



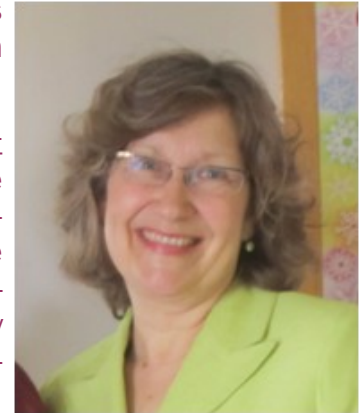
October 2011

The News of the Wisconsin Congregational Association

Moderator's Message

Welcome to the WCA Congregationalist! It is near the end of October and Thanksgiving is in sight—the Congregational High Holy Day!

We have much to be thankful for in the WCA at this time. Our churches are reaching out to the world and the local community to feed the hungry, minister to the sick and in prison, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless. There is always more we can do, but each person or family we help is a life touched by God. For this opportunity and honor we are thankful.



We are thankful for the fellowship we share with our sister churches in the Congregational Way. Spiritual friendships are made and nurtured when we gather together for worship, business or fellowship. The gifts of the Spirit are abundant and present. The prospect of how these gifts might be used together for God's work is humbling, and deserving of our gratitude.

There are specific reasons to be thankful in the WCA at this time, and you can read about some of these things in this newsletter. As we all learned at our Annual Meeting in May, the LEAD Team, led by Rev. Stu Merkel of Faith Community Church, is continuing to explore God's call to us in the form of planting a church. Please read Stu's article to learn more about this process.

Secondly, the WCA is currently home to several ministry students. Each issue of this newsletter will highlight one of these students. See Julie Sheridan-Smith's article this month, and offer a prayer of thanks for God's work in her life.

Gifted by God, many of our members are talented writers of fiction and poetry. When we read their prose, it is easy to see God's glory through the beauty of the imagination and the truths that emerge. In each issue, we will be highlighting an offering of writers who are members of WCA churches. In this issue, the offering is from Rev. Nanci Rathbun of Fox River Congregational Church. If you enjoy Chapter 2 of her novel, *The Snoop*, ask Nanci personally if you can read more.

If you know of more reasons in the WCA to be thankful, offer your thanks to God, and then write something up for the December issue of the WCA Congregationalist! You may email your articles to me at cabaconhammer@gmail.com.

In gratitude and covenant,
Rev. Cindy Bacon Hammer

WCA Officers

Rev. Cynthia Bacon Hammer, Heritage Congregational Church-Moderator

Pastor Carol Taylor, Second Congregational Church-Past Moderator

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Paul Ray, First Congregational Church of Rochester-Clergy at Large

Larry Sommers, Heritage Congregational Church-Lay Member at Large

North Shore Congregational Church

By Bill Neuhaus



Church News

North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point, Wisconsin, began its post summer schedule with an "Invitation Celebration" in which we welcomed friends and residents from the surrounding community to a special worship service featuring traditional Blue Grass music. The moving words and rhythm grounded in Celtic folk melodies were an inspirational beginning to a year of meaningful action and activity.

Our theme of "Widening the Welcome" is bearing fruit in new church membership and increasing support of missions in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the United States. Our Benevolence committee is coordinating volunteer time and financial contributions to such organizations as St. Ben's Loaves and Fishes and Repairers of the Breach who serve the hungry and homeless. Our Board of Christian Education is continuing to implement more programs designed to educate the youngest as well as mature members of the congregation.

Of particular note is the recent visit of the Reverend Arthur Rouner Jr., author of [The Congregational Way of Life](#). This noted clergyman and scholar shared his insight and message on "what it means to live and worship as a Congregationalist" over a two day visit that included seminars and two worship services. He highlighted his heroic work in war torn Africa bringing the Word of God to warring tribes on the Kenya / Uganda border.

With North Shore's enthusiastic congregation and God's good help, this year promises to be both fulfilling and productive.

Recipes from Congregationalists

Dead Flies on Rye (or Swiss Cheese Stuff on Rye)

Recipe from Gloria Kedzierski
via Raellen Preuss, First Congregational Church of Mukwonago

1 large bag Swiss cheese-shredded
1 can chopped black olives
4-6 T. chopped onion
12 oz cooked and crumbled bacon
1 t. Worcestershire sauce
Mayonnaise to moisten
Combine ingredients. Spread on cocktail rye. Melt under broiler 2-3 minutes.

This recipe is delicious, and was shared at a WCA Women's Retreat several years ago. The recipe's name is always a great conversation starter!

LEAD Wisconsin by Rev. Stu Merkel

During the last 10 years the NACCC has put out a call for Congregational churches to plant new churches. This call came from the Congregational Church Development (CCD) division of the NACCC which helps and supports new church plants and does church revitalization for the Association. In 2010 CCD ventured into a plan to help local regions catch the vision of planting and starting new churches. That year a group of clergy met in the Wisconsin Dells for an overnight retreat with Tom Nebel author of [Big Dreams In Small Places](#) a church planting guide. Tom helped the ministers from Wisconsin form the LEAD team that today is working to position the association for new church planting efforts around the state.

LEAD stands for Learn, Encourage, Achieve, and Dream which is what the group hopes to do in planting a vision for new churches. We are learning about planting, encouraging one another, achieving milestones, and dreaming of new church starts. The group meets to pray, plan, and dream about ministry growth for the fellowship

The group that has now been meeting over the last 18 months with the dream of planting a new Congregational Church in Wisconsin came to the May 2011 meeting of the Wisconsin Congregational Association. There the group shared its message and vision with the many churches represented.

LEAD Team Wisconsin is convinced by God that planting a new church is something we are called to help God do now and that the churches of our fellowship should work together to make it happen. Some question *why plant a church* when so many churches are struggling with declining attendance and even some are in crisis? The LEAD team is concerned about this too but believes that while churches are struggling there is still a growing need for new spiritual communities of faith and new life breaths new hope into old fellowships.

You can become a part of the LEAD team effort by contacting Pastor Stu Merkel of Faith Community Church in Franklin, WI (pastor@faithcc.us). The team needs your prayers, interested people from your church, clergy participation, and the heart to dream about new faith communities starting in our region. The local church still remains the greatest hope of the world and has ever since our pilgrim forefathers came to this great land. Now is the time to attempt great things for God and expect great things from God to occur.

WCA Ministry Student Profile

Over 10 years ago I began to discern a call to ministry while teaching 4 year old Sunday school. Naturally I was convinced I had somehow intercepted someone else's message! Several people I trusted, learned from, and prayed with affirmed this with me. I could not conceive of what a call to ministry should look like but I knew I needed to go back to school. As I finished an undergraduate degree in theology it became clear that the next step was Seminary. I joined the first cohort of distance MDiv students at Dubuque Theological Seminary in 2007; traveling twice a year for "intensives" on campus and taking online classes together in between. This enabled me to be at home with my family and continue working full time at North Shore Congregational church as the Children's Ministry Director and Christian Involvement Coordinator, putting learning into practice and I am grateful. God willing I will graduate this May 2012! My husband has been amazingly supportive along the way and he with our three children have loved my through nine years of school. I am excited for whatever God has in store and look forward to following further into ordained ministry.



**MDiv Student,
Julie Sheidan-Smith**

Fiction Feature *The Snoop, Chapter 2* by Rev. Nanci Rathbun*The Snoop Chapter 2*

Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest. - W. H.

Auden, critic and poet

I woke, groggy and disoriented, to the sounds of buzzing and pounding. The digital clock read 4:48. Groaning, I pawed for the “off” button. Still, the sounds persisted. I sat up and listened more intently: telephone, doorbell, hammering on the entry door. Good grief, I thought, has the world exploded?

I picked up the phone with a raspy “Hello?” as I pulled on my robe and slid my feet into slippers.

“Angie, it’s Bart Matthews. Listen closely, there isn’t much time until the police get to you.”

“I think they’re already here, Bart,” I responded as I looked out the peephole at two men, one of whom I knew. “Joe Ignowski and another guy are pounding on my door.”

“Okay, before you answer the door, I want to hire you on behalf of Anthony Belloni.”

“Just a minute, I’m getting some clothes on,” I yelled at the door, hoping to stifle them before all my neighbors heard. The pounding and buzzing stopped. Why, I thought, would the infamous “Mafia attorney” (media phrase, not mine) be representing Tony? Adultery isn’t illegal. “Bart, I have a conflict of interest in that regard.” I was trying not to name Gracie.

“I know, Gracie told me. She also told the police when they arrested Tony tonight for the murder of Elisa Morano. I don’t want you talking to the cops without a briefing. If you’re employed by me, you’re covered by attorney-client privilege.”

“Hang on, Bart, I’m thinking.” I opened the door and motioned the detectives in. “Give me a minute,” I told them.

“Hey, Angie,” Joe whined, but I ignored him as I walked into my bedroom and shut and locked the door.

From the back of my walk-in closet, surrounded by sound-muffling clothing, I resumed my conversation with Bart. “Let me get this straight. Tony’s in the slammer for killing Elisa and Gracie wants me to help him?”

“Right. She’s in a ‘Stand by Your Man’ mood.” He paused and I heard the click and the little explosion of butane flame, then the sucking sound as he took a drag. Bart weighs at least three hundred, smokes non-stop, and works eighty hours a week as legal counsel for the Family. I doubt he’ll see forty.

Ignowski and partner were now pounding on my bedroom door. “Give me a minute, Bart.” I exited the closet, opened the bedroom door and stood there, one hand brandishing the phone and the other on my hip. “You guys will have to wait. I’m talking to my attorney.” Joe’s partner started to protest, but I raised my hand and pointed. “Go press the Start button on the coffee-maker in the kitchen. It’s loaded and ready. Pour yourselves a cup and I’ll be out as soon as I can.” Before either man could respond, I closed and locked the door and walked back into the closet.

“I can’t say yes or no to the offer, Bart, until I know whether Tony did it. I won’t protect him if he did.”

“No way, Angie. He never touched her.” Hoarse cough/laugh. “Well, at least he never touched her that way.”

“But they were making it?”

“Yeah, they were. He’s properly ashamed, believe me. He and Gracie had it out tonight, after she told him about hiring you. He broke down and confessed, told her he wanted to end it with Elisa, that he’d never cheated before. Then the police came to the door and she lost it and told them the whole story, how Tony couldn’t have done it because he loved her and not Elisa. Silly twit just couldn’t keep her yap shut.”

“She’s under a lot of pressure, Bart. Four little kids and another on the way, and a lying husband accused of murdering the girlfriend. I think you should cut her some slack.”

Nanci Rathbun is a recent graduate of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, and is the Associate Minister at Fox River Congregational Church in Pewaukee.

The Ten Commandments (sung to the tune of Do-Re-Mi)

God is one, the only One. Do not worship other Gods.
 Speak God's name in righteousness. Spend one day a week with God.
 Love your mother and your dad. Do not kill or cheat or steal.
 Speak the truth with every word. Be content with what you have!
 Now back to...

The Snoop, Chapter 2, continued

He had the grace to apologize, and even sounded sheepish as he did. "Sorry, Angie, you're right. Gracie's got a lot to deal with. That's why she's begging you to help clear Tony." He let it lie there for a couple seconds. Every good lawyer or interrogator knows the technique. I use it myself. That doesn't make it easier to handle.

"Can you get me into the jail tomorrow? I want to talk to Tony in person."

"No problem. You can go in as part of my staff. You're taking the job, right?"

"For now. You're lucky, I didn't find anything incriminating on him, just the affair. Now I'd better get out there and talk to Iggy and his partner before they explode."

"Lucky draw, getting Iggy, huh? Could be worse. I'll call you first thing in the morning."

"It's already morning, dammit. Don't call me before ten." I hung up the phone and washed my face before joining the men, who were drinking coffee at my dining room table.

There's a lot of common ground between criminals and cops. Both savor power, thrills, control. The good cops know they're only a step or two away from the crooks they're arresting. Iggy is one of the good cops. I heard that one year, Iggy's new license plates arrived in the mail with a little message scratched on the back from the prisoner who stuffed the envelopes: HI IGGY. Go figure.

Iggy introduced his partner to me. "Angie, this is Detective Ted Wukowski."

I extended my hand. "They call you Wookie?"

"Only once." He gave me a real Sergeant Friday look, no smile, no expression, all business.

Iggy coughed, a little embarrassed by Wukowski's manners. "Angie, we're here to talk to you about Tony Baloney, uh, I mean, Anthony Belloni."

"I know, Iggy. I was just on the phone with Bart." We both knew who I meant, and if Wukowski was in the dark, what did I care? "I'm on retainer to help him represent Belloni, so I can't talk to you."

Wukowski stood, looming over me as I sipped from my coffee. "You know the rules, lady. You can lose your license for withholding evidence of a crime."

"That's right, Detective. But the last I heard, running around on your wife isn't a crime. It's dishonest and lowdown and immoral, but if I had to report everyone I knew who cheated, the streets would be pretty empty." I gently set my cup down on the table, pushed back my chair and stood up. I knew I didn't hold the advantage, five-three to his six feet, dressed in slippers and robe, with my hair in its wild bed-head mode, while he wore a navy blue suit and his dark hair was perfectly combed and parted.

Nevertheless, I stuck out my chin and took a step toward him. He backed up. I graciously extended my hand toward the foyer. "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I have business to attend to. You may direct any further inquiries to Bart Matthews."

"That scum," Wukowski muttered under his breath.

Iggy grabbed his arm and pulled him to the door. "Ange, a woman is dead. We need to find out who did it."

"How'd she die, Iggy?" I asked.

He hesitated. "The coroner will have to decide. There was a gunshot to the chest, and a lot of cuts to the face and hands. It wasn't pretty."

After they left, I sank down on the couch and stared out at the panoramic view of Lake Michigan. Light was just breaking over the horizon. A new day, but not for Elisa Morano. I slowly recited the prayer for the dead that I learned as a child: *Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.*

Considering her lifestyle, I wasn't sure that Elisa was one of the faithful, but I figured there was no harm in asking.

Travel Feature-Finding God in Wales by Rev. Cynthia Bacon Hammer

Did you know that there are more sheep than people in Wales? I didn't. At least I didn't until I visited Wales a year ago and saw hillside after hillside of lush green dotted with sheep of all sizes and shapes. Finally, an image to go with *pastorale!*



Wales is a beautiful country, not only because of fields and the sheep that inhabit them, but also because of the early morning fog, the rocky coastline, the ancient castles, cathedrals and walled cities, the beauty of the language and the people. There is a feeling of divine design in all that is Wales, from the thick brush that forms lines between fields and pastures that defines the contour of the landscape to the harmony of the plan for each individual city, God's grace can be seen. Those things made by human hands seem to be the servant of the natural setting created by God, the human the servant of the existing land. Of course, this makes the roads curve a little more, but the result is well worth it, for the feeling of well-being that emerges is nothing short of Sabbath-like.



Llandeilo is pronounced Klan-dye-lo.

Arriving on a Saturday and being in the country, I asked the proprietress if there was a Congregational Church in the nearest town. Of course, there was! I was blessed to worship on Sunday at a Welsh-speaking Congregational Church in the town of Llandeilo. Having been given an early time for worship (better early than late!), we arrived in time to find a church deacon unlocking the church for morning worship and lighting the furnace to ward off the chill. When she realized I was a Congregational pastor in the U.S., our gracious host suggested I



apply for the pulpit there, since they had been searching for over three years! When I said that I didn't know a word of Welsh, she promptly replied, "I'll teach you. It's easy!"



Fortunately, after 24 hours in the Southwest region of Wales, where everything is posted and spoken in both English and Welsh, we were able to sing along with the familiar hymn tunes and try our hand at pronunciation. Though we did not understand a word of the sermon, it was easy to understand the hospitality and sharing of the Spirit present in the warm and welcoming congregation. God had been worshiped, and we were not alone, but a true part of the Congregational community. What a joy!

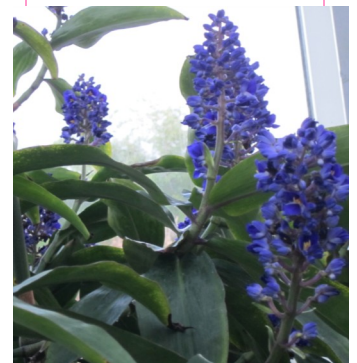
Wales, continued

On St. David's Peninsula, far to the South and West, there is the town of St. David's, and St. David's Cathedral. Founded about 550 AD, after St. David had traveled to Jerusalem before returning to his native Wales. After burning several times over by invading Danes, the present Cathedral was begun in the late 1180's. Standing in a hollow only a short distance from the most westerly point of Wales, the Cathedral and grounds are stunning and worshipful. Again, the welcoming spirit of the people made this trek special and more beautiful than the surroundings themselves. It is clearly *A Place of Pilgrimage, Beauty and Peace* as noted on one of the informational pamphlets. All visitors are *warmly welcomed* and though a popular tourist attraction, *The Cathedral is above all a place of Worship*. There are spaces that are always reserved for prayer and quiet, inviting the pilgrim to worship in peace.



As we were leaving the peace and beauty of St. David's, the sun and clouds were filling the sky with color and light, bouncing off of the trees and brush, causing the stone bridges to sparkle and shine. I turned and saw the Cathedral illuminated by this mystical sky. As you can see, the view is other-worldly, possible only by divine-design. A feeling of completeness filled my being. All was well, and the feeling guided our way back to the countryside, dotted with sheep.

The National Botanical Gardens are beautiful, even in the late fall.



As this reflection comes to an end, I must make special note of the people of Wales. The generous welcome and harmonious feeling felt was not limited to Cathedrals and churches. It was an ever-present sensation because of the people. Every question was welcomed and answered with grace, each town inviting, each meal served with great kindness. Conversations were easy and fruitful. If I am ever blessed to return to Wales, it will be to see the people again. The sense of community to be found in Wales is a blessing to all, natives and visitors alike. The easy humor and relaxed ways of Wales give the visitor a feeling of belonging. No one is a stranger. And consequently, God is praised.

In Cardiff, *Dr. Who* fans can see where the series is filmed.



**Wisconsin
Congregational
Association**



www.wiscongregational.net

OUR COVENANT

We covenant with the Lord and with one another in striving to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, known or to be made known to us and to be free from the will of humanity for the purpose of becoming perfectly subject to the will of God.

We voluntarily associate ourselves together for faith, freedom, a fellowship, with Jesus Christ as our only Head.

We affirm and maintain the freedom of individual conscience as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, our only interpreter of the Word of God.

We also claim that each Church shall be free, independent, and forever devoid of any and all control by the association.

Coming in Our Next Issue—December 2011

What is your church doing for Advent and Christmas this year?

Please send articles related to Advent and Christmas to Rev. Cynthia Bacon Hammer at cabconhammer@gmail.com.

Recipes, fiction, poetry, church news, travel experiences and news about theology students are requested.

Other items of interest are also welcome.

Articles are due by Wednesday, November 23, 2011.

