

# GENEVA LUTHERAN



The English-Speaking Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva  
20, Rue Verdaine / 1204 Geneva, Switzerland.

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Lent and Easter

"God crosses the limits and goes where we see only loss"

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## In God's Name? Religion, Violence and the Path to Peace

By Peniel Rajkumar

We seem to live in a context where "there seems to be enough religion to make us hate one another but not enough religion to make us love one another," to use the words of Mark Twain.



One of the dangers of religious

violence today is the enlisting of God as an ally in violence. This on the one hand empowers the perpetrator and on the other elicits a dangerous complicity through silence by a passive majority.

In this context the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks assume a poignant relevance: when religion turns men into murderers, God weeps and says "not in my name". In a time as this, where it is increasingly affirmed that religions which are often considered part of the problem need also to be part of the solution, the challenge for religions is to reinvent themselves as instruments of peace.

Three values are integral to this transformation of religion as a pathway for peace, namely honesty, hospitality and humility.

There is need for honesty to acknowledge that religions have at their heart problematic scriptural texts - 'texts of terror', which can condone violence against the 'other', and work towards critical

scriptural reinterpretation as a way towards peace.

This approach of honesty should be complemented by hospitality which moves beyond the idea of tolerance, which often perceives the religious other as an unavoidable inconvenience which cannot be eliminated. The spirit of honesty and hospitality needs to be completed by a spirit of humility, which is constantly attentive to the dynamics of power at play even in projects of interreligious collaboration and makes sure that the table of interreligious dialogue and cooperation is one in which there is equal space for the sharing of gifts of all.

In this way religious communities can reinvent religions not as fortresses to be defended but as wellsprings for the flourishing of all life.

## Nigerian Women's Resilience Amidst the Politicisation of Religion and Violence.

By Fulata Moyo

We visited north east Nigeria, as part of the World Council of Churches' pilgrimage of justice and peace initiative. As an expression of solidarity with women, the focus was active listening to women's experiences as victims and survivors of male-initiated violence in a context where religion, culture and armed conflict serve as instruments of the politics of patri-kyriarchal domination.

What were the women's stories? What examples of resilience and resistance as

agents of transformation could they share? Using four town hall meetings, 10 focus group interviews and 50 short individual interviews, we listened and interrogated the role of religion and culture. With feminist ethics of care as our theoretical framework, we analysed these accounts, especially the gendered aspects of violence and women's agency in response.

Since religious, cultural and political leadership is often male, listening to and holding conversation with men became a methodologi-

cal imperative so as to ensure that both our analysis and conclusions were ethically viable.

Though it is arguable that neither Boko Haram's insurgency nor the herdsmen versus farmers conflict is about the religion or culture of the targeted communities, women's stories bring important insights into the patriarchal politics of power and greed fuelling most of the attacks. However, the women who were interviewed use religion as the source of their agency for hope and healing.

## Pastor Column: Drifting in God's Love

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"God is not finished with us"

By Andy Willis

There are pieces of driftwood all over the church office right now. In fact, there's one sitting on the desk in front of me. It's a small branch, clearly snapped from a larger one, and it's surprisingly soft to the touch, almost like velvet when you run your fingers along the grain. Maybe most striking is how light it is: this limb that once supported part of a living, growing tree is now thoroughly dried out and practically weightless, barely heavier than a leaf.

The office isn't normally full of driftwood, but during Lent there are usually piles of something strange cluttering up the room. Last year there were teapots

and watering cans and pitchers; the year before there were mismatched platters and dinner plates. This year, it's wood that washed up on the beach in Prangins.

"Anyone

who says he's never felt like driftwood before probably isn't telling the truth," one of our members said when we began this season. I couldn't agree more. Who hasn't felt adrift at some point, broken and cracked, tossed about and washed up on some unfamiliar shore? I think we recognize something of ourselves in these strange bits of wood invading our sanctuary with their knots and their frayed ends and their chipped or peeling bark.

We usually try to hide those knots and frays and chips, of course, but with the driftwood, it's all on display. There's something lovely about that—and also more than a little uncomfortable. "I guess I am a little like that misshapen, battered branch up there on the altar," I think to myself. "I wonder if anyone knows that."

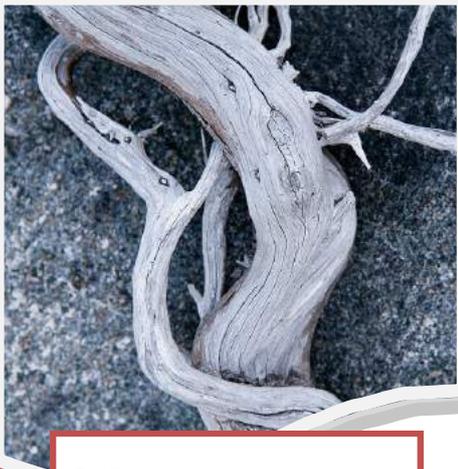
Lent is a good time for those sorts of uncomfortable realizations. The traditions of this season—fasting and prayer and self-examination—are there to help us recognize our vulnerability, our humanity, our dependence on God, and to face them with greater honesty than we perhaps normally do.

In the stories of Holy Week, the

disciples look a whole lot more like pieces of driftwood than "oaks of righteousness," to use Isaiah's poetic words. We recognize something of ourselves in their fearfulness, in their silence before injustice, in their tentative steps toward the Kingdom of God and their much more purposeful fleeing when the going gets tough.

So driftwood is a potent image for Lent, it turns out. But I'm learning that it's not only a Lenten image. When it's floating out at sea, driftwood can provide shelter and food for birds and fish. When it washes up on shore, it can become a home for plants and animals. It can end up serving as a foundation for sand dunes in some places. Creation is not actually finished with a branch that breaks and lands in the water—far from it, in fact.

And God is not finished with us, either. That's where the story of Holy Week finally goes—to a God who becomes chipped and frayed with and for us, who rises with the promise that we can never drift beyond love, and who builds something new and astoundingly beautiful from his driftwood disciples.



Driftwood displays all the crack and broken parts. Drift Monhegan Island, Maine

## A Community of Stillness

By Malcolm McKinlay

Are you being called to silence?

There are some for whom a discipline of silent prayer comes easily. For others like me who have restless, incessantly chattering minds, practicing silent prayer in community is a tremendous blessing.

Every Tuesday evening for the last year, a small group has been meeting at the Lutheran church in Geneva to practice centering prayer together.

Centering prayer traces its

lineage from the Desert Fathers and Mothers, through the mystical traditions of the middle ages (a good example is 'The Cloud of Unknowing' from the 14<sup>th</sup> century), to modern figures like Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and priest who has committed himself to practicing and promoting centering prayer since the 1970s.

The path of centering prayer is less about placing your petitions and requests before God, and more about learning to place oneself in silence before the transforming presence and love of God.

Typically on any Tuesday even-

ing, there are 3-5 of us present (and others who practice at the same time at home). We meet at 6pm for a 6.15pm start. Our rhythm is to sit in a circle, each sharing in one or two words, 'how we come'. The leader then reads a short prayer or meditation or scripture, and then we practice in silence for 20 minutes.

At the end of 20 minutes, we say the Lord's Prayer together. And as we come out of the silence, we have a chat before farewelling each other for another week.

If you are interested in joining us or learning more about centering prayer, contact Monica McKinlay at [www.listeningpresence.org](http://www.listeningpresence.org).

## Nuclear Weapons and Faith

By Jonathan Frerichs

Participants in this forum were invited to consider the nature of nuclear weapons and of faith - together. The vast gap between them usually keeps the two topics far apart. However, when two things of such consequence are so completely the antithesis of each other, the implications surely merit attention and action.

There is currently good news about the forum topic. The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) a Geneva-based campaign, in which members of our congregation are involved through work with ICAN partners.

Also, just before the forum, some of those involved in this field also took part in a unique symposium at the Vatican at which Pope Francis strengthened the long-standing opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to nuclear weapons.

Currently nine countries "have" nuclear weapons - United States, Russia, China, France, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. What do these decisions to make, use and threaten to use such devices "teach" people of faith? A lot. For example, if we believe in God as Creator of the

universe, the Giver of Life, our species is now able to destroy itself and to threaten all life on Earth.

The nuclear era, which began in 1945, is the first time in human history in which humanity has the capacity to destroy itself. That is only the ultimate form of nuclear evil. Any use of nuclear weapons, especially against cities, would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

How does the conscious decision to have, maintain and rely on such a threat square with faith? Massive, indiscriminate, destructive force? The effects of which transcends time and space? Compare this with any tenet of faith that you treasure or any favourite verse. To note just one: You knit me together in my mother's womb; Your works are wonderful; You are the God of all days" (Ps 139).

Faith has much to teach us about nuclear weapons. In Christian teachings all people are made in God's image. God loves all people equally. Love God by loving your neighbour. Do not kill. Make swords from ploughshares. Take care of Creation. The teachings go beyond the pages of the Bible.

Ponder all that Christians share with other world religions in the face of nuclear dangers. Do not

kill. Protect human life and dignity. Safeguard the sanctity of life. Treat others the way you would like to be treated. Preserve the Earth for future generations. To take this one step further, nuclear weapons remind us how much of the basic teachings of our faith are reflected in the central precepts behind international law: that security is indivisible, certain basic rights are universal, protecting life and saving lives is the cornerstone of governance, the rule of law with justice and mercy is the basic bulwark against violence, war and destruction. Nuclear weapons teach us that our faith is a compass for awareness, concern and motivation no matter how troubling or complicated a challenge. Faith teaches us that no problem, nothing we have done or are doing, not even weapons, is bigger or more powerful than God and the manifold gifts in which God is revealed to us - beginning with love, hope and grace, the sisters of faith. Nuclear weapons also remind us that faith is inseparable from efforts to heal, protect and save life.

If faith can move mountains, it can surely stand alongside the vast majority of humanity who if given a choice would remove the mountain of nuclear weapons.

"Faith is a compass for awareness, concern and motivation"

## Why I enjoy preparing and serving refreshments

By Valerie Marinoni

A few years back, I wrote a line or two about the joys of ushering, especially in the summer months when complete strangers often peek inside, attracted by the music. We invite them in, even if they just want to take a look.

The other day, I was thinking about refreshments - since it was our turn again. Of course, I enjoy baking - that's part of it. But we are also privileged to have our church right in the middle of town where we can open the doors to "strangers" and invite them in to share our goodies and have a hot cup of coffee or tea.

For most of them, home-made

cakes and biscuits are a far-off memory. It is just lovely to see the smiles on their faces when they are greeted warmly. Occasionally, I can greet an old friend whom I see regularly at the soup kitchen.

"it is part of our mission to widen the tent to all "

Every Sunday, the children and young people are the first to arrive downstairs (!! ) and one of the little ones once said to me how good it was to have enough food for the people on the street who don't get many treats. Ah! There is someone with her priorities right!

Cooking at the soup kitchen is on a completely different scale ...cont pg 6



Photo credit Johnny Camaddo

## Leave No One Behind, A Message from the UN CSW.

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“ denounce gender-based discrimination, violence and misuse of religious teachings that justify them”

By George Arende

The 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) took place in New York under the theme: challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and empowerment of rural women and girls. Global leaders, UN experts, partners, activists and civil society organizations gathered in the Empire State from 13-23 March, to reflect on the numerous challenges facing the rural women and girls.

Challenges of inequality and discrimination hinder many rural women and girls from realizing their full potential compared to their male counterparts. Addressing the session, the UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumyile Mlambo- Ngcuka called for ‘commitment to fight’ challenges such as poverty, inequality, intersectionality that lead to discrimination and violence against women.

‘The world eats because {women} toil’; many are unpaid as they care for their families at the expense of their own growth, she said.

She further wondered why women contribute to 60 per cent of the global agricultural workforce

but only 13 per cent own land they work in.

‘It is the women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination who bear the brunt of prejudice and exclusion’, she added, Urging member states to show commitment, acceleration and accountability in addressing what she called the ‘biggest challenge of our time’ that face women and girls.

### Ecumenical Women at the UN

‘We uphold women and girls as whole persons, acknowledging [the fact] that women and men are created in God’s image’ read a statement from Ecumenical Women at the United Nations (EW) to the commission.

The coalition of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations, ‘denounce gender-based discrimination, violence and misuse of religious teachings that justify them’.

‘We welcome multi-sectorial partnership that empower women and challenge harmful, discriminatory interpretation and practice’ the statement further read.

The joint statement emphasized the importance of women empowerment to achieving Sustain-

able Development Goals (SDG’s); and cited ‘land-grabbing, access to land, impact of climate change on agriculture, privatization of critical public services, corporate appropriation of indigenous resources’, as some of the main challenges affecting rural women.

Speaking at the launch of the UN Women 2018 report ‘Turning Promises into Action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, the Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres reminds us that as long as women are economically and socially disempowered in the world of work and in their homes and communities, growth will not be inclusive and will not succeed in ending poverty.

The next Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) will be held in March 2019 with the theme: access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

*Our congregation’s music, liturgy, and prayer reflect the richness of the global church.*

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## RECIPE: Almond and apricot thumbprint biscuits

125 g sugar (including some vanilla sugar, if you have any)

125 g butter at room temperature

Beat well together to a cream

1 egg

1 teaspoon lemon juice or Limoncello (if you have forgotten to buy lemons)

Add and beat well again

125 g flour + 1 soup-spoon-full

125 g ground almonds

Baking powder for 250 g flour

Incorporate gently. Put the bowl in the fridge to harden up a bit. It is too sticky otherwise.

Form round biscuits with two teaspoons, place on a lined baking tray. Make a hole with the end of a teaspoon, fill with ¼ teaspoon of Valerie's Apricot Jam - what else! J

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## Our congregation life in Picture



*Conversations at  
coffee hour*

© George Arende 2018

*Our community  
serves at the soup  
kitchen every first  
Saturday of the  
month. © George  
Arende 2018*



## Do You Need a Breathing Space?

By Monica McKinlay

Do you find yourself continually going, always fast-paced? Do you live with a lot of shoulds and musts? Are the demands of your life exhausting you? Perhaps in doing so much good work, we can easily lose our centre and often we live spiritually unsustainably. Breath-

ing Space is an invitation to pause. To rest. To reflect. A space of quiet where one can be intentionally open and listening. A space where you may glimpse a surprising encounter with God.

Breathing Space focuses on contemplative practices that have been passed down in church tradition as helpful ways of praying, but may have been lost in our modern day. A typical mini-retreat includes gathering as a community over tea and snacks, interacting with a teaching, space for silence and reflection, debriefing and questioning together, and ending with a final blessing.

Previous Breathing Spaces have included: slowing ourselves down with the practice of *Lectio Divina* - listening and responding with our hearts to a short passage of

scripture. And gaining awareness in *The Daily Examen* to be attentive to the movements and presence of God throughout our day.

Breathing Space aims to nurture a praying community who find it helpful to connect with God in silence, listening, and presence. So far it has included about 30 people who are from different English-speaking churches in Geneva.

A weekly group has grown out of these Breathing Spaces. We meet Wednesdays 12h30 at Holy Trinity Church for no more than 45 minutes to listen to scripture together *Lectio Divina* style. Those who desire a brief pause in the day are welcome to join - no previous experience required.

You are invited! Keep your eyes open for the next Breathing Space to try it yourself!



**Monica leads a past session of Breathing Space.**

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## Preparing and Serving Refreshments ...Cont pg 3

we are prepared for anything between 150 and 250 guests. Here, the joy is working in a jolly team, friends of all ages, chatting and chopping together, and then serving all this tasty food to people who, for some reason or another, need a free meal.

For the past few years, we have welcomed new church members with a simple meal, a possibility to meet "older" members and to have a good talk. Preparing tasty soups and baking home-made bread have been on the menu each

week during Advent or Lent. I like to think it makes a difference to the way they become part of the family and feel at home here.

Yes, it's also part of our mission to widen the tent to all - friends, visitors,

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## Lent Prayer

By Terry MacArthur

God who crosses the limits and goes where we see only loss, finding glory in the seed with a broken shell, exposed to dirt and greed and yet ready to burst cell upon cell into new beginnings:

encourage in us the removal of the husk, the urge to defend and deny, learning bit by bit to rely on the grace that losing is not necessarily being lost, and loving is worth its cost in Jesus Christ, who crosses all our limits with the cross. Amen

## Lesson from the Nobel Laureates

By George Arende

Sometime in 1976, a mother walking along the streets of Belfast in the company of her four children, suddenly found herself in a life threatening situation. A car had lost control and run over three of her children leaving them for dead. Only one survived. Soldiers had shot the diver leading him to lose control of the car.

The event triggered major protests in Belfast, as the community gathered to mourn the loss of the children. The little known Mairead Maguire mobilized rallies across Belfast, a campaign that called for respect of human lives as sacred and precious.

**“We can all make the world a better place”**

Her transformative action and initiative convinced the Norwegian Nobel committee, who awarded her with Nobel Peace award in the same year. The award recognized her individual extraordinary actions towards the betterment of humanity.

The South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu led several non-violent protests, during the apartheid. He delivered fiery speeches and urged South Africans to forgive and adopt peaceful actions during the apartheid era. His non-violent approach to confront apartheid was equally rewarded with a Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. The late Prof. Wangari Maathai's love for environment and commitment to protect it, is yet another example of people who believed in action towards common good.

She championed for envi-

ronment protection, not only in Kenya where she hailed from but also globally. She endured torture, faced resistance and came face to face with state intimidation. During one of her protests in Nairobi, the police forcefully pulled off her hair. Despite the humiliation, she remained steadfast in conserving and saving the environment. Similar to other laureates before her, the tireless effort to nurture and heal our wounded planet got her rewarded in 2004 with the Nobel prize.

All the Laureates since 1901 illustrate one common denominator: people exhaling compassion and commitment to change and make the world a better place.

**Its never too late to do good**

Albert Nobel was an inventor and a businessman born in Sweden in 1833. When he was thirty years old, he made his first inventions of dynamite (a kind of explosive made by his company called Nobel Company). Although dynamite has many peaceful uses, including digging tunnels, it was and is still used in warfare. Alfred Nobel went on to become extremely wealthy by inventing and selling war materials, especially with a kind of smokeless gunpowder that made it easier for soldiers to see during battles.

In 1867, Nobel patented his dynamite discovery after making improvement on the blasting cap; which was ignited by lighting a fuse. Nobel died in 1895 and left behind a nine million Kronor endowment fund.

According to the Nobel Peace prize committee when Nobel died, in 1895, his will came as a surprise to many.

He left most of his vast fortune to pay for a group of prizes awarded every year. The prizes were to be given for achievements in chemistry, physics, medicine, literature and the cause of peace. The first four prizes are awarded by a committee appointed by the Swedish parliament, and the peace prize is decided by a committee appointed by the Norwegian parliament.

According to Nobel's will,

"The prize for peace is awarded to a person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding of peace congresses".

The award is sometimes given to an individual and sometimes to an organization. In 2017, Nobel peace prize award went to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its groundbreaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons.

As people of faith born of a 'reformer' (Martin Luther), desire to drive change is often over-shadowed by sense of powerlessness. We encounter poverty, unemployment, diseases, changing environment and the list of challenges seem endless. Being a change agent requires ordinary efforts to realize extraordinary effects.

A little effort in our own little way will build up to the bigger change we all desire. Together we can make the world a better place.

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Worship

Sundays, 11h00

**ELCG ANNOUNCEMENT CORNER**

**HOLY WEEK WORSHIP**

**Palm Sunday- 25 March, 11h00**

We begin with the joyful story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at the start of the last week of his life.

**Maundy Thursday-29 March, 19h30**

We commemorate Jesus' last night with his disciples with a service of Communion.

**Good Friday -30 March, 19h30**

We tell the story of Jesus' trial and death and depart in silence.

**Easter Vigil, 31 March, 20h00**

We gather with the German-Speaking Congregation on Saturday for the Great Vigil of Easter—telling biblical stories of deliverance and celebrating the light of the resurrection. The service concludes with a feast in the sanctuary.

**Easter Sunday- 1 April, 11h00**

The celebration of Easter continues with a festive worship on Easter Sunday. Holy Week Worship

*(All worship services take place at the church).*

**OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Revelation Coming to ELCG, Tuesdays at 19h30**

A new evening adult Bible study on the New Testament book of Revelation will begin on Tuesday 3 April, 19h30 – 21h00. The eight-session study will use the book Revelation, by Eric D. Barreto, and will be led by Miriam Deffenbaugh and Pastor Andy Willis. Revelation is a difficult book to read. It includes comfort and hope but also fear and terror, and contains some of the most disturbing and most sublime imagery in the Bible. What has Revelation to do with us today? If you are interested in exploring this complex book, please contact Miriam Deffenbaugh or the church office.

**Taizé Worship Services -  
Thursday Evenings During the Easter Season**

Easter Season Taizé! Come join a reflective service of light and hope as we celebrate the resurrection and pray for the Holy Spirit to come anew in the situations in our lives and the world that are in need of new life. From 12 April - 17 May we will meet each Thursday in the sanctuary at 19h for a short service of Taizé music, silence, scripture, candles, and prayer. All are welcome!

GENEVALUTHERAN



Editorial team: Sandra Cox, Jane Wangui and George Arende. The Geneva Lutheran is published quarterly. Send an email to [office@genevalutheran.ch](mailto:office@genevalutheran.ch) to subscribe. Driftwood photo courtesy: flickr <https://bit.ly/2IZHzHC>