

GENEVALUTHERAN



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

Volume 04/2017

Advent

ADVENT PRAYER

"stir up your power" is a prayer for people who feel stuck in some way, who long for movement and motion, who feel that it's time for God to do something in their lives and in the world.

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A pilgrim to witness a 900-year-old tradition

By Phyllis Brewah

During the month of September, I signed up for a congregation trip to La Grande Chartreuse Monastery Museum. Before we embarked on the trip from the Ecumenical Centre aboard a hired bus, I had moments of nostalgia, mainly from reading the description of the museum made in the church announcements.

I couldn't help but admire the beautiful landscape of Switzerland and France as we snaked through villages, towns and farms. I stared in awe at the beautiful scenery, as well as the level of development. My mind went into soliloquy, comparing it to my country, Sierra Leone. After 2.5 hours of driving through curves and turns, we arrived at the monastery, located in the Chartreuse Mountains, north of Grenoble in Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse in France.

This was among my first trips out of Geneva since I started working for the LWF. Nothing prepared me for what I was about to see in the museum, other than the reading I had done on the bus about the monks and the monastery.

Living in silence and meditation for me meant that they went about their daily chores without talking or uttering a single word.

As we navigated our way through the museum rooms, learning about the simplistic life in silence, I struggled as I witnessed a tradition that has been practiced for many centuries. I was at the centre of what Matthew Arnold wrote in his 1850 poem *"the Carthusians' world-famed home."* It is a tough decision, I told myself. Unable to fathom the monk's hard choice and preference to be neighbor to the loneliness of trees, birds and wild animals as opposed to a world we

all familiar with - that of consumerization. Their choice of isolation protects them from modernization, noise, corruption, deceit and war, I thought.

The 900 year old tradition and discipline of meeting every three hours for prayers won my admiration. Years of unwavering commitment and dedication for sure has made them survive the infiltration of modern technology.

The more I explored the rooms in the museum to share the inner spiritual adventure of Carthusian Monks' vocation of solitude, the more questions popped into my mind.

I wondered how the monks lived that simply without interacting with the outside world. Before I tackled that question, another had generated. Why we are engulfed and enslaved by consumerism to the extent that we doubt our ability to live without consuming?...cont pg 4

Caring for the orphans in Ethiopia

The Abobo Bethel Congregation in Gambella, Ethiopia has initiated a project aimed at supporting orphaned children who have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS in the Gambella region in Ethiopia. At the height of HIV/AIDS epidemic, many orphaned children - young girls and boys - became caretakers of their younger siblings. Extended family and neighbors initially stepped in to take care of the orphans. In the long run, the existing social

structures could no longer be sustained.

The Abobo Bethel Congregation encouraged its members to support the desperate orphans who were on the verge of becoming street children, and initiated its ministry for orphaned children.

The congregation provided financial support, asked members to adopt orphans and to support their educational needs.

Concerned churches in Germany responded and their congregations have actively supported the program for the last ten years. Three German volunteers - two in Germany and one in Ethiopia - raised funds for the orphans' program. However, in the last two years, the level of contribution has declined significantly.

The Abobo Bethel Congregation is seeking funding to support the program. The funds raised at the ELCG Harvest Festival are expected...cont pg 2

Pastor Column: On the move this Advent

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By Andy Willis

Stir up your might, and come to save us! (Psalm 80:2)

It's old language, that verse from Psalm 80. Some contemporary versions of the Bible



Shooting Star Across Texas Hill Country © Ralph Arveson

might simply translate it as "wake up," and I can understand why. If I'm trying to rouse my son from sleep, I don't say "stir up your might." It sounds awkward and stilted; we don't talk to one another like that.

But this verse from Psalm 80 has long been translated into English this way. Christians

have been praying with the words "stir up your power" for centuries during Advent, and I like the sound of it. When we say it that way, we are calling on God to notice where things have gotten a little too settled. The oil and the vinegar have separated; the cream has drifted to the top. It's time to shake things up, God: stir up your might, and come.

Culinary images aside, it's a powerful prayer for the start of Advent. It's a prayer for people who feel stuck in some way, who long for movement and motion, who feel that it's time for God to do something in their lives and in the world. Does that sound like a prayer you could pray this season? Where do you feel stuck? Where do you wish for movement and new direction? Where do you wish God would stir things up and come?

The story of Christmas is the story of a God who isn't content to let the world grow stale and settled, who finally enters into human life to shake things up and show us what life that is full and free looks like. The story of Christmas is the story of a God

who is on the move. We will follow that theme over the weeks of Advent this year, paying attention to the ways God is on the move in the biblical story and to the ways God remains on the move in our world and our lives today.

But we won't rush there. Advent begins with the honesty of Psalm 80, with the cry for God to get moving, to stir up our imaginations, to stir up our hopes, to stir up our dreams, to stir up our lives. Do not leave us settled, God, we pray. Make something new of our lives where they are stuck; churn up new possibilities where the world has become accustomed to dead ends and half-truths. Come to us as you came to the world in need two thousand years ago.

Stir up your might, O God, and come to save us.

Peace be with you this Advent.



Abobo HIV and AIDS Orphan project is one of our sharing project for 2017/2018

Abobo orphan project. cont...

to directly support 50 orphans and another 150 orphans through education and counseling. The program will provide monthly food contributions to the orphans' host families, undertake Saturday tutorial classes, and provide counseling services, as well as school materials. Some of the orphans are making significant progress in their studies and may only require support for the next few years.

For other young children still in primary school, the congregation will need time to find creative ways to support them to complete their education. ELCG Sharing support will provide an opportunity to the Abobo Bethel Congregation to establish a more sustainable way of ensuring its long-term goal of providing education to the children and helping them achieve better lives.

Calls to stamp out persecution of people with albinism

By George Arende

An extraordinary event happened in September at the Palais Wilson in Geneva. For the first time a United Nations body, the United Nations Independent Expert on Persons with Albinism, in collaboration with the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) and Lancaster University, held a two day workshop on witchcraft and human rights. The meeting was convened to examine and address the impact of witchcraft and the problems that result in gross human rights violations.

In a statement released by Ikponwosa Ero, the United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights of Persons with Albinism, "[The United Nations admits that] in numerous countries around the world, harmful practices related to witchcraft result in serious human rights violations, such as various forms of torture and murder, discrimination and exclusion". The ground-breaking workshop offered a window of opportunity to discuss "witchcraft and human rights in a holistic, systematic and in-depth manner" said Ms Ero.

Albinism is a rare, non-contagious, genetically inherited condition which occurs worldwide regardless of ethnicity or gender. It commonly results in the lack of melanin pigment in the hair, skin and eyes (oculocutaneous albinism), deficiencies that cause vulnerability to sun exposure. Exposure to the sun can lead to skin cancer and severe visual impairment. The World Health Organization suggests that America and Europe have 1 in every 20,000 person with the condition, while 1 in 1000 people in Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from Albinism. Witchcrafts use body parts of people with albinism to make amulet charms, which many believe bring good fortune and luck.

Women and children are mostly affected by the frequent infanticide, kidnapping, amputation or decapitation to harvest body parts. The exact number of people abused remains unknown as most of the abuse goes unreported.

Dr Ojot Miru Ojulu works for the Lutheran World Federation as Interim Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, a position that places him at the centre of human rights and social justice activities of the United Nations in Geneva. Together with other UN experts, academics and members of civil society organisations, he attended the two day workshop on witchcraft and human rights.

"Albinism is a humanity problem and not only for a few people in advocacy and human rights field," he said.

He lamented that "People living with albinism are maimed and killed for trade in their body parts; all in total contravention of international human rights law." People keen to succeed in business, others looking after promotion at workplaces and even politicians hunting for voter winning formulae; all contribute in making the human body parts a lucrative business. In Sub Saharan Africa, body parts sale can fetch as much as 2,500USD.

Although the practice is outlawed in many Sub-Saharan countries - ignorance, myths and superstition still pose a challenge in stopping the practice. A little pot is soon hot for those people accused of the practice, for they themselves face fatal consequences, in some cases mutilation or death.

Several Lutheran churches in the south are active in confronting this problem. "We amplify the voices of churches in areas affected and table the issues at the global platform," said Dr Ojot.

When asked about the role of the church, Dr Ojot said, "Truthful biblical teaching based on the love of God for all can help counter the belief system in witchcraft". He added that the church has multiple ways to respond to human rights violations against people with albinism. One way is for churches to offer "spiritual reassurance on the thoughts, beliefs and actions of people who find answers in witchcraft," he added.

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Dr. Ojot Ojulu follows the Albinism session at Palais Wilson.



Solidarity with People with Albinism

All men and women are created in the image of God. Part of that image is being erased and calls on us to stand in solidarity with people with albinism. "Human beings are equal in dignity and worth by virtue of being human," reiterated Dr Ojot. He added that human dignity is inherent and non-negotiable and as such attacks, mutilations, discrimination and stigmatization are all against the very biblical teaching that all are equal before God. He further challenged the church to "Treat everyone with respect and dignity; stand with those whose dignities are challenged".

A keeper of our brothers and sisters means caring for one another. Dr Ojot draws his strength from the Genesis 4: 8-10 verse when advocating for global challenges. According to him, "Keepers of our brothers [and sisters] is a basic Christian principle". Wars, conflict, refugee crises and other challenges that yield slow results, can at times discourage. "[As a human] sometimes I lose hope, but there are many sides of hope that keep me going," he noted.

Cont pg4

"Treat everyone with respect and dignity; stand with those whose dignities are challenged"

Collaborate to overcome racism

By George Arende

A forum on racism, discrimination, Afrophobia and xenophobia took place in September at the Ecumenical Centre to listen to the experience of people of African descent in the United States. It was organized by World Council of Churches in coordination with the National Council of Churches



Dr Iva Carruthers, general secretary of the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference at the session. ©2017 George Arende

of Christ in the USA (NCCC) to learn, acknowledge and reaffirm the role of faith communities as agents of transformative justice in the face of racial injustice.

While welcoming the participants attending the session, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit lamented that racism and discrimination is a "sad reality" for many in the United States. He noted the existing connection between polarization, division, nationalism and racism. "The Church finds itself between two poles: [one that has] a strong willingness to divide, polarize, to discriminate and [another] with momentum of strong witness for right, justice of saying no," he said.

He called upon the churches to use the "language of faith" and not to "demonize others" for change.

The chairperson of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, a group established in 2002 and mandated by the Commission on Human Rights and Human Rights Council to study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in diaspora, called on "collaborative efforts" in combating evil.

The full video clip of the session is available on youtube: <http://bit.ly/2yLt3Sn>

Racism,
discrimination,
Afrophobia and
Xenophobia-
"sad reality"

Stamp out persecution of Albinos...cont pg 3

"People who stood up against US travel ban, many stories of hope during the European refugees crisis, civil society coming together and people standing in solidarity with the oppressed, all restore my hope," he add.

He believes the world is filled with both good and bad people, and the side one takes is what matters. "There are voices of hope out there which need to be amplified." There is hope, "we are not alone" he said.

"Not acting is not the solution. Join the good voices even in situations of helplessness."

Reflection of the monastery trip... cont pg 1

The more I made an analytical comparison between 'our world' and that of the monks, the more I felt the need to change.

This was my second spiritual pilgrimage. The first was to the Luther sites in Germany in 2006. Such pilgrimages challenge spiritual life and the monastery visit was no different. It offered me an opportunity to be a witness to rich historical faith in Christianity.

Our forefathers were forcefully invited into Christianity from as early as 1789 without ever getting such an opportunity for witness. It is not surprising that many rejected the 'new faith' as it was known then. This visit renewed and strengthened my faith in unimaginable ways. Just as the monks were persecuted then but endured to become a witness of our faith, today many Christians are equally persecuted for dedicating

their lives to Christ. Lately I find myself questioning things around me while I ask the fundamental question of how I serve God. Continuous reflection on the monk's way of life has helped me acknowledge the power of silence and taking a quiet moment to listen to God's voice in creation and His works.

Why you should STOP DRINKING bottled water?

By Dinesh Suna

More than 1.8 billion people globally consume contaminated water. The global network of churches and faith based organizations under the umbrella of Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) of World Council of Churches strives to change this sad reality. EWN affirms that water is a gift of God, a public good and a fundamental human right. One million plastic bottles are produced every minute and most of them find their way into landfills. In 2015, the EWN issued an appeal that urged churches in Europe and North America to eliminate the use of bottled water because the two regions have clean and safe tap water suitable for drink-

ing. It is believed that continued use of bottled water may result in having more plastic than fish in the ocean by the year 2050. "EWN strongly believes that bottled water industries are an impediment to realizing the human right to water," said Dinesh Suna, Coordinator of the Ecumenical Water Network of the WCC. Speaking at one of the forums organized by our church, Dinesh outlined the criteria for becoming a 'blue community' and invited us to become one: "Recognize water as human right, say no to bottled water, promote partnership and finance to operate drinking water and waste treatment system." He noted that the WCC has taken the lead by "banning" the use of bottled

water at the Ecumenical Centre, and installed water dispensers.

Inspired by the WCC, about 20 churches and universities have joined the blue community in Switzerland, including Bern University. For more information:

[https://
water.oikoumene.org/en/
about](https://water.oikoumene.org/en/about)

"By the year
2050, there will
be more plastics
than fish"-World

Economic Forum and the
Ellen MacArthur Founda-
tion 2016 Report.



How to overcome inequalities, a lesson from Christoph

By Christoph Benn

The increasing inequality within almost all societies and the still huge inequity between countries and communities is one of the most important challenges in our world today. One way to address these inequities is by facilitating financial transfers from those who can afford to provide others with better opportunities in life. This responds to one of the core Christian values based on our firm belief that all human beings are created as equals in the image of God.

Probably no other community has put these principles into practice in a way as radical as the global AIDS movement. It was people living with HIV in rich countries who first argued that if they had access to life-saving treatment, then all people living with HIV should receive it regardless of where they were born and whether their communi-

ties were rich or poor. They were the first to take the universal human right to health (and therefore to life) seriously in a practical way.

The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria can be described in many different ways. Yes, it is a financial institution created with the support of the UN and the G7 but most of all it became the organizational instrument of the global AIDS movement with the mandate to ensure that all people affected by these diseases should receive full access to prevention, care and treatment all over the world. This model inspired so many people that the Global Fund has received financial contributions of more than 50USD billion since its creation in 2002. Rich and poor governments, corporations, foundations and increasingly also wealthy individuals from poor countries are supporting this pool of funding that

has been supporting by now tens of millions of people in around 150 countries.

The model is now being applied to many other global problems. Global funds have been established for education, climate change mitigation, freedom from slavery and other burning issues. It can therefore be considered a particular model for overcoming inequities on a global scale.

Questions we considered in our ELCG weekly forum conversation were:

Will global solidarity continue in a climate of increasing nationalism and inward looking populist movements?

Can the Global Fund model be applied to other areas that we care about as a community?

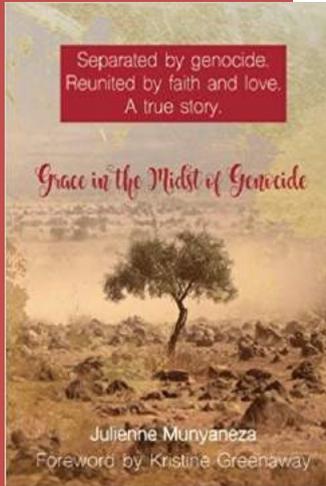
How is the model related to faith communities and their strong conviction of all human beings being entitled to equal opportunities?

"Transfer of
finances from
the 'haves'
provides others
with better
opportunities in
life"

Where is God at our point of need?

By *Julienne Munyaneza*

I had just started a new job in London with the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) as the Regional Co-ordinator for Africa and the Middle East when the Rwandan war broke out in 1994 and the genocide against Tutsis started. Indeed my absence saved my life. I travelled out of Rwanda alone, and my husband, Malachi, and our three children were to join me in London later. For the three months period of the genocide (May-July), I lost contact with them. I didn't know what had happened to them. I kept wondering if they were alive or dead.



This was a season of constant nightmare. Yet, the Omnipresent God was with them as He promised. And despite those horrible events, in which thousands of innocent people perished, including massacres in church buildings, I didn't lose my faith in God. If at all, I trusted Him even more. Of course most Rwandans asked tough questions like where's God in this genocide? Why did He allow it to happen? Why didn't He show up if He's really Almighty? Understandable. A time came when I could no longer sit still or concentrate on my job. One evening I went home after work (and by the way, allow me

say that my WACC colleagues were just amazing, supportive, caring and loving), I prayed what has become my famous prayer, a faith-full prayer that God could not resist, in which I asked God to see my husband and children again in this life even if He had to resurrect them, just for me. And He did. I hope my presentation answered my forum title at the ELCG "Where's God when we most need Him?" For more details read my little book 'Grace in the Midst of Genocide'. You can get it from me or online: <http://amzn.to/2z7QEWG>.

Support for Mexico earthquake victims relief

An earthquake measuring 7.1 magnitude hit Mexico in September causing massive destruction and devastation to the people of Morelos state. Seventy three people died and more than a hundred were injured in Tlaquilenango municipality, some 70 kilometers from the epicenter Axochiapan. More than 600 homes were destroyed and another 1,780 severely damaged. Government reports indicate that up to ten thousand homes were completely damaged in eleven Morelos municipalities.

In response, volunteers from churches, schools and some government employees helped build 74 shelters besides assisting in rescue efforts and clearing debris. Relief and reconstruction efforts saw the establishment of collection centers that accept donations.

The Methodist church in Tlaquilenango, Morelos, is one of the organisations that provide food and other relief goods to the communities in rural areas. Besides food and water, the church distributes clothes, care packages for babies and hygiene items. A medical clinic has been set up within the church compound to provide ongoing medical assistance to the victims.

Part of the funds that were raised from the proceeds of the Harvest Festival will support the ongoing relief efforts of the Methodist church in Tlaquilenango. With the process of restoration and rehabilitation expected to take at least a year, the ELCG sharing support will help increase food, medical supplies as well as other needs required in the rebuilding effort.



Grief and Loss Group

By Elizabeth Benn

At times, living in a place far away from family and friends can be quite challenging because the net of supporting people is accessible only by using modern means of communication. However, the geographical distance is felt even more painfully at times when family members or friends fall ill or even die and work-related responsibilities don't allow for longer periods of absence. We may have to fight the desire to spend time with that person, to help with care issues, or to just be around, as well as feelings of guilt.

This disconnectedness is even harder to bear when it comes to losing someone close. It may be that not having had the chance for a final farewell multiplies the intensity of grief or leads to self-accusation. Even if we are able to attend the funeral, we are thrown into an ongoing process in which we can only try our best to integrate, knowing that we will have to leave early again. We may be bereft of the possibility of ongoing consoling conversations and hugs, shared memories or jointly shed tears.

Having talked to several members of our congregation, Pastor Andy saw the

need to provide room and company for those dealing with loss and grief while living far away from home. By offering group meetings once a month, we try to provide the space and support that is too often not allowed at work or in our society. Although I am not a professionally trained grief counselor, I draw from my experiences as a palliative care nurse and psychotherapeutic counselor. Anyone wishing to give room to their own grief in joining this group is very welcome.

A Call to
"Spend time
with the
bereaved"



Volunteers assist in clearing debris after the 7.1 magnitude earthquake in Mexico.

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WORSHIP

Sundays, 11h00

**Christmas
Worship Times**

24 December:

Worship on the
Fourth Sunday of
Advent, 11h

Christmas Eve wor-
ship, 17h

25 December:

Christmas Day wor-
ship with eucharist,
11h

ELCG ANNOUNCEMENT CORNER

SUNDAY FORUM

3 December, 12.45

Overcoming Inequities in Our World Today
Through Global Solidarity: The Experience
of the AIDS Movement and the Global Fund-
Christoph Benn

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Taizé Evening Prayer this Advent

This Advent, there will be a weekly Taizé-
style prayer service each Thursday at the
ELCG, from 19h00 to 19h45. These services
will be quiet and meditative, an opportunity
to slow down, reflect, and pray using simple
sung chants, scripture readings, and silence
during the busy weeks leading up to Christ-
mas.

The first Taizé service will be on Thursday,
30 November at 19h00.

All are welcome to attend.

**Congregational Assembly – 10 De-
cember**

Our annual December assembly will take
place on Sunday 10 December, immediately
following worship. Among other things, we
will be voting on a budget for the coming
year. Members, please mark your calendars
now and plan to attend.

Kids' Day at the ELCG – 16 December

On Saturday, 16 December, children of our
congregation are invited to the church from
10h to 14h. We'll play games, sing songs,
tell Bible stories, and share lunch
(provided). It will be both a fun day for chil-
dren and an opportunity for parents and
caregivers to have a few hours on their
own.

If your son or daughter would like to partici-
pate, please contact the church office by
Wednesday 13 December to sign up.



*Rev. Garland Pierce a former member of our
congregation was among the participants at the
racism, discrimination, Afrophobia and
Xenophobia forum. ©2017 George Arende*

GENEVALUTHERAN



Editorial team: Sandra Cox, Jane Wangui and George Arende. The Geneva Lutheran is published quarterly. Send an email to office@genevalutheran.ch to subscribe.