Community Churches, an association of free churches similar to ours, and while there I received my first inkling of what it means to be spiritually free. I learned to live it, and know it now as a growing love that seems to have no terminal point.

I love being out here in the open where the free Spirit of God moves and acts and you never can be too sure of when or how. I love the challenge of no boundaries and no horizons. I enjoy being free to put comas where periods used to be and occasionally even a question mark. I've been thrilled to learn that God doesn't live in the box of anyone's theological statement and that even the absolutes in life can be as open-ended toward future light and revelation as in

God Himself. It's been a mind and soul expanding experience from the beginning.

I found the Congregational Way in its most historic and continuing process in 1968 when I was called to be the minister of the Congregational Church of Soquel, also in California. It was a feeling off coming home to a home I didn't know I had. It brought me into our National Association, this organization of free people and churches doing corporately all those things temporal and spiritual I once thought to be impossible without the guidance of a central ecclesiastical authority. Everything I was familiar with in the old days was there; all the institutions for a viable association of churches or a church denomination were there, but nearly everything was being done by volunteers in co-operation with each other under the headship of Christ. It was the CONGREGATIONAL WAY and I loved it at first sight.

This may all sound like old hat to you, but remember, I'm simply telling you what our National Association means to the likes of me, a Johnny-come-lately, who once didn't know such a fellowship existed, but rejoices every day now because he found it, and is glad for this opportunity to say a good word for it.

During this year as your Moderator I've become increasingly aware that the Holy Spirit is working dynamically among us. Numerically we may not be growing by leaps and bounds, but I have sensed an encouraging spiritual surging among us that prompted the theme of Vision With Vitality for this conference. Many things are happening that are loaded with promise. There is something blowing in the wind that is refreshing and stimulating. We're hearing the sound of a rustling in the tops of King David's mulberry trees, the signal to stir ourselves to follow the Lord going before us. (II Sam. 5:24)

It's a good time to be in this National Association, and each of us should be on guard that the spirit of hope and enthusiasm that moves among us is never contaminated by anything that will take away the joy. Let's avoid strife and negative criticisms at all costs. Let's not get so introspective in examining our flaws that we, as some others have done, become both fascinated and immobilized by the fact that organizationally, we may not be perfect. Some of our so-called imperfections may be the very agents of our continuing free march into the future.

An example is that in no way are we all look-alikes, think-alikes, or do-alikes. Organizationally, this could be a liability, but with us it is not. We should covet our differences as an asset to be cherished and lovingly accepted. If ever we should start putting our act together in stereo-type, we'll lose our utter dependence upon the leading of the free Spirit of God who is more interested in our corporate conformity to His will as He reveals it than in our conformity to each other's personal view points.

Well, for a brief address, I've said enough. These comments are simply meant to tell you how glad I am to be a Congregationalist and to encourage us one and all to keep looking Forward, in Freedom, with Vision, and Vitality. If for no one else, do it for me. I love our National Association, and the National Association is you. I thank you for listening.