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A Season of Creation

Pastor Andy Willis

With a new school year beginning, children everywhere are being asked that perpetual September question: "And what did you do on your summer vacation?"

What about you? You may not have had two months off, but I hope the summer provided at least a little time for rest and rejuvenation – and for enjoying the outdoors.



Lavaux Vineyards, Vaud

When we gather for worship this September, you will find that we're observing something called "The Season of Creation." It's something new for our congregation and for the church as a whole.

The Season of Creation was begun by the Uniting Church of Australia several years ago. The idea was simple enough: to set aside the four weeks leading up to the Feast of St. Francis (4 October) for worship, reflection, and action focused on the gift of creation. The Uniting Church developed an alternate set of biblical readings for these four Sundays each year, and now churches throughout the world are joining in, turning their attention to the wide web of creation of which we're a part.

This year, our congregation is joining in, too. September 3 will be the First Sunday of Creation, or "Forest Sunday." It's followed by Sundays focused on land, wilderness, and water, before we arrive at St. Francis Day.

During Advent last year, a group from our congregation (and some members of St. John XXIII, the local English-speaking Roman Catholic parish) read Pope Francis's recent encyclical *Laudato Si*, "On Care for Our Common Home." There's so much wisdom in this text – if you haven't read it yet, I strongly encourage you to get your hands on a copy. Here, I want to lift up just one small sentence from it:

"Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise."

We hear a lot about problems associated with the natural world today, and rightly so: climate change, severe weather, deforestation, depletion of resources, the environmental crisis. We must pay attention to the facts and to the immense damage done to the natural world by human use and misuse. Our faith and our common humanity demand that we learn and act responsibly.

Pope Francis would agree. But at the start of his book that is through and through a call to responsible action on behalf of the wellbeing of creation, he maintains that for Christians, creation is not, first and foremost, a problem; it is "a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise."

That's at the heart of how I see the Season of Creation. It's a time to recall the beauty and richness and complexity of God's world and to lift our voices in praise. It's a time to remember that when we go out for a hike, we are not just doing something good for our health; we are entering sacred space. We are communing with God's creation.

Of course, we must pay attention to the threats facing our common home, and we must act. But that's not where we begin; we begin with praise to God for this good earth. It's that praise and gratitude that we need, deep in our spirits, to sustain us for responsible action and to help us live in ways that truly honor the world around us.

I hope you'll join in worship this season as we give thanks for all creation and join together in praying and acting for its healing, and ours.

Peace,

Andy

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Waed Melaneh Shares Hope amidst Difficulty

George Arende

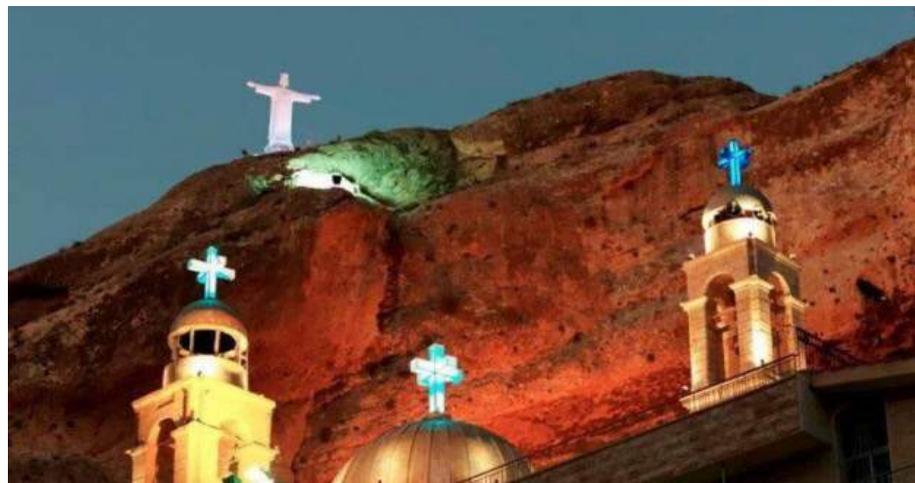
What began as an expression of art by teenagers on a school wall in the city of Deraa, became a pro-democracy protest following the arrest and torture of the teenagers by police. The small protests that began in March 2011 spread like bush-fire. Deraa city soon became the epicenter of a national movement that called for the resignation of President Assad.

By July, four months into the protest, streets became battlefields. Assad's opposition was widespread. The opposition groups had acquired lethal weapons and formed militia for two reasons: one, to defend themselves from oppressive police and two, to expel government forces from their local areas.

Come 2012, the situation had transformed from national protest into complex civil war between the armed opposition brigades and government forces. By the time the fighting reached the capital Damascus, a trail of deaths, destruction and displacements followed. Tens of thousands of people found themselves living as refugees in Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. Some fled to Egypt while others had to traverse European countries seeking safety as refugees.

One family caught in the long protracted war was that of ELCG-member Waed Melaneh, a Christian from Maloula, a village located some 40 miles from Damascus. His village prides itself of being one of a handful of villages in the northeast of Damascus that still speaks Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. "Before the war, we lived normally, we used to go out over the weekend, meet friends, go to church every Sunday and celebrate Christmas. We adored our country", recalled Waed.

In the last six years, the right to such privileges has changed. The situation deteriorated from bad to worse. Waed and his family helplessly watched as his village and country turned into a battlefield. His village was among the few that were protected by the government forces, security that averted Christian deaths. In other



Maloula, Syria

areas the battle was either between the government forces and armed opposition, or between the government forces and Islamic jihadists. Over time the country has become a place for military experiment by the superpowers. The United Nations on many occasions have made humanitarian appeal to aid Syrian refugees. One senior UN staff termed it "the largest humanitarian response in the human history".

The prolonged war has split families and displaced children. Waed's family and relatives have not been spared the effects of the war: "my sister lives in Amman, Jordan, and another in France", he said. Sporadic attacks on his village later became common. "Christians live in a dangerous situation, forcing many to leave", lamented Waed.

“They [ISIS] force Christians to convert or leave “, he explained. “I am worried about my mother who is alone in Syria, since I came to Geneva ten months ago”.

Although he is safe in Geneva, he cannot stop worrying about his mother and relatives living in Syria under challenging conditions. "Damascus has no electricity, no water, no internet. It is difficult to be here in a peaceful and safe country and not worry about my family", reiterated Waed.

Hopeful despite resettling challenges

Since he moved to Geneva with his wife, Joyce Saad, who works for the United Nations, Waed, an economics graduate, is faced with more challenges that he must overcome. “Whenever I watch news reports of bombs and mortar attacks in my country, I fear for my mother”, he said.

For Waed to secure a job, he has to learn the official Geneva language - French. But that also proves a hurdle. “We have a single salary, with only my wife working. I am unable to afford the high cost of tuition for French classes”, he said.

When asked how he has coped in Geneva, he said, “We are hopeful. Two months ago I applied for a Swiss driving license. Every day I wake up, pray and move on with my job search”. "I have sent my CV to many organizations".

The couple was introduced to ELCG by Kiki Lawal, and believe that the church is a welcoming community and a place for renewing hope. Waed said, "I found very nice people. I feel comfortable and we are happy coming to the Lutheran Church. My hope is always renewed here".

For now he hopes that he will be able to get a job, learn French and invite his aging mother to Geneva, so that he is able to take care of her.

Charity concert

Both Waed and Joyce are passionate about their country. Through their friendship with the Sham Trio that dates back to their time in Damascus, they organized a charity concert in the church to raise funds for the Relief and Development Center, a Damascus Catholic diocese center working with refugees, women and displaced children.

Using qanoon, clarinet and percussion instruments, the Sham Trio based in Berlin, Germany, successfully performed a traditional Syrian music concert in ELCG on Saturday, July 1.

Maureen Gumbe and Dinesh Suna, both members of our congregation, live-streamed the concert on Facebook to 248 viewers. Valarie Marinoni summarized it well on Facebook: *What a wonderful moment - we are truly blessed!*





Watch the concert here: <https://luther250.com/concerts/concerts-dete-2017/sham-trio/>

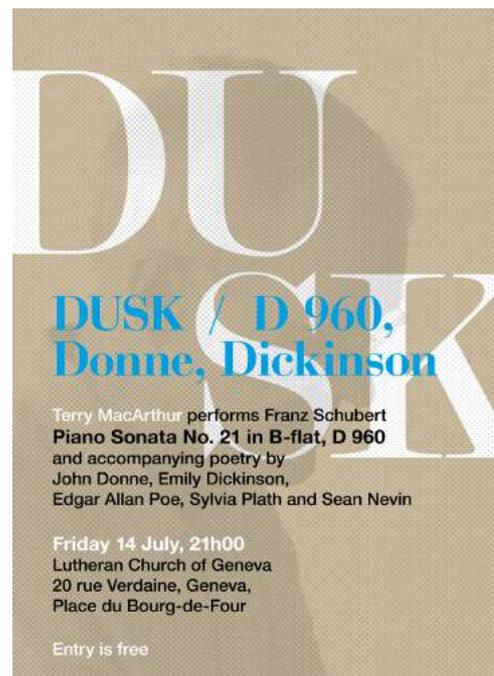
Dusk Terry MacArthur

A friend told me about an author, who took a year off to master a piano recital to write a book about the experience. Have no fear that this will become a book. Just before Max, my partner, became ill, a pianist played Schubert's last piano sonata as part of the summer noon-time concerts at the church. I was taken by her performance, but even more by the music itself.

Schubert never wrote that this sonata was composed as a confrontation with his own early death at age 31. But that narrative became more and more compelling for me as I practiced the music. From the deep bass trill that interrupts the opening phrase to the insistent octave that propels the finale, death keeps inserting its claims. Yet in the midst of what must have been a horrible, ugly ordeal, Schubert poured out forty minutes of intense, glorious music.

The grand piano in the summer always invited me to practice. After I heard the Schubert sonata, I quickly downloaded the score and started in on the slow movement. I told Max that I had discovered this piece, and was enjoying it, although I would probably never be able to play it. I could manage the slow movement. His ears no longer worked well, but I sang the ascending phrase. Max whistled the next part. He was not a musician, but he had an encyclopedic knowledge. Of course, he knew the piece. Not too long after that he was hospitalized. Others helped me keep vigil, and during the breaks I would sometimes sneak to the church to play Schubert. Schubert's confrontation with death merged into my dealing with Max's.

When I play the opening theme, I never fail to want Max to hear it, to cherish it with me. Sometimes loss overwhelms me. Sometimes I can almost hear Max wonder if I am making too



much rubato or not enough. I would need to reach back to some old hymns to find music that has become such a part of me. Of course, in the midst of the solace there is that threatening trill.

After Max's death, Schubert became my friend. Some days, I would need to play it, almost like a fix. The third movement is a real terror and the fourth has some sections outside my abilities: all those notes under a never-ending melody, with bass notes on the offbeat just to keep things unbalanced. Then I started to work with Matteo Magistris, who opened new possibilities that I have never seen. What a delight to work with him, and to discover how much better I could play.

Then came the idea of putting words alongside the music. I wanted others to see something of the narrative I was seeing without making the connections so strong that it would close off imagination. Poetry makes suggestions outside the normal explanations of what words mean. It could serve as the vehicle. At first, when I had thought the program might be part of the Summer Music series, I was going to find an actor to do French poetry. My French would have been more opaque than illuminating. When it was decided that poetry didn't quite belong at noontime, I felt free to choose poetry in English and do it myself. It didn't take me long to find what I wanted. I already had decided there would be one psalm. John Donne had long fascinated me. Dickinson as well. Then I realized that I needed someone to watch me, and work on the delivery of the poems. Douglass Fowley took the time to show me myself. This work became valuable for understanding not only the poems, but what it means to see death through other eyes. Dusk seemed an appropriate image for the program and for the time of the recital.



Many people came. It was not too hot, thank goodness. My nerves were not too bad. Douglass and Mateo had been right. I was performing for friends and I felt encouraged by the chatter in the gathering dark. The audience seemed willing to walk with me and Schubert into the face of death, and find there not only an ominous trill, but melodies to buoy the spirit, triplets with which to dance in the dusk, and a redeeming grace as a melody suddenly turns to a major key (seven sharps) with an Amen hidden in the middle voices.

A neighbor of Max's, Woody Lauber-Zand, came with her pencil and drew during the performance (above). It is a kind of summation of the night, as is the video that Ray Woodcock lovingly shaped that is available on our web site. (<https://luther250.com/concerts/concerts-dete-2017/dusk-schubertpoetry/>)

The last poem was by a poet previously unknown to me, Sean Nevin. It is part of a series of poems about grieving.

Self-Portrait as the Emptied Closet

I fan a stack of Manila folders across our bed, warranties
the deed to the house. I remove your suit coats, ties –
the shoebox of letters home. I am the emptied closet, the
archeologist
unearthing my own past. In the widow house everything
is boxed. Moth balls in lace satchels swing from
their hangers
and I hear your impossible footsteps echo
across the hardwood. Recollection
is a treasure map, the fool's errand,
it's flawed, encoded and incomplete. I write history here
on the floor.
I still lose. I must.

When I first read this, I remembered looking into Max's closets and seeing the moth papers hanging there all alone. I still hear the impossible echoes, especially when they are bathed in the sounds of Schubert.

Two Perspectives on the LWF Assembly in Namibia

Many people in our congregation were involved in the Twelfth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, from May 10 to 16. In the June edition of Geneva Lutheran we included press releases from the LWF written for a general audience. Now in this edition, we are including two personal reflections written by and for people in our community.

Namibia – A Much Happier Place

Ralston Deffenbaugh

It was a joy and a blessing that the Lutheran World Federation's Twelfth Assembly could take place in Namibia. And for me personally, it had special meaning: I started my LWF career in Namibia and ended it there.

In 1975-76, I took a year off from the Harvard Law School. The LWF sent me to Namibia to observe political trials and to assist the churches' legal defense efforts. At that time, Namibia was under South African occupation. South Africa had applied the full range of its oppressive racially discriminatory system of apartheid, including the use of detention without trial, torture, and extra-judicial executions. I was witness to grave violations of human rights. I saw how adversity bred character for some, but also how some others were broken. I saw how vitally important the role of the church was. Namibia won a place in my heart and I became committed to the LWF.



In 1989-90, through the LWF, I was invited back to Namibia to serve as a legal adviser for the Namibian Lutheran bishops for the year of transition to independence. It was marvelous to see Namibia go from war to peace, from oppression to freedom, and from occupation to independence. Again the role of the church was vital, for the success of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group, for free and fair elections, and for an independent Namibia.

Thirty years ago, it would have been inconceivable that an LWF Assembly could take place in Namibia. But now Namibia is a much happier place and the Assembly was a great success. Thanks be to God!

Ralston Deffenbaugh retired on June 30 as the LWF Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights.

Believing in the Catholic and Apostolic Church

Rev. Dr. Ireneusz Lukas

As part of the LWF conference in Namibia, there was a global commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on Sunday, 14 May 2017 at Sam Nujoma stadium, in Windhoek. Not only Lutherans from around the world, but also thousands of Lutherans from Namibia and neighbouring countries, and many ecumenical guests, participated in the commemoration event that was a highpoint of the assembly. It was a deeply spiritual experience to worship with the whole world and to listen to the story of Reformation “from the perspective of unity, not division,” as LWF President Bishop Munib Younan said in his welcoming words. For me as a Lutheran from Poland, a predominantly Roman Catholic country, it was especially moving to see the Roman Catholic Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, lead the apostolic Confession of Faith. I was especially touched when, as an ecumenical community, we confessed our faith in one, catholic, and apostolic Church. The word “catholic” in this context does not, of course, mean “Roman Catholic.” However, these words, spoken together by the ecumenical family during the global commemoration, were for me an expression of tremendous changes in relations between the churches, and a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.



Ireneusz Lukas is the LWF Area Secretary for Europe.

Teaching Chemistry in Las Vegas

Cory Evans-Klock

The question I get asked most often when I say I am a high school chemistry teacher in Las Vegas, is “why Las Vegas?”. The simple answer is serendipity. I joined an organization called Teach For America (TFA) after my senior year of college. This organization chose the city, the school, and the

subject I would be teaching. I was inspired to join TFA because of its goal is to close the education gap between the rich and poor in the United States, which resonated with my desire to have a positive impact on the world.

I also thought teaching would be easier than my studies, and would provide a much-needed break between degrees. This delusion should be credited to all the amazing teachers who made it look easy. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since starting at Mojave High School over four years ago, I have worked harder than any other time in my life. And even though I've completed my TFA term (two years), I have no plans to stop teaching. Through teaching I have fallen in love with my life. I have discovered a purpose I will sacrifice for, and have grown to become someone I can be proud of: an inspirer, a mentor, a learner, an educator.



Mojave High School's AP Chemistry students and their teachers, Cory Evans-Klock (standing on the left in the back - in the green t-shirt) and Joseph May.

Every class period I greet my students with a handshake and a genuine smile because they are my strength and my greatest source of joy. Every day I stay after school for three hours or more to tutor any student – current, former, or never met before – who finds him or herself in my room. I bring food because they might have missed lunch, I listen closely because they might have no safe place to be themselves, and I patiently explain, guide, and encourage them to fall in love with learning.

In return, there are small acts of kindness from them that keep my spirits lifted. It could be a student bringing me extra whiteboard markers, decorating my room for the holidays, or preparing a school-wide 26 puzzle scavenger hunt to give me a birthday card signed by those very same students who I helped after school. Through these actions the students continually communicate to

me that I am making a difference, and that reaffirms my purpose and my unwavering hope for their future.

Why do I teach? For the joy, the challenges, the learning, and the positive impact I can bring in my students lives. Why in Las Vegas? Serendipity placed me there, but I stay because I am still needed here.

Cory Evans-Klock has been a member of the ELCC since 1996. He is currently teaching chemistry at Mojave High School in Las Vegas, Nevada in the United States.

Acting Together to Ban Nuclear Weapons By George Arende

On August 6, 1945, during World War II (1939-45), an American B-29 bomber dropped the world's first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The explosion wiped out much of the city, killing and injuring an estimated 150,000 people. Three days later, a second A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, causing another 75,000 casualties, according to conservative estimates. Tens of thousands more citizens would perish in the ensuing months, years and decades. A new and most cruel weapon had been used on Japan.

Atomic and nuclear weapons kill and injure people in three horrible ways: with heat, with blast and with radiation, The aftermath of the twin bombings saw massive devastation in the cities from the initial blast, the widespread fires that ensued and the radiation contamination that even reached rural areas far from the epicenter. Homes, schools, hospitals, temples and churches were reduced to ashes. Radio stations went off the air. In the ensuing years, radiation caused 17 types of cancers and a variety of birth defects among a range of health and psychological conditions, some of which are ongoing three generations later.

Since the attacks 72 years ago, the opposition to nuclear weapons in the world community has failed to rally sufficient political support for the abolition of nuclear weapon in the face of determined opposition by the nuclear powers and public acquiescence of their citizens in the nuclear status quo. That long wait came to an end on July 7, 2017, when two-thirds of the world's governments (122 countries) adopted a treaty which takes an essential step towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. The new treaty outlaws the development, testing, production, manufacture, acquisition, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, as well as related activities. (See United Nations Resolution 71/258)



The vote was 122 to 1; Netherlands voted "no", instead advocating the "protection" of US nuclear weapons, a position also shared with 30 other US-allied countries that boycotted the negotiations and vote. Singapore abstained at the last minute, after having been supportive of the treaty along with its neighbors in Southeast Asia, which is already one of the world's six nuclear-weapons-free zones. The nine countries that have nuclear weapons – the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea – boycotted the treaty negotiations. They instead

proposed specific steps towards nuclear disarmament that have been on the international agenda for decades, mostly dependent on their commitment and action, and which have seen no progress for more than 20 years. The five countries that have the vast majority of nuclear weapons (USA, Russia, Britain, France and China) are allowed to keep their nuclear arsenals temporarily on the condition that they take effective measures to get rid of the weapons, under the terms of the 50-year-old Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. In a joint statement issued the day before the treaty was adopted, the USA, Britain and France stated that it offered “no solution to the grave threat” posed by nuclear weapons and vowed “not to sign, ratify or even become party to it”.

Church involvement and members of ELCG

For six years, members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) have worked towards the realization of the abolition treaty. After the historic vote, Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of WCC, welcomed it, saying, “it could ultimately save millions of lives.” For his part, Peter Prove, a member of our church and the director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), reiterated that “banning nuclear weapons is essential step towards their eventual elimination, a goal the WCC has supported since it began in 1948.”

Another ELCG member, Jonathan Frerichs, has helped mobilize churches and related organizations to support the treaty on behalf of the WCC and the Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi International. “Christians are called to protect human life and God’s precious gift of all life which we see around us. Nuclear weapons misuse the very building blocks of Creation to threaten our small corner of Creation,” he said. “In a way, this treaty reflects a core value of faith and of collective conscience into the realm of the rule of law in order to protect a common good.” Frerichs noted that after the vote, a Hiroshima survivor told the packed UN conference hall that nuclear weapons have always been immoral and now they will be illegal as well.

While calling for collective involvement, Fyske Tveit said, “Churches now have a fine opportunity to help with the next step, [and] urge governments to sign and ratify the treaty and then to see that it is implemented.”

The treaty will open for signature on 20 September 2107 and will come into force when 50 countries have ratified it.

What the treaty calls for

The 10-page document urges state parties to the treaty to be “mindful of the risks posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons” that “concern the security of all humanity.” It expresses “deep concern” about the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” that could result from the use of nuclear weapons.

The treaty prohibits the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Countries that ratify are bound by the treaty to co-operate with the International Atomic Energy Agency in implementing control measures.



Victim assistance that is “gender-sensitive” and includes medical care, rehabilitation and psychological and economic support, is stipulated by the treaty for people affected by either the use or testing of nuclear weapons.

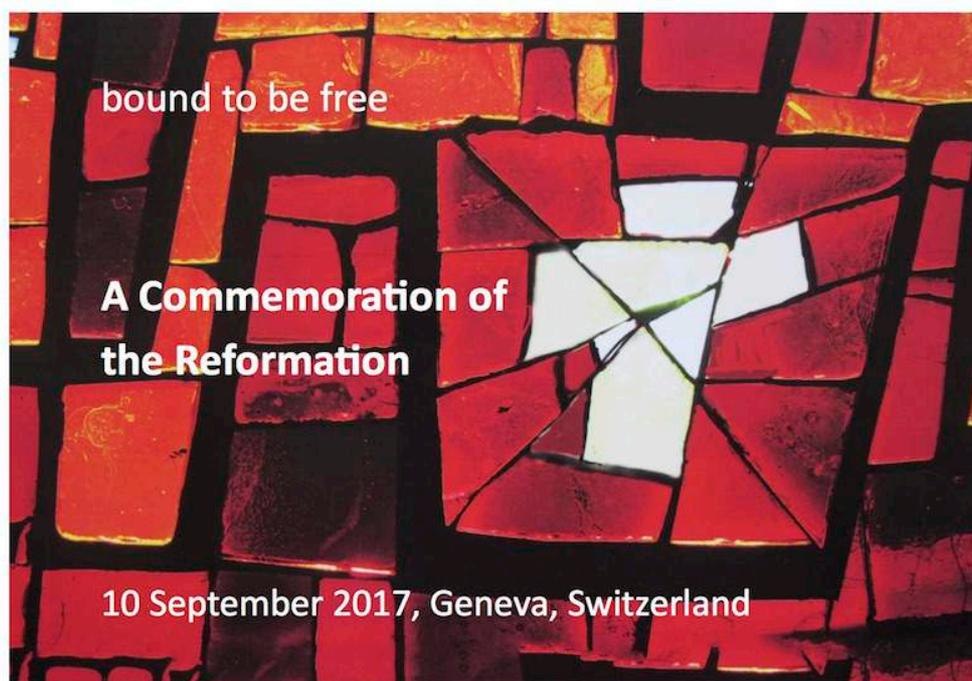
The ban treaty is strongly supported by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Trade Union Confederation, the World Medical Association, the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates and many other organizations. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global coalition of over 400 partner organizations in 100 countries including the World Council of Churches and other religious international associations.

With thanks to Jonathan Frerichs

Announcements

Commemoration of the Reformation - 10 September

On Sunday, 10 September, Lutheran churches from throughout Switzerland will gather for a common worship service in Geneva commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The service will be held at the Temple de la Madeleine at 11h00, just down the hill from the Lutheran Church, and Rev. Dr. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, will be the preacher. There will be no separate worship service at the ELCG that morning. *All are welcome!*



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