



English-Speaking Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva
Autumn 2016

Life Challenges

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The Cloud Around Us

Andy Willis

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... (Hebrews 12:1-2)

If you're like me, that verse calls to mind All Saints' Day, the day when the church remembers the faithful who have gone before us. It's often read as part of the service on November 1st, and so it might make you think of candles and bells and a recitation of names.

But this year, that reading fell on an ordinary Sunday in August—the 15th, to be exact. Not a feast day, not a special day, just a regular old Sunday. Lots of people were traveling, so the sanctuary wasn't packed. It was hot, so we opened the windows and let the breeze blow in.

It was just an ordinary summer worship service, though for me it wasn't entirely ordinary. It was my first Sunday back after paternity leave, and my mind was very much on my son, Glen, born two-and-a-half weeks earlier.

That bit about the cloud of witnesses is the famous part of this section of Hebrews. As you might imagine, what comes before it is a listing of heroes of the faith. Praise for Abraham

for setting out into the unknown, armed with little but his faith in God's promise (and Sarah's faith, I might add). Praise for Moses and David and Samuel and Rahab and Gideon and Samson. Name after name, faithfulness after faithfulness. The letter names these heroes "of whom the world was not worthy" to inspire the reader, to leave us stunned with the brilliance of their commitment to God and give us a push to keep going in our own attempts at following Jesus.

It can be encouraging, and it can also be a little daunting, reading about all that super-heroic faith. What are my stumbling attempts compared to all that? Annie Dillard has said something wonderful about encountering these sorts of biblical characters:

A blur of romance clings to our notion of these people in the Bible – as though of course God should come to these simple folks, these Sunday School watercolor figures, who are so purely themselves – while we now are complex and full at heart. We are busy. So, I see now, were they. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? There is no one but us. (from *Holy the Firm*)

It's not to say that the heroes of scripture aren't to be admired – but they're not so different from us, really. They're also complex people, struggling with multiple commitments, persistent doubts, bad habits, and all the rest. The cloud of witnesses is often just as cloudy as we are.



Glen wasn't quite up to joining in worship on that Sunday, but the service reminded me of how excited I am for him to get to know the church. I'm excited for him to start inhabiting a time every week set aside for prayer. I'm excited for him to start learning some of the songs we sing (and to pick up a percussion instrument before long). I'm excited for him to start hearing the stories of those biblical heroes of faith. When he's ready, I'm excited for him to open his hands and receive the gift of Communion.

And I'm excited for him to get to know all of you, the cloud of witnesses in this place. Yes, I'm talking about you – with your imperfect faith and your limits on your time and your persistent questions, and your complex, full heart. God doesn't go looking for whole, put-together people; God comes looking for us, and calls us saints.

That's what we find in this wonderful community, time and again. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Just look around – even on an ordinary summer Sunday.

My Recent Challenges with Health

Maureen Gumbe

Throughout my life, I've faced varied challenges, which I overcame, usually without intervention by others. But as life progresses, so have challenges concerning my health.

Waking up one morning in late summer of 1997, I tried to get out of bed and felt a dull pain behind my right knee. Stepping on the floor forced a loud cry as the pain intensified. I hopped around, while preparing for work, careful to avoid putting pressure on the leg. What could have caused this?, I wondered. During that day I realised that I needed to seek medical help and saw my physician, who, after reading the X-ray announced that my meniscus was in trouble. Hmm. It was not considered urgent and I was treated, bandaged and returned to work, limp and all.

The pain continued, intermittently for four months. I enjoyed a respite until 2001, while walking along the lake in Annecy with a visitor, my right leg buckled forcing me to sit. I'll avoid the details of how I regained my car that day.

The Orthopaedist whom I saw in the emergency room at Hospital La Tour, diagnosed the condition as being arthrosis, wearing of the joint, explained that I was having a "crisis", prescribed a knee brace and a pair of crutches. What fun, I had never used them before. So off to the pharmacy, where I was given a pair and instructions on how to use them. A month later, the crisis passed, I was able to walk normally, but some pain remained and became a part of my daily life, limiting my ability over time to descend stairs.



In 2005, with volcano-like suddenness another crisis erupted. Visits to the physician, crutches, anti-inflammatories, oral and external, physical therapy, and intense pain continued for about four months. The doctors, in accord, felt there was no urgency, advised that continued walking coupled with some specific exercises was all that would be necessary.

2010 came along and another lightening-like crisis struck. More of the same treatment was pursued until 2014, when the right leg ceased cooperating, and I was forced to limp, snail-like, to the pharmacy to rent crutches. My generalist, after viewing IRM images of both knees, which confirmed that there was no meniscus apparent in either, and that the bones of the femur and tibia were having an unhealthily close relationship, the right being in worse condition, recommended me to an orthopaedic surgeon. His prognosis was knee replacement of the right knee in June of 2015 and the left in 2016.

I left his office with a sense of relief, despite being told that it was a major operation and of the necessary precautions and concerns surrounding it. My prayers for a solution to my suffering had been answered; this was my biggest health and life challenge, to date. But I was convinced that I would recover fully, regain my mobility and enjoy pain-free walking.

My confidence was in the medical team, the surgeon and anaesthesiologist, who were reassuring. When asked by a few friends, whether I was afraid to undergo surgery of this nature, I reminded them that I was a child of God, and I had faith in Her to be with the medical team in the operating room.

I was awakened in the recovery room, by two lovely young nurses and assured them that I was fine and was not in pain. Thirty minutes later I was back in my room with the usual medical contraptions and a right leg which felt like a log. I silently said a prayer of thanks to God for bringing me safely through surgery. The surgeon and the anaesthesiologist came later to inform me that the operation was successful, with an image of my newly fitted knee. Smiles all around.

Later that evening, my first visitor came, enjoyed a cup of coffee and goodies from the bar, stayed a while and prayed with me before leaving. This was the first of many visits each day, from our Pastor Andy Willis, members of our church community and other friends. My room was filled with prayers, laughter, conversation, flowers and gifts.

Getting out of bed the first day post-surgery, learning to walk with the aid of a walker, was easier than I thought it would be. Under the care and guidance of the physiotherapist, I began taking baby steps down the corridor and then learning to climb the stairs, after switching to crutches. Am grateful that this part of the re-education went smoothly and pain free. Ten days later I was discharged from the Clinique Grangettes, to continue my recovery at home, with the aid of nursing assistants, who were present each day, and a physiotherapist, three times a week. I regained control of my right leg faster than my surgeon expected.

Three months later, the second surgery became necessary, as the left leg had worsened in the meantime: return to Clinique Grangettes and the same medical team. I awoke in severe pain, despite the pain treatment before surgery. Would this time around not go as easily as the first, dear God? It didn't. I sought pain relief from the medication pump fairly often the first 36 hours.

I received the same charming visitor the first evening, who prayed with me and enjoyed a cup of coffee and chat for a while.

The following day, September 8, was my first-born's birthday and I was able to sit up in bed and pen a short story for her.

As with the previous operation, I began the routine of learning to walk again, and physiotherapy, which went well, considering I was in a weaker condition than during the first round.

Members from our church community, this time around I was blessed with both Pastors Andy and Terry, and many other friends, rallied around me.

What better way to spend one's birthday than in a hospital, Tuesday, September 15. A new and enjoyable experience.

I was discharged twelve days later, a longer sojourn, because of a minor complication. The same services of assistance were re-instated at home.

It is now 14 and 11 months respectively since surgery. My recovery continues. My thoughts take me back to the first challenging post-operation moments from time to time. My left leg still requires more attention than the right. But, mobility is pain-free, after almost 15 years. Deliverance.

In conclusion, the prayers, presence and kind acts of my church community and friends, who accompanied me throughout this period, from the poem which was sent and then read on my birthday, to the flowers which perfumed my rooms, the nursing staff who sang 'Happy Birthday' to me and their excellent care throughout, all brought me peace, joy and inner healing. My faith in God's grace gives me hope for a full recovery. My cup overflows with gratitude.

Prayerful Action and the English Café

Terry MacArthur



A year ago, a UNHCR tent in the garden of the church marked our Lenten journey. We prayed for people on the move, took communion inside the tent, followed Biblical accounts of journeys. The next logical step was to transform prayer into action.

We talked with the agencies serving refugees in Geneva. The idea of starting an English café got an encouraging, helpful response. It would be a welcoming space for those more comfortable speaking English than French. So, we gathered volunteers, set up schedules, made publicity, held training, baked cakes and cookies.

But rarely did anyone come.

Maybe it needed time to catch on. Some of the volunteers visited the protection civil, where many of the young men are housed to try with a personal invitation.

Few came. We stopped baking. The energy of the volunteers dropped.

We were not totally absent of refugees. We heard a couple of really desperate stories. But the refugees were looking for quick help, which we couldn't provide. We would be thanked, and they were off searching further for a solution.

Some people off the street stopped in. A woman from England, whose husband was in the Cantonale Hospital, was glad to have someone listen. Some residents of the Old Town made it through the door. One came back and even attended part of the 250 Celebration. Our ears weren't totally wasted. But more than a few cups of coffee went down the drain.

Along the way, we developed one repeat customer, a refugee from Afghanistan with official status, so not needing urgent help. His wife and children have joined him here. He is happy that his kids are safe, but wondering about what future he can have here in Geneva. He is from the Hazara minority. A couple of weeks ago when the demonstration of Hazara's was attacked by a suicide bomb in Khabul, I had already heard something about their situation. It was no longer just news from a violent part of the world. Someone from that community had already told me about the issue of the power lines that were being re-routed away from their valley. We forget what a power line might mean. The issue was no longer a grievance about some people whose ethnic name I would soon forget, but part of the story of the man having coffee with me. Although the English Café is over, the two of us plan to meet together just to keep contact.

We have some suspicions about why more didn't come. The church is far from where most of the refugees live. If one is in desperate need, a listening ear is down the list of priorities. The knowledge of English is maybe less than we had thought. Most of the refugees that did come had very limited English. Maybe the fact that we were advertising ourselves as a church was a barrier to some. We don't know, of course. We gave it a good try. It didn't work. But we learned we have some energy within our community (and also within the German congregation) to serve further if we find the right connection. We are getting some suggestions from the Hospice Général about next steps.

The UNHCR tent is long gone, but if we are open, the Spirit will lead us in paths of service we had not yet imagined.

Challenging Dreams

Betsy Pipher

Betsy and Ben Pipher are from Tennessee, USA and have been part of the ELCG community since November 2016. Betsy is studying Sustainable Development at the University of Geneva and Ben came to support her and is looking for a job.

It was a whirlwind decision to uproot our lives and transplant to Geneva. In less than a three-month period, we sold our car, sold our house, quit our jobs and shoved what we could into a storage unit. While the actual logistics happened quickly, it was a decision long in the making. I (Betsy) had been researching graduate programs and overseas jobs since before we got married in 2010, but nothing seemed to stick. Why Geneva? Really I have no idea besides it was exactly where the Lord planned for us to be. The move followed six difficult months in our lives that taught us a lot about the grace and power of God. Our faith renewed, it made it easier to leap into the unknown, fully aware that no matter what we serve a God who loves us and plans good for our lives.



In some ways we struggled upon arrival...lack of linguistic skills, no friends, no church, no material belongings. We didn't even have a mattress or pillow for the three weeks! Ha! There was stress for sure, but the overarching theme was joy. We were so happy to be here, to see God's promise becoming a reality! We prayed for a church to call home during our time here and began to visit any church that was in English. We were immediately drawn to ELCG because of the welcoming people and the poetic way in which Andy preached. ELCG has been a refreshing retreat for us and we are so glad to have found it.

Report from the Congregation Council

Philippa Bowen, Secretary

The Congregation Council has recently proposed to contribute a regular short article for the *Geneva Lutheran* to give the congregation an update on the main issues discussed and decisions made during our monthly meetings. The CC meets for two hours on the final Sunday of every month. Regular agenda items include the reviews of the monthly Pastor's report and the Treasurer's report. We recently decided to review the activities of one Concern Group each month and the relevant coordinator is invited to present an update.

Our April meeting was largely focused around the May Annual Assembly, including the revised budget, as well as the results of the



survey we conducted in relation to the renewal of the covenant of ministry with Pastor Willis. We will continue to follow up on the rich feedback provided by you, our members, in order to continue the things that are valued as well as respond as best we can to concerns and challenges that were raised.

Our June meeting included a follow up on previous discussions around developing a new website. Amrita Manchala agreed to develop and circulate a survey to all members to find out how people are currently using the website as well as ideas for how a new website could better meet the needs of members and provide outreach to the wider community. Please respond to the survey which you will receive in the near future. We discussed how best to use the money which remains in the Adeline Keller fund and Rebecca Sangeetha is following up on this.

The Stewardship Concern Group was reviewed. The group needs new members and a new coordinator as I am not able to continue in this role in the coming year. Despite our small numbers, there is enthusiasm and we have come up with some great ideas for encouraging each and every one of you to participate in the life of our congregation.

Friedrich Lohmann, President of the Church Council, presented a report of current CC activities. We discussed the recent Jubilee Celebrations before moving on to the challenges with regard to meeting the budget for building maintenance costs as well as the renovation project which will be presented to the congregation in the near future. We discussed the recruitment of new members for the recently created Property Concern Group.

To conclude this first edition of Congregation Council Matters, your feedback is always welcome and we invite you to discuss any of the above issues with members of the CC or Pastor Andy. A reminder that any member of the congregation can attend the CC meeting (though only council members vote) so please join us!

A Look at Our Giving and Finances

Sarah Stephens, Treasurer

As we come to the end of summer and just past the mid-point of the church financial year, we want to take this opportunity to update you on the congregation's current financial situation. As of 31 July, we have received Sfr. 150,068. This is approximately Sfr. 28,800 behind the income projected to the end of July. The budget we have adopted for 2016 is "tight" in that it closely reflects our actual anticipated expenditure. So we need to be sure we meet our total giving needs for this year. Thanks go out to so many congregation members who give generously of your time, talents and treasure to help our self-supporting congregation flourish.

If you are not already making a financial contribution regularly, we hope you will prayerfully consider doing so. No amount is too small - greater amounts are most welcome! All contributions help sustain our vibrant faith community. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or Pastor Andy.

B.E.L.K. Update
(Federation of Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and Liechtenstein)

By Roswitha Golder

Since Elisabeth Benn resigned as President and member of the Board, the General Assembly of the English-Speaking Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church asked me to be its representative. As I recalled having attended at least one General Assembly of the BELK on your behalf some three decades ago, my first meeting on its Board brought back good memories. I was made very welcome and appreciated getting to know other members: two men, both pastors, and four women, lay leaders in their Lutheran communities, one of them the organist, another the President of her congregation.

Among the decisions taken, probably the most important one for the English-Speaking Lutheran Church in Geneva concerns maintaining, and if possible intensifying, contacts with Lutheran churches in Switzerland that are not members of BELK. To my knowledge, there are at least three such communities in Geneva: 1. The Eritrean Lutheran Church, 2. The Malagasy Lutheran Church, and 3. The (Brazilian) Free Lutheran Church, which started to meet in our building in August. I suppose that the Hungarian Lutherans still meet at the Chapel of St. L gier down the hill from our building. Through "Witnessing Together in Geneva" we are already linked on a local level. I am not sure to which extent these and other Lutherans meeting in Geneva are aware of the wider network created by BELK in which way they, as well as similar communities existing in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, might join it.

We also briefly discussed the Study Document "The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion," and I was given the task to combine our remarks in a statement on behalf of BELK to be sent to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) before the deadline on July 31st. The Study Document that I personally found very stimulating can be found on https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-self-understanding_communion_2015_1.pdf.

The next meetings of the BELK Board will be held on August 16th in Zurich and on October 12th in Berne. I am looking forward to your reactions to this report, and please do not hesitate to let me know of subjects to bring up at further BELK meetings.

Contact: Roswitha Golder, email: r.golder@bluewin.ch

Photo on next page, left to right: Irmtraut Dehning, President of the German-speaking Congregation in Geneva, responsible for the webpage of the BELK; J rg Winkelstr ter, pastor in Basel, President of BELK; Ruth Bornh user from Berne, Vice-President of BELK; Falko von Saldern, pastor in Berne (in job-sharing together with his wife, Nina); Roswitha Golder; Brigitte M ller-Reuter; and Waltraud Knobloch, Treasurer of the BELK from Basel. Not pictured are Margot Seidensticker, Secretary, from Zurich; Helmut Sobko, pastor in Vaduz; and Pia Repo-Leine, pastor of the Finnish Lutheran Church (which the Board recommends be given an official guest status in BELK). Nina von Saldern and J rg Winkelstr ter represent the BELK at the meetings of the Working Group of Christian Churches in Switzerland, AGCK-CH. Falko von Saldern maintains contacts with the Communion of Evangelical Churches in Europe, GEKE, and Ruth Bornh user with Women in Church and Society, WICAS.



Announcements and Upcoming Events

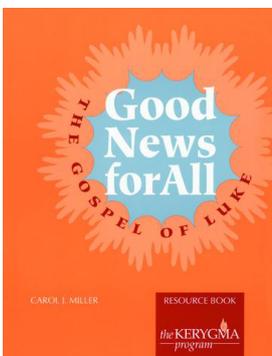
Congregational Retreat - 23 and 24 September

This year's annual congregational retreat will take place from the afternoon of Friday 23 September to the afternoon of Saturday 24 September. We will again be up in the Jura, at Monterêt, near St-Cergue. A program will be provided over the two days, even for the younger ones. It is a wonderful opportunity to get together, know each other better, enjoy some relaxation and fun, meditate and worship together.



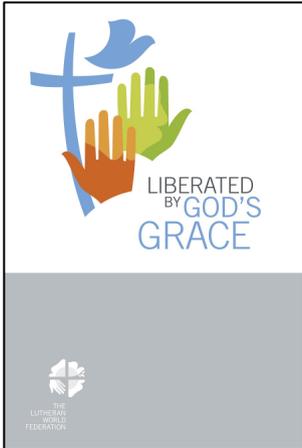
Contact the church office with questions or to register.

Tuesday Evening Bible Study - The Gospel of Luke



An evening Bible study will resume in the Gemeinderaum on Tuesdays from 19h30 to 21h00, beginning 6 September. Miriam Deffenbaugh will facilitate the study, using Carol Miller's *Good News for All: The Gospel of Luke*, from the Kerygma series. The student book is 20 CHF (please speak to Pastor Andy if this is a problem). We plan to meet through 1 November, with the possibility of 1-2 more sessions in late November. Please contact the church office to indicate your interest. No prior experience necessary! All are welcome!

Education Hour – Liberated by God’s Grace



In 2017, the Lutheran World Federation will hold its Twelfth Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia. In preparation for this gathering, the LWF has gathered essays and reflections from Lutheran theologians, pastors, and thinkers throughout the world around the theme “Liberated by God’s Grace.”

This fall, a group will gather to read several of these reflections, touching on the Bible, spirituality, and living an engaged Christian life. Together, they provide a rich and inspiring glimpse of the global church today. The group will meet on Sunday mornings from 9h45 to 10h45, starting 18 September. Contact the church office or Andy Willis with any questions. All are welcome!

Parenting Program in the Fall

Philippa Bowen, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, is planning to run a parenting program in September–October for members of the congregation. The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program involves weekly group meetings for four weeks with telephone follow up over the subsequent four weeks.

The program is recommended for parents of children aged 2 to 10 who would like to look at positive parenting strategies that have been proven to work. The costs involved will be for childcare, as it is strongly recommended that both parents attend for the four sessions, as well as a small charge for material. Anybody interested can register by contacting the church office. For more information, contact Philippa directly at philippabowen@hotmail.com.

Save the Date: Harvest Festival – Sunday 6 November

Every fall, our congregation holds a Harvest Festival, an after-worship auction where we raise funds for one or more projects outside our congregation. Members auction off all kinds of things—from artwork and homemade crafts to meals in their homes and guided hikes in the mountains.

It’s always a fun event, and all proceeds are given away. Mark your calendars for this year’s Festival—*Sunday 6 November, right after worship*—and start thinking about what you can offer for the auction!

Rising to the Challenge of Migration: Are We All Noahs?

Witnessing Together in Geneva – Jeûne Genevois: Thursday 8 September

Witnessing Together, the gathering of migrant churches in Geneva, is organizing their annual *Jeûne Genevois* event around the theme of migration this year. It is a great occasion to discover or rediscover other Christians who celebrate in Geneva, and to share a moment with them. How can we witness together? What welcome do our churches provide?

Our own Peniel Rajkumar will be speaking, as will Clare Amos, known to many in our community for the Bible studies she has led at Holy Trinity Church. Both are staff members of the World Council of Churches.

Here's a brief outline of the program:

- 10.00-16.00 Presentations and discussion at the Ecumenical Centre,
150 route de Ferney, Gd Sacconex
(welcome with coffee from 9.15 a.m.)
- 16.15 Walk to Parc des Crottes, Montbrillant
- 17.30 Parade from Parc des Crottes to Temple of St. Gervais
- 18.00 Service at the Temple of St. Gervais

More information on the Witnessing Together website:

temoignerensemble.wordpress.com



A House of Living Stones: Jubilee Weekend, 4-5 June 2016

Photos by Johnny Camaddo



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