



The Eastern Synod Lutheran

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Hopes and Fears

“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” As a child, I was always mystified by this line from the carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem. I understood something of the hope of Christmas. I knew something of how that hope was expressed in Jesus. But what about the fears? What role could fear possibly play in the wondrous and beautiful story of the first Christmas?

The nativity images that most of us carry from childhood are similarly weighted. They are soft and pastoral. A smiling Mary; a beaming Joseph. Kindly looking animals; polite and gentlemanly shepherds. All surrounding a chubby, ‘no crying he makes’ baby who lies contentedly and comfortably in a soft bundle of golden hay. It’s a carefully edited image that evokes little of the fearfulness that would have characterized that first

Christmas night. The fear of a young mother about to bear her first child, alone in a cattle shed. The fear of a poor father unable to provide his family with proper shelter. The fear of simple shepherds startled by the unexpected appearance of heavenly emissaries. The fear of a jealous and vengeful king whose terrors would soon force the young family to flee to a distant land as refugees.

But this was the context in which God acted. Christmas tells us that God was not content to have the world remain lost in the darkness of fear and sinfulness. Instead, God entered into the world in a very special way through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In the midst of so much that is dark and frightening, Christ comes as Saviour to reveal anew the good news of God’s gracious and loving intention toward the world.

Hope and fear did, indeed, meet on that first Christmas night. And they’ve been meeting there ever since! Many of us just haven’t had occasion to think about it all that much. Most of us simply don’t know what it’s like to experience feelings of fearfulness at Christmas time. But this Christmas may be different. As Bishop Munib Younan writes in his Christmas letter to the Lutheran World Federation, “The reality of violence and turmoil long present in the

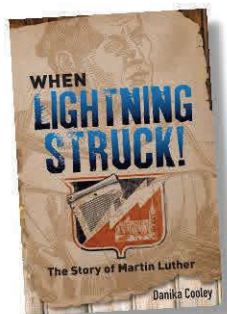
Middle East, parts of Africa, and southern Asia, has now manifested itself in Europe and North America. As the Holy Family once searched for a Bethlehem inn, I ask, ‘Is there a place in our world for peace based on justice?’” Many of us are asking that same question.

Our world has changed. All no longer seems ‘calm and bright’ for us. But fear is not the final word for this Christmas any more than it was for the first. That’s why, in spite of our anxieties and fears, it is not a message of fear, but rather one of hope, that Christians will again proclaim and celebrate this Christmas – and perhaps with a deeper integrity than might be the case under less challenging circumstances.

Hope, like fear, is a contagious force. And it often shines brightest in the midst of darkness. But it doesn’t shine like a spotlight. It is more like a lantern; a light that we carry, a light that helps us to see around our feet, to see where we are planted and in what direction we are moving. It is the light of divine hope, a light that casts out fear and scatters the darkness. It is the light of Christ’s presence.

May you be touched by the warmth of its glow this Christmas-tide!

Bishop Michael J. Pryse



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NEW

Malagasy Lutherans and St. John's celebrate Reformation Sunday in Montreal

In downtown Montreal, the Malagasy Lutheran congregation of Montreal and the congregation of St. John's celebrated the Reformation Festival jointly on Sunday, October 25. The Lutheran Church of Madagascar is a member church of the Lutheran World Federation and the Montreal congregation is about five years old. This is the third year that they are resident at St. John's.

The Malagasy pastor (currently completing PhD studies at Université de Montreal) and Pastor Eric Dyck jointly presided over the Eucharistic liturgy which used *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as its basis. The service used a combination of English, French, Malagasy, and German with translations printed in the service booklet published for the occasion. The Montreal Malagasy congregation had also invited the newly established congregations in Trois Rivières and Quebec City to join them. This meant we had two Malagasy choirs—from the Montreal congregation and from the Trois Rivières congregation—who sang a combination of traditional and contemporary repertoire, but their singing of beautifully harmonised renditions of classic Gospel hymns during communion was a highlight. The lay leader and council president of the Malagasy congregation served as assisting minister with other servers for the processions from St. John's. The high-tech Malagasy organised simultaneous translation into Malagasy of the sermon, preached by Pastor Dyck, via smart phones. An edited video of the service has been made available by the Malagasy congregation and can be viewed at

<https://youtu.be/LkYzq5J-ppA>

Both our congregations needed to stretch a bit in order to find suitable compromises for the liturgy. For example, in the Malagasy church only the ordained serve communion. The lay leader needed to receive special permission to serve the cup. Since the Malagasy only receive communion kneeling, for many seniors at St. John's they were taken back to their earlier years in the congregation when St. John's knelt at the steps for communion rather than the current prac-

tice of standing in a semi-circle around the altar. Younger members from St. John's had a new experience at communion. There was no difficulty in joining together in song with very robust renditions of Reformation hymns and the St. John's organist using the instrument to full effect. The recessionary hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God" was thundered out in a mixture of English, Malagasy, and German.

The festive banquet followed in the parish hall with about 150 people including lots of children packing the hall. The traditional Reformation Sunday schnitzel dinner of St. John's was mixed at the buffet with the wonders of the Malagasy kitchen; two meals to mix and match. St. John's needed to admit that the selection of fruits offered as dessert by the Malagasy were definitely a healthier choice than the St. John's plates of pastries! But a large part of the fellowship and fun was trying foods that were new to either congregation. Schnitzel became quite the novelty for the Malagasy. There was great co-operation in the kitchen, in the hall, and with the before and after set-up.

Rounding off the afternoon, David Schulze, a board member at CLWR, gave a bilingual French/English presentation on the work of CLWR, especially as it relates to the Lutheran World Federation. Many of the slides from around the world seemed so much more present as the hall reflected two sides of the globe sitting together.

Over and over again, Malagasy and St. John's members commented on the joys of being together and the wonders of sharing the Word, Holy Communion, and fellowship. People from both congregations said they are looking forward to "next time." It was a first effort at a joint celebration and an occasion that could be assured of Lutheran success.

Profounder, but so very present, was a deep resonance of the shared immigrant experience. Cultural adaptation and adjustment. Although decades apart and emigrating to Canada under very different circumstances, the sense of being an ethnic group within the larger Canadian mosaic was palpable—just a more contemporary context. For example, the struggle to have one's children maintain the language of origin was evident. At one

time for St. John's immigrants through the sixties and seventies it had been their children learning English and later French and no longer speaking German while for the Malagasy the children speak and play in French and it is difficult to get them to speak Malagasy. Several St. John's seniors observed: "history repeats itself." In fact, the Malagasy have had to begin providing simultaneous translation from Malagasy into French at their services so young members fully understand. At the same time there are only young families in the Malagasy congregation—the oldest member is 64.

We learned things to add and improve for next time. For example, we should have been ready to do hymn singing at the lunch, a practice long abandoned at St. John's dinners, but which the Malagasy regularly do. Next time!

St. John's members and Malagasy members concluded this afternoon with more than smiles and polite nods, they left renewed in the Gospel and together as Christian brothers and sisters. A new awareness of being one body in Christ.

- Pastor Eric Dyck

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Coming soon!

2016 will bring a new addition to these pages as our friends at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary will soon be sharing some of their news and stories with us.

Here's a little taste of what you can expect:



Santa's elves and the Women's Auxiliary have been busy! A heartfelt thanks to everyone who had a hand in making the seminary's surroundings more festive.



The WLS Women's Auxiliary present a quilt to Marg Schiedel for her service. For the past 20 years or so she has created the citations for people being honoured by the auxiliary for a host of good reasons. The lovely quilt was created by folks at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Pembroke, Ont.



Report of the Treasurer (To Nov 30th, 2015)

As we approach year-end benevolence receipts for 2015 are continuing to track modestly ahead of amounts received for the same period in 2014 – that's an encouraging sign.

Offerings to CLWR are behind last year's pace due to a large \$81,000 one-time congregational donation in 2014, a decrease that has been partially offset by strong donations to the Nepal Earthquake and Syrian Refugee appeals in 2015.

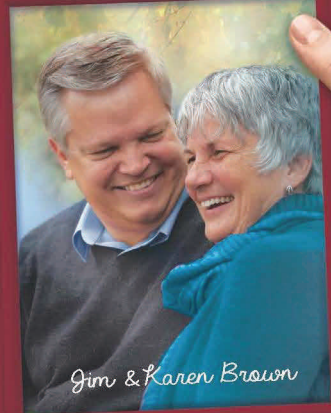
More details about 2015 receipts are posted in the [Report of the Treasurer](#) on the synod web site.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Rev. Doug Moore and his wife Karen as they mourn the loss of their daughter Linnea.



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Wishing you all a joyous Christmas and a
Happy New Year.

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For more information please
contact Rev. Douglas Reble,
Assistant to the Bishop
dreble@elcic.ca



Plans for the 2016 Eastern Synod Assembly are well underway. Come and hear good news stories on mission and ministry and share in joyful worship with your sisters and brothers from across our synod. We will also welcome the President of LWF, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib A. Younan, as one of our guest speakers. One of our tasks, among others will be to elect clergy and lay delegates to the 2017 ELCIC National Convention.

The assembly will take place June 23-26, 2016 at the International Plaza Hotel in Toronto, Ontario.

Registration is set to begin on March 1, 2016. Check our website www.easternsynod.org for updates.

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