



English-Speaking Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva
Advent 2015

Rhythm and Ritual

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Walking Together

Pastor Andy Willis

Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” (Acts 8:29)

Talk of chariots and wandering disciples and desert roads – not to mention a Spirit that gives step-by-step instructions in clear, concise sentences – can sound a long way from Geneva in the year 2015. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch from the biblical book of Acts is in many ways a strange and distant one.

But I’m also convinced that it is a rich and profound picture of who our congregation is and can be.

You may have heard me talk about this conviction of mine already. I’m saying it in as many ways as I can right now. The story from Acts is a story of two strangers – a scruffy disciple being whisked around by the Spirit from one place to another, and a court official of the Ethiopian queen – brought together on a desolate road. Their encounter has much to tell us.

Philip sees the Ethiopian's chariot coming, and the Spirit tells him to run up alongside it. The two begin a conversation, with Philip huffing along on the shoulder of the road, and before long, the traveler invites Philip to come on up and sit by his side. They read scripture together, eyes are opened, grace is shared, and they part ways, with Philip spirited off to another adventure and the Ethiopian going on his way rejoicing. (If you haven't read the story in a while, go ahead and pick up your Bible and do it now – it's well worth your time: Acts 8:26-39.)

Yes, chariot wheels scraping along in the dust are far from our congregation's daily life. But I can think of at least three ways in which our community and this story are rumbling right along together.

First, our congregation is a place where people from very different backgrounds meet. I've never been part of a church like it – where the Lord's Prayer is such a cacophony of languages in worship and coffee hour is truly an intercultural experience, week after week. We are brought into community with people very different from ourselves, with vastly different experiences of faith. It's an incredible gift.

Second, meetings between people in our congregation don't always last for very long. Sure, some of us are around for a decade or more, but that's really the exception in Geneva. Many come for work or study for a year, or three. Like the two conversation partners on the desert road, we often share only a brief time together.

And **finally**, powerfully transformative encounters take place here. You know it as well as I do. Many have found in our congregation not only a nice place to be; they have found an experience of faith and community that has transformed the way they see themselves and the world. Many leave this place changed.

The parallels between the ancient story and our present community are deep and wonderful. So the question is, *What do we do about it?*

We've started something new in our congregation this fall, with the aim of embracing and deepening this image of a community of travelers, sharing the road for a time. It's called "Walking Together," and the idea behind it is very simple.

Once a month this fall, we have been bringing together members and people new to the congregation for a meal. We talk, we learn something of one another's stories, and after dinner we share in an informal time of Bible study in small groups. For those interested, we are planning opportunities for more intensive preparation and study during Lent.

The process is very simple, but the aim is significant. We mean to take seriously the opportunity we have to travel together for a time and to see what transformative work the Spirit means to do, both in us and in those we meet.

So how can you be a part of it? You can join in one of the gatherings this fall, or you can watch for more opportunities this winter as the process develops. If you want to know what I'm excited about in ministry right now, here it is. There is motion all around us, and for this moment we are sharing the road, with grace to discover and a wonderful story to tell.

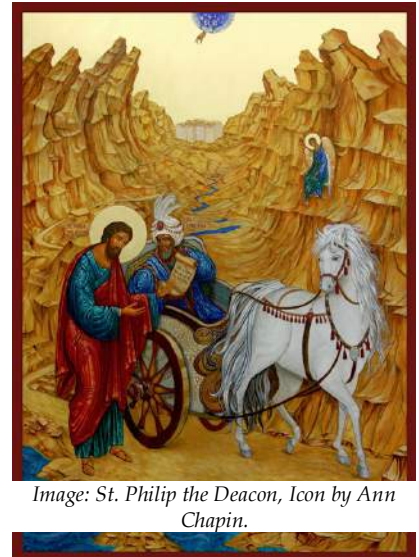


Image: St. Philip the Deacon, Icon by Ann Chapin.

Sharing: Zvataida Primary School in Zimbabwe

Ngonidzashe Hove



Front

Back

Zvataida Primary School is a new school located in the rural Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. The community is composed of people from various religious denominations, including Lutherans. The school was using makeshift classrooms while making an effort to set up one decent classroom block for their children. This noble desire could not be realized due to lack of sufficient funds and the daunting challenges posed by unfavorable economic conditions in Zimbabwe. The community managed to finance the construction of the only classroom structure (without roof – see picture) after which they found it difficult to proceed, and progress was stalled for about two years due to lack of funds.

The timely and generous support by the ‘good Samaritan’ ELCG enabled the community to achieve their revered goal of providing a decent learning environment for the children from that community. The church donated USD 5000 in May 2015 which enabled them to continue with construction work from roof level. By August 2015, the roof and plastering was complete (see picture) and most of the minor construction aspects were reported complete by October. This development serves as an important milestone in recognizing the rights of children and also demonstrating the church’s sincere role in responding to those in need. ELCG support resulted in what may turn out to be a memorable change which the Zvataida Primary School community will live to cherish for years to come. The block has two classrooms, and out of the total enrolment of 300, 60 children (30 in each of the completed classrooms) will experience learning in a different and humane environment soon.

Apart from its primary purpose as a classroom, the classroom block will also be used for church services and for hosting a number of community events. The community is quite appreciative of the support given by the church and wished to convey their heartfelt gratitude to the ELCG membership.

Sharing: Promotion of a Culture of Peace in Colombian School

Maria Lucia Uribe Torres



The purpose of the project is to support peace education workshops for 480 youth and adolescents ages 12 to 17 in the municipality of Soacha in Colombia. The project aims to train 20 teachers in five schools to deliver four workshops on self-knowledge, citizenship, respect for others, dignity and human rights, respect for difference and diversity, human development and entrepreneurship.

The project is part of program put together by an interdisciplinary team of professionals, volunteers and college interns in 2014. During this period, workshops were designed using several conceptual and pedagogical approaches. A pilot process was initiated to ensure that the implementation phase in 2015 would be successful. A workshop guide was designed to support the implementation in 2015.



After the funds from the Lutheran Church of Geneva were received in 2015, a project coordinator was selected, a young professional with a bachelor's degree in political science and three years of experience in community work, capacity building and peace education. Four professionals were also trained to facilitate the workshops with young people. The implementation of the workshops started in May 2015. 16 workshops were implemented for 480 students from four educational institutions in the Commune 4 of Soacha, on the topics of: Prevention of forced recruitment, life project, prevention of consumption of psychoactive substances, appreciation of diversity, self care and prevention of domestic violence and access to justice.

By July 2015 when this report was shared, the organization was in the process of training a group of 20 multipliers, or students from each of the schools to replicate and share their lessons learned outside the classroom, with other classmates, in their homes or

community spaces, in order to achieve greater impact and sustainability on personal and community levels.

A Reflection on 'Introduction to the Lutheran Tradition'

Jane Wangui



I was brought up as a Catholic and joined the ELCG when I moved to Geneva in 2013. Having never been to a Lutheran Church before, I was surprised by the relative similarities in the format of the service and the typical Catholic mass. Needless to say, I felt at home.

In the two years since I joined the ELCG, I had always wondered about what it meant to be a Lutheran and wanted to know more. While I was familiar with Luther's role in the Reformation, I was not sure how to go about learning about the Lutheran tradition. I was glad when I saw the announcement for the class in one of the bulletins in the summer.

Given my limited knowledge of what it means to be a Lutheran, the 'Introduction to the Lutheran Tradition' not only provided an overview, but also gave me a better perspective of the tradition that I did not have before. The six sessions covered a lot of ground, including the history of the tradition, faith, worship and sacraments, the Lutheran tradition and the Bible, inter-faith relations and the theology of the cross. During the sessions, we reviewed some of Luther's works and read his perspectives on faith, God, sacraments, baptism, among others and their application today. In addition, it was also interesting to learn from others' perspectives about their traditions and how they have influenced them, and their differences with the Lutheran tradition.

The sessions were insightful and informative and although I have a lot more to learn, I must say I have a better appreciation of what being a Lutheran is all about, and hope that more sessions like these will be offered in future.

ELCG Visit to Taizé

Allison Evans



Sloth - got that down to both an art and a science
Gluttony - easy here in the land of cheese and chocolate
Greed - no doubt, sharing is hard!
Pride, lust, wrath - sure! Check those off the list.

The traditional seven deadly sins are pretty much an everyday occurrence for me, I confess. (Plus plenty more!)

But, (and here is a pride example) I rarely envy. Your house/car/handbag may be gorgeous and I'm happy for you if that makes you happy. You have a great job, family, figure? Congratulations! Your accomplishment, your creations, your acquisitions - I truly rejoice for you, don't necessarily want it for myself, nor secretly wish for your fortunes to change.

But on Thursday 10 September, I envied. ENVIED. In a most enormous way and most unlikely place, the Taizé community in France's beautiful Burgundy region.

It was a clear crisp day, a gorgeous glimpse of early autumn when a mismatched group of ersatz pilgrims gathered at the steps of the Ecumenical Center of the World Council of Churches. Onto our coach boarded business (wo)men, clergy, drowsy teens, retirees, homemakers, interns, and the enormous smile of a life-loving pre-schooler.

Although pilgrims together, we sought varied goals.

Some came to re-spark a Taizé fire. Some came to personally experience a cultural and religious institution. Some came to fill a bank holiday or in response to their family member's edict. I came to learn.

My only prior exposure to Taizé was the music to which I was introduced in 1994. Both beloved for its contemplative and simple nature as well as disdained for monotony and scarce text, Taizé music is more a prayer than a hymn.

So my personal pilgrimage was to experience the music directly and at the source so to better understand it in worship settings. How then, a brave reader might ask, did this stir up such overwhelming envy?

Certainly not the physical property of the community. Handmade of practical design, the community exists for subsistence, not to impress tourists. Our lunch was simple and far from the highlight of the day. Even our lovely and moving worship service was so due to the journey of the mind rather than the journey of the motorways.

What then to envy? How could I leave such a peaceful day so unfilled?

My biggest revelation on our Taizé away day was whom these hundred-or-so multi-denominational brothers serve in their peaceful way. They open their way of life to tens of THOUSANDS of young people every year. Not to recruit, influence, inspire, program, or otherwise compete in worldly ways. Young people come to Taizé simply to BE.

They arrive in groups; small and not so small. They might be a Catechism class, a youth group, or friends from the same village or school.

They might stay a weekend, a week, a month, or a lifetime. They pitch a hillside of tents and are assigned working responsibilities for the practical needs of the community.

And they talk. And sing. And contemplate. And heal. And grow. They have no electronic connections so they grow human connections - connecting with themselves, their fellow pilgrims, their Creator.

And so I ENVY. I ENVY their dedicated Taizé experiences. I ENVY thrice daily group prayer. I ENVY the theme introduced daily by a brother and its discussion.

And I envy the refreshed and inspired young people shaped and formed by their Taizé experience as they re-enter their re-formed lives.

But most of us on 10 September were not Taizé's specially welcomed pilgrims. We were the gift shop patrons and hikers who again boarded our coach for re-entry to schools, jobs and the workaday world.

And I envied the young people who would be forever changed by their Taizé experiences.

Learn more at

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiz%C3%A9_Community#Young_adult_meetings

Baking and Ministry (plus recipe!)

Wendy Donaldson



My mom was an excellent cook, not fancy...delicious and flavourful and economical. She could make an amazing soup out of almost nothing, and she did, regularly. I once came across a quotation attributed to Beethoven: "Only the pure of heart can make good soup." I framed it for her.

She was also a bit of an armchair philosopher. She had these soundbites (long before there were soundbites). "Don't get married if you don't like doing dishes," was one. (That may have been when my brother and I would squabble while doing the dishes.) She had a number that ended with "in today's society." And as she aged and adapted to all the changes life brought her way, she often quipped: "Every year different." That has been quoted many times as Andrew and I have adapted to life in Geneva!

I'd like to think I inherited some of her wisdom. That feeding and serving others is a privilege. That putting time and care into baking and cooking is never a wasted effort when it can be shared. That, in the doing of it, we can live out God's ordinance to love one another.

Final nugget: “Don’t eat that...it’s for the church.”

Shortbread Squares



- 1 cup butter, softened
 - ½ cup fruit sugar
 - 2 cups flour
1. Stir sugar into butter. Mix flour into butter and sugar a bit at a time.
 2. Spread mixture into a 9x9" or 8x8" pan.
 3. Bake in a 300 degree oven for about 50 minutes. Shortbread should be baked through but not brown.
 4. Remove from oven. While still warm, prick the surface of the shortbread with a fork to make diagonal marks. Cut into squares before they are cool.
 5. When cool, sprinkle the surface with white sugar.

Rendez-Vous with Clare Franklin Duran

My name is Clare Franklin Duran and my kids, Maria (10), Daniel (6) and I have been members of ELCG since June 2015. My dear friend Lynn Gorrell introduced me to ELCG long ago, but it took me a long while to “let go” of my Episcopalian roots. I’ve been in Geneva for 15 years and I’m a physical/physio therapist at HUG working in neurology, mostly in rehabilitation.

The theme, Rhythm and Ritual immediately brings to mind **memories of my childhood** and the joys of being a parent. First, my childhood: having *never* moved from my childhood home in the NW Maryland suburbs of Washington DC, I was bathed in the happy and simple routines of a suburban childhood: a one-mile walk to my neighbourhood school, bike rides to the pool, every summer at the same Delaware beach. I had such a wonderful happy childhood and still hold dear my two oldest friends from just next door. Childhood memories are a series of simple, happy family events – holidays, birthdays, trips to the beach. The joys of being a parent come in part from returning to those blissful childhood rhythms and rituals: back to school, swimming lessons, sleep overs, holiday stories and decorations. I happily relive, certainly with our own adaptations, the routines of my childhood.

One special **family tradition** is birthday pancakes, stacked as a cake for breakfast. The story goes that my mother, whose birthday is December 27, had to leave home after breakfast on her birthday, so my grandmother prepared her a “cake” of pancakes by putting one pancake on top of



another (each layer separated by a bit of butter and brown sugar...). And now we always have a pancake “cake” for birthday breakfast - this is not always an easy task on a school day, but it’s essential!

Certainly, my **best decision** was becoming a mother. Despite all the challenges and frustrations, it is for me, the single biggest source of joy and growth. I could not imagine my life without Maria and Daniel.

One of my **favorite places** is the campus of Wellesley College near Boston, where I studied and received my BA in Art History. I love Wellesley for its beauty certainly – the lake, the gardens, the buildings, both old and new, provide enormous pleasure for the eye. But for me, Wellesley also nurtures my soul as I remember how I learned, how I struggled, how I made friends – how I achieved. I only make it back every 5 years for reunion, but at least there is that frequency!

Although I studied art history at Wellesley College, **the piece of art that touches me** deeply is Handel’s Messiah. If there is one thing that resources me and lifts me up, it is listening to Handel – I can never get enough!! The voices, the melody, the words...the power of it all combined never ceases to lift me up. However, I have yet to find a live performance in or near Geneva at either Christmas or Easter!! Let me know if you have any suggestions!!!

My **perfect dinner** would most definitely be with my two older sisters, my nieces and nephews and my two kids. When we can all get together, we laugh and tease and hug. My middle sister would be cooking just about anything she wants! We’d be catching up on new events and reliving many happy family stories

My greatest **virtues**.....well, I strive to be empathetic, as much in my professional as for in my personal life. I try to imagine “walking in the shoes” of another, to share the joy but also the pain of life’s ups and downs. I believe I am extremely loyal to my friends and family and always hope to hold up those dear to me through thick and thin. And now for those **vices**.....I can be a perfectionist and a bit rigid. I try very hard not to seek to control *everything*; I often expect too much of others. At times I am a bit too emotional.

Although I hope and strive to be **optimistic**, I am rather more like Charlie Brown, for those of you who know the “human” of Snoopy. I want to believe in good and hope and often do so, sometimes naively; but I am also a sceptical and doubtful person. Certainly my profession in rehabilitation allows me to witness the power in the human spirit, the love and support of God and family and lots of hard work. Seeing people face sometimes devastating neurological events with grace and strength always lifts me up and renews my sometimes failing optimism.

Global Mission Fellow

Olga Tshiwewe Kangaj

Democratic Republic of Congo

Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church



Coming to Geneva was both challenging and exciting. I remember running up and down between offices for immigration, going to the TPG to get my monthly ticket, and looking for cheap shops where I could buy a jacket because I could never imagine that it was going to be that cold! But this was really a dream, because I could not find any cheap shop! Meeting new faces and not remembering names the next day! Trying to find a line so as to be in touch with my family and finally searching for a church! The streets were quiet, and the building seemed to have only three inhabitants, i.e. Bethel, the concierge, and myself. Coming from a place where neighbours are very active and streets are always busy, a place where the coldest degree is 16, this was really hard for me and I used to feel lonely. But I thank God I had a precious friend and sister (Bethel) as well as a lovely supervisor (Fulata). I also found a place where I could feel at home which is the church as well as the young adults group. My work at the World Council of Churches (WCC) is my source of inspiration, and having an opportunity to be part of the pilgrimage of justice of peace is an honour, I could never imagine a better way of serving God. I enjoy meeting new people, building new relationships at church, working in my neighbourhood, serving at the soup kitchen, being ready to serve at church, and volunteering at the hospice. My time in Geneva is priceless; the beauty of this city, especially nature, remains a powerful source of strength which nourishes my spiritual life each and every day. I thank God for this challenging and exciting journey.

Global Mission Fellow

Bethel Mhone,

Malawi

Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church



This was not my first time away from home, but it was my first time overseas. I had mixed feelings, I was anxious, excited, and also unsure if it was the right way to fulfil my dreams. I had sleepless nights envisioning how my life in Geneva will be. Finally I packed my suitcase, took the plane and landed in the promised land with Exodus 33:14 guiding me; *“My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.”*

The journey began on unpleasant road of cold weather and the communication barrier. I really struggled, and though I still decided to move forward, I found myself very lonely and bored. Living in a big family, I guess that's expected. Family members could not come but I needed one. Other than my colleagues who are there for me, I anticipated every Sunday service to join my new family. The church community has been my teacher, my guide, my strength and, for the most part, I am not alone anymore. Joining the World Council of Churches has been a privilege, the experience has inspired and challenged my spiritual, social and life values. The pilgrim of justice and peace has taught me three lessons so far. First, as a young woman I have to bold: this simply means being committed to bigger goals like justice regardless of my fears. The second is being courageous. The most difficult part, I think after the commitment, is taking the right action, or walking the talk. Finally our faith, which is the core value for the goal. I have learned it should never be left behind but is to be the match stick for our burning actions. In the middle of my journey, I have seen thy presence and it will lead me to the end.

Christmas Music and Traditions

Amrita Manchala



It's hard to choose a favourite Christmas carol, since there are countless great ones. However, my absolute favourite is Silent Night, written by Joseph Mohr and Franz Zuber in 1818. It is a beautiful carol, with a special melody which allows us to reflect upon the season of advent. It sets a picturesque scene for the birth of Jesus. Whenever I listen to this carol, it reminds me of a sweet lullaby that is so soothing and brings a sense of peace within, while rendering a very important story.

Every Christmas Eve, I look forward to the sea of flickering flames that illuminate the dimmed room, as the song fills the air and our hearts.

Hiro Hayafuji



My favourite Christmas carol is "Adeste Fideles". It was often sung during Christmas time by a missionary from the States when I was in kindergarten in Kyoto, Japan. The song was also often sung at Christmas parties during my college years at Brown University in Rhode Island, when I lived with other students in a dormitory. The carol brings me a sense that something sacred has already arrived to this confused world. Indeed, nothing is more important to me than our saviour Christ. I am wholeheartedly thankful that we are allowed to come and adore Him.

Matthias & Anders Ralston



We have spent Christmas in many locations, including Sweden, Paris, Boston, and New Jersey, so we have a mix of rituals and traditions.

Matthias: My favourite Christmas tradition is opening all the presents, even though I get too many books. I really like drinking hot chocolate, and it was really fun when we went to Tuveryd [the small village in Sweden where our family is from] and it was snowy and dark.

Anders: I really [like] snow at Christmas, and my favourite Christmas was when we went to Tuveryd. It is cozy there and I liked the Swedish food and songs.

Important Dates for Your Calendar

All events at the church

28-29 November - German Congregation Advent Market

29 November - First Sunday of Advent

4 December - Walking Together dinner, 18h30

6 December - Christmas pageant, during worship

6 December - Congregational Assembly, following worship

13 December - Escalade soup sale, afternoon and evening

24 December - Christmas Eve worship, 17h00

25 December - Christmas Day worship, 11h00