

WHAT CONGREGATIONALISM MEANS TO ME

In the early months of 2021, I spoke with Lois Rosebrooks about her relationship to Congregationalism. Many of you will remember Lois, a long time member of Plymouth. Over the years, Lois served Plymouth in many capacities, including leading the Sunday School and as chair of the History Ministry. Lois now lives in Delaware where she is near her family, but for those of us who know her, she is still very present and still very much a member of the Plymouth Community.

For Lois, music and Congregationalism intersect. Her roots are in Congregationalism - you might even say it is in her DNA - but her singing voice took her to many churches and denominations over the years. When she was growing up in Massachusetts, she attended the Congregational Church with her father. By the time she was 14, she had become an accomplished singer and shortly thereafter, her fledgling career as a church soloist was launched.

Lois studied music in college and continued her studies after graduation, eventually finding her way to Henry Pfohl, who was then at Plymouth. He was the founder of the adult choir at Plymouth, and built Plymouth's choir by offering free voice lessons to anyone who would sing in the choir. Lois moved to New York City in 1957 and availed herself of this offer, studying under him for 5 years, and cementing her relationship with Plymouth, which she joined in 1963. Even as a Plymouth member, she performed as a soloist at churches and synagogues all over New York City, including Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in Harlem, which was a personal favorite.

When she retired from her "day job" in 2000, she took on the mountain of historical information that was stored at Plymouth. Aided by local

students, she worked for 15 years to catalogue and store the collection, and to build the History Ministry at Plymouth.

In speaking about Congregationalism, Lois says, “I grew up with Congregationalism so it is very natural to me. What I love most about Congregationalism is the freedom. Each congregation is in charge of how its ministers are chosen. Congregational Churches attract a variety of people from many different denominational and geographic backgrounds. Each church can choose its own form of worship and can involve the laity in worship in many ways. Overall, there is an openness in Congregationalism that I have never found anywhere else.” As a church soloist, Lois was exposed to many denominations, but she always came back to Congregationalism. “There was a brief period when I had a dual membership with Plymouth and a Baptist Church, but I only did that because I was working at the Baptist Church and they required it.” Lois went on to say, “I love the personal freedom that individuals have in a Congregational Church – the freedom to believe according to their own conscience. I appreciate that Plymouth does not use any of the creeds.” And, of course, history is very important to Lois. She added, “I still connect with the religious fervor of the Pilgrims.”

Lois’s passion for Congregationalism led her to be active for many years in the NACCC, The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, and organization of which Plymouth is a member. She says, “I found the UCC (United Church of Christ) to be very narrow in its views, whereas the NACCC churches embodied what I considered to be traditional Congregationalism.”

For Lois, it all comes back to freedom – freedom to make choices and freedom to worship within “The Congregational Way.”

~ Lois Rosebrooks, interviewed by Jacque Jones