



Summer 2018

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The American and Foreign Christian Union (AFCU) is a US-based 501 (c) (3) organization that supports the American Church in Paris, the American Church in Berlin, and the Vienna Community Church.

President's Message

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have returned home re-energized from our annual AFCU board and semi-annual development meetings held in Oro Valley, Arizona (Tucson) in April.



I also thank all the AFCU board members, church representatives and pastors, and spouses who attended the meetings at their own cost and who work throughout the year to serve the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ through the American churches in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna.

Highlights of current activities from the AFCU and the ACB, ACP, and the VCC include:

1. AFCU

The AFCU development team has initiated preparation for a five-year strategic plan, incorporating the needs of the three European churches. This plan will focus on the changing demographics of church membership, recognition of the maintenance requirements of the large church buildings in Paris and Berlin, membership growth in all three churches, and serving the needs of the community where the churches are located.

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Have you moved recently? Please update your contact information with us by sending an email to

AFCUeditor@afcubridge.org



The Mission of the American and Foreign Christian Union is to support the International, English speaking, ecumenical churches whose ministries bear witness to Jesus Christ.



2. board member class and officers were elected.
3. Church programs, financial reports, and budgets were reviewed and approved for all three churches and the AFCU.
4. Organizational plans were put in place to solicit outside funding sources to help support cultural activities at the ACP and ACB.
5. Gratitude was expressed for the prayers, activities, and financial support of the Friends of the three churches and AFCU. This support is critical for the survival and growth of the European congregations as immigrant populations become a larger portion of membership.

American Church in Berlin

1. The period of pastoral transition at the ACB is nearly over. Reverend Ben Coltvet has been serving as interim pastor from December through early May. Following Pastor Ben is Janice Kibler who will serve as interim pastor from now until August when the newly called permanent senior pastor, Reverend Dr. Mari Thorkelson, will arrive with husband Patrick Foley. We thank God for His guidance during this transition period. We also thank the ACB Council for their leadership, and Ben and Margit Coltvet and Janice and Jim Kibler for their willingness to "jump in" and serve with very short notice. We also thank the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for their participation in assisting with the interim and permanent call processes.
2. An AFCU task force has been working with the ACB to determine their financial needs and potential sources of funding. The focus is on the challenges of maintenance requirements for this large church building, the demographics of the congregation, and opportunities for growth in Berlin.

American Church in Paris

The ACP continues its strong mission in Paris under the spiritual leadership of Reverend Dr. Scott Herr.

Some highlights:

1. More than 2,000 people attended Easter services this year.
2. The "access for all" lift was completed and dedicated, providing handicap access into the church building.
3. An ACP Refugee Task Force has been formed to deal with the increased refugee population.
4. The Thurber Thursday lecture series continued to welcome different Christian leaders from diverse backgrounds to give presentations to ACP members and

the community.

5. The Alpha Course is taught to present the fundamentals of Christianity.
6. A team was assigned by the AFCU to work with the ACP property team in identifying and prioritizing major maintenance and capital needs during the next 5 years.

Vienna Community Church

The VCC is seeing continuous growth under the spiritual leadership of Reverend Gabor Lassu. They are also benefiting from the addition of the new "Meeting Place" that was acquired in 2016.

Other highlights:

1. They have recently elected a new board that will be led by moderator Mickela Moore.
2. They gained compliance with the 2005 Recognition Agreement of the Evangelische Kirche in Austria.
3. They hosted the International Christian School of Vienna's Choir Competition

FUTURE MEETINGS

Our Autumn development meeting will be held in Ridgefield, CT during October 12-13, 2018.

The next annual board meeting is tentatively set for May 17-19, 2019 to be held in Paris, France.

I again invite you to attend the American churches when you visit Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Be a FRIEND by supporting the churches with your prayers and financial support. Remember that when giving through the AFCU, your gifts are tax-deductible in the United States since we are a 501(c)(3) organization.

Also, if you have a desire to serve these churches with your time and talent after leaving Europe, please contact me or another member of the AFCU board. We welcome new members.

Let me close by quoting from 1 John 4 v. 7: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God." NIV.

In Christ,



Ted Ziemann
AFCU President

Help Them Learn About Christ by Don Krump



Our three beloved churches in Europe all have active children education programs that need your support. With the influx of African and middle East refugees seeking comfort & Christian community in Vienna, Paris & Berlin, many wish to worship in English, the language they learned of Christ and want their children to do the same. These refugees expanding needs and meager resources cry for our gifts.

With the recent changes in tax laws, we would like to ask your consideration in sharing a portion of your RMD (**Required Mandatory Distribution**) from you IRA (Individual Retirement Account). Gifting is easy and is both a benefit to these children, their families and your tax liability. This is a meaningful way to help these families grow in Christ.

Your generous contribution can be made by your or your custodian of your IRA directly to the American & Foreign Christian Union (AFCU) by mailing a check to the:

AFCU Treasurer
2885 Sanford Ave SW #29934
Grandville, MI 49418

Feel free to designate all churches or the church of your choice.

Likewise, contributions of **appreciated stock** can be made to the AFCU account for the specific church of your choice. By doing so you avoid the taxable capital gain. Such contributions are handled by our Treasurer at jvoskuil@calvin.edu.

As a reminder, 100% of your contribution goes directly to the church or churches of your choice. We are all volunteers on the AFCU board and cover all our board expenses. You will immediately receive a receipt for your donation with our Tax ID as we are a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization. We do appreciate your consideration for supporting the children of our churches.

Be assured that 100% of any contribution will go directly to the churches (or church of your choice). The AFCU is a non-profit US-based 501(c)(3) organization made up of volunteers who cover all the organizations expenses. You will receive a receipt for any of your contributions which will include our Tax ID for your records. We do appreciate any gift you might give to this most worthy endeavor of educating the children of our European churches.

AFCU Comes to Connecticut

October 12-13, 2018

Welcome to historic Ridgefield! The #1-rated town in Connecticut, founded in 1709, features a picturesque colonial Main Street (“no town in Connecticut has a grander, more imposing main street, impressive any time of the year” – *Frommer’s guides*) dotted with countless points of interest: Keeler Tavern (with a Revolutionary War cannonball embedded in its garden wall), the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, the innovative and exemplary Prospector Theater (see *NBC report*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErlzyTF54PM), the Ridgefield Playhouse, and seven of the state’s top award-winning restaurants. Plans are underway for a group visit to the church/community foundation/architectural masterpiece “The River” at Grace Farms. Board meetings will take place at either The First Congregational Church Ridgefield (founded 1712), or at The Leir Foundation (*currently on wait list*). Dinner is planned at Bernard’s. Discounted in-town accommodations have been reserved at the charming 1849 West Lane Inn, and additional choices are available in neighboring Danbury and beyond. Once in Ridgefield, meeting spaces, restaurants, and points of interest are all within a short walking distance. Ridgefield is 60-90 minutes away from area airports (JFK, LaGuardia, White Plains, Bradley, and Newark). For additional information, contact karenhalac@aya.yale.edu.

www.keelertavernmuseum.org

<http://aldrichart.org>

<http://www.prospectortheater.org/about/>

<https://ridgefieldplayhouse.org>

<http://gracefarms.org/about/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/17/arts/design/thespiritual-and-spectacular-meet-at-an-ultramodern-community-center-in-connecticut.html>

<http://www.westlaneinn.com>

<http://www.bernardsridgefield.com/bernards/>



AFCU meeting in Tucson, AZ, Development chairman Don Krump presenting

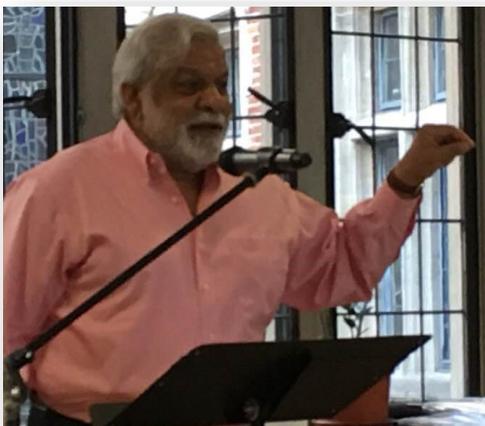


www.acparis.org

Dear Members and Friends of the AFCU,

I admit I loved watching the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle! Presiding Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, “We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world, a new world.” People immediately after the ceremony expressed their predictably varying and conflicting opinions about Bishop Curry’s sermon, but I loved BBC commentator Jeremy Vine’s *Twitter* post, “The preacher is doing 50 in a 30 zone, and it’s brilliant!” Others said it was “hundreds of years in the making...” It made me think about our theme verse from Revelation 21:5a, and just how the Lord is “making all things new.” Clearly, God is working through real people in (and out of) the Church today.

Simply the presence of Bishop Michael Curry at the royal wedding in Windsor Castle was extraordinary. You should know that we at the American Church in Paris have had some extraordinary speakers and topics in worship and for various lectures recently here at the ACP. Charles Amjad-Ali from *Luther Theological Seminary* talking about “Exorcising Prejudice: The Reformation and the other (Jews and Turks),” and “Tragic Pasts and Ambiguous Futures: our inter-



Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali

religious world,” and George Hunsinger and Dan Migliore from *Princeton Theological Seminary* reflecting theologically on “Same-Sex Marriage” are recent examples of pushing us out of our

comfort zones. Grace Ji-Sun Kim from the Quaker *Earlham School of Religion* will be giving a lecture entitled, “Embracing the Other: The transformative spirit of love.” You can find videos in the *Thurber Lectures* archives on our website.

In our recent new member class, people from *16 different countries* participated. And I’m sure as we welcome dozens of children to *Vacation Bible School* in August, a wonderful diversity of races and cultures will be represented. It’s important that as the world and the complexion of the Body of Christ changes, we in the church learn to listen to different voices and perspectives. How do we reconcile the changeless quality of the gospel of God’s love with the manifold changes of our world?

My new favorite leadership quote from Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky goes like this: “Leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb!” The follow up line, of course is that true leadership means leading your people where they *need to go* but *don’t want to go*! It means *learning and loss*. Learning requires letting go of old assumptions and paradigms, and

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Pastor Herr, *continued from page 5*

loss involves grieving what was but no longer will be. It's obvious that the world is changing, and Jesus promises to lead the church in and through change. Will we follow? Will we be open to what the Crucified-Risen Lord is doing even here and now in and through our lives and life together?

In the first quarter this year, the AFCU board paid for a building audit of all properties on the *quai d'Orsay*. The good news is that the initial report shows no crises in the basic structural integrity of the buildings. The bad news is there are a number of projects that have been recommended to us for which we don't have money in the budget to complete. If you are interested in helping fund one or more of our projects, including sound and lighting upgrades in the sanctuary, just contact me or one of the AFCU board members for more information. And either way, please *remember that even though many people go on vacation in summer, the church does not, and your financial support is much appreciated!*

Now that all of the "High Holidays" of the church calendar are finished and we are now in "Ordinary Time," perhaps the Holy Spirit can open us up to some of his most extraordinary work calling us forward to repentance, change and transformation, leading us and even the world into new life. We hope that you will continue to pray for us, and if possible, stop by and worship with us on a visit to Paris! As always, thank you for your faithful support amidst all of the changes of this world.

In Christ,



Embellished

by Gigi Oyog with Stephanie Wiltse

Fred Gramann has done it again! He has recently been appointed Honorary Associate Director of Embellish, the premiere handbell ensemble of the West Michigan area.

According to Stephanie Wiltse, Embellish Music Director, the appointment was a culmination of years-long collaboration with Fred. "We are very excited to have a formal title reflecting our warm and collegial relationship with Fred," she said.

For many years now, Fred has also been serving as Honorary Associate Director of the Raleigh Ringers, another renowned handbell choir from North Carolina. They were the guest choir in 2016 when Fred celebrated his 40th year as ACP's Director of Music.

Embellish was founded in the fall of 1995 to provide a high-quality musical experience for diverse audiences, both through performance and teaching handbell ringing. Their CDs include "The Colors of Bronze," "Embellish the Season," and most recently "Celtic Dreams."

Stephanie said that she first became aware of Fred's amazing compositions around 1995, when Embellish was being formed. She heard two of Fred's powerful works on the first CD released by the Raleigh Ringers of North Carolina, an inspiration for many community groups. These two works, "Prelude on Herzliebster Jesu" and "Fantasy on

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Embellished, *continued from page 6*



Photo credit: Russel Cooper

King's Weston," have set a standard for compositions for many budding handbell ensembles, not only for their musical depth, but also through Fred's ability to combine multiple melodies with integrity and creativity.

A few years later, Stephanie met Fred in person when they both rang in the annual Bay View Week of Handbells in northern Michigan, under the direction of handbell pioneer Donald Allured. Over the last few years, Fred began serving as Associate Director of the Bay View event, and in 2017, was named its Music Director.

Stephanie and her family first visited the ACP when they traveled to Europe in the summer of 1999. Fred was travelling at that time but kept inviting Embellish to come and visit. Embellish finally decided to take him up on his offer, raised funds, planned a tour, and in 2006, made the journey to Paris.

That visit was historic and memorable. It coincided with the weekend celebrating Fred's 30th year as ACP Director of Music. Embellish was invited to be part of the gala concert. Embellish and Fred's Bronze Ringers also conspired with each other to learn and secretly rehearse a work by Cathy Moglebust, commissioned specifically for the event by Fred's ringers. Together, the two groups performed the commissioned piece for a stunned and tearful Fred during the 11h00 worship service on Sunday.

"Since that time, Embellish continues to be part of the loyal ranks of those who consider themselves 'FwF' (Friends with Fred). We have reached out to Fred to have him lead local ringing events when other, larger events have brought him close to our area. Every time Fred works with us, we learn and grow musically. We love having him work with us, but we are also eager to share his expertise with others as part of our mission to support and encourage other handbell musicians in our area and beyond," Stephanie said.

The concept of an Honorary Associate Director has been developing over the years, but the idea finally took shape over dinner after a local Mass Ring which Fred directed last May. "Fred said 'I'm in!', and we made the announcement," she recalled.

During the event in May, Embellish presented the concert "Sounds of Spring" in the Basilica of Saint Adalbert in Grand Rapids. The concert also featured Campana, Embellish's companion handbell ensemble, under Fred's direction as special guest conductor.

Stephanie said that as Embellish Honorary Associate Director, Fred's duties include providing additional support for the mission of Embellish as requested; being an ambassador for the ensemble by listing this honor in his formal resumé, and working with the ensemble as requested when in the Grand Rapids area.

Bloom Where You are Planted: A cookbook for comfort

by Alison Benny

Some travelers like doing things the hard way. They careen from one adventure to another, enjoy making mistakes and relish the times it goes right. Then there are those who don't want to waste time, bumper-car style, on trivialities; they want to understand how things work and get on with the fun.

These types of people and everyone in between can benefit from the American Church's program, an orientation to living in Paris for English-speaking expats. For over 50 years, Bloom Where You're Planted, this year taking place on Saturday, 6 October, has been illuminating Paris' obscure little mysteries – bakery etiquette, work visas, brittle nails – and easing expats into its *joie de vivre* of the city. The entrance fee includes a copy of the Bloom guidebook, which the *International Herald Tribune* once called “as homey as a garden club cookbook.” It is a compendium of priceless tips on cultural differences such as school vacations,

cuts of meat, or hooking up the utilities.

Attendance at Bloom includes:

- Exciting talks presented by expert speakers
- A light breakfast and strong coffee
- A delicious lunch
- Closing wine-and-cheese reception
- Networking opportunities
- A gift bag with giveaways and useful information
- Copy of the 2018 Bloom Book

Save yourself or a friend a lot of bumbling, come to Bloom Where You're Planted, and don't just survive – thrive! For more information and registration,, please visit www.bloomparis.org. And, of course, if you would like to volunteer to help with the event, please contact Pamela Chiodi at: bloom.acparis@gmail.com



Dedication of The Lift



The Vienna Connection



www.viennacommunitychurch.com

GIVING THANKS

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:3-6

Dear Friend in Christ,

In these verses Paul touches on many important themes; he speaks about prayer, sharing in the gospel, and the providence of God. However, before all else, he acknowledges his love for the people of Philippi. This is what touched my heart, as I am constantly thinking about living with and praying for all of you, our friends at AFCU, our ALUMNI and all our new and old

friends at the church, as we live, serve and rejoice together as one Body of Christ: ***"I thank my God every time I remember you!"***

We have now been together for two years since the Lord called me to serve our wonderful congregation. I am privileged to honestly say that I think of you and give thanks for you to God in every memory of our life - not only for the joys but also the difficult times as we have grown together in Jesus. I am so happy to confess that my experience with all of you resonates with Paul's.

We have made great progress together! We? Great? Progress? It sound like a secular report, so please allow me to rephrase it: with the Lord's help, by His grace, He has revealed His will to us and we have followed His plans together joyfully! Therefore we have many things to be grateful for. And yes, after giving thanks to God for His revelation, I give thanks for you *"every time I remember you!"*

Over the last two years God has led us and taught us by His endless love to renew our faith, deepen our understanding about Him, build a personal relationship with Him and allow Him to be the Head of our Church. As we have all acknowledged, our highest church guiding principle is the spiritual welfare of the congregation. These are the most important factors to be thankful for.

On the other hand, during these two years, we have established various events for spiritual growth, fellowship and ministry to praise God, grow together and welcome newcomers as well, like Adult Bible Study, Circle of Moms, Women's Ministry, Community Outreach, the Film, Art, Music Circle and many other wonderful opportunities. Our congregation has grown by 70%, our Sunday School has multiplied and our Sunday worship attendance often reaches 100 people. These are great miracles! Just recently, our Sunday School children joyfully greeted our mothers on Mother's Day, we held a unique Pentecost reading of Acts 2 in ten different languages and we had a moving installation ceremony of our new Board members and Fellowship Coordinator. It is always a joy to remember Cassandra McConnell and the Choir, Chanda Rule and the Praise Band and our recent special outreach events, the excellent performance by students from the Wiener Musikakademie and our wonderful and uplifting service at the *"Long Night of the Churches"*.

At the moment, my ministry is focusing on a threefold vision. First, getting to know you even better by pastoring, visiting and caring for you, continuing to build strong cohesiveness in the church and nurturing our

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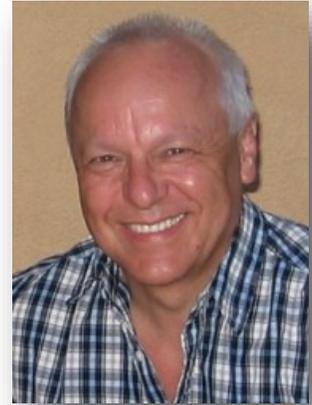
Vienna Connection, *continued from page 9*

many already-established ministry opportunities. Secondly, I would like to place our new Community and Gospel Outreach Program to the highest level of priority in everything we do. Finally, providing leadership and vision for our new Board, refreshing our Working Groups and assisting all our new Board members in their tasks.

"I thank my God every time I remember you" - my fellow coworkers, teachers, helpers, new lay leaders and our friends at AFCU, who have recognized the needs of our future generations and outreach goals by helping us to grow together. Thank you for your love for me and your trust and support in what we do together with the help of the Lord!

All glory belongs to God alone!

Pastor Dr. Gábor Lassu



We are the Church

Theological Study

by Rev. Gábor Lassu

The Church is the body of Christ. As a body, it is not primarily an organization, but rather, an organism, which is fundamentally connected to the Head of the body, which is Christ Himself. She receives Her provisions, guidance, and direction from the Head. It is in Ephesians 4:15-16, that *"instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* This connection is created for a purpose, which is to fulfill God's objective by building a structure where all people can gather together under the name of the Lord. This structure, which is the visible organization, has to be able to reach out to, understand, communicate with, support, and integrate all people into the organism at all times. Therefore, its functions must be able to operate in a timely manner to fulfill this purpose.

The Church is above all civilizations, cultures, other religions, and pluralist societies. This means that the Church must be able to be one step ahead of the world, as well as cultural and social change in order to accurately study and understand people's lives, circumstances,

concerns, and real issues. This is all necessary so that She may properly help and unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in the form of evangelism and mission for all people. The Church is alive and must act accordingly instead of acting like a fossil from the Middle Ages.

In reality, real transformation on key measures in this context of the Christian Church have been mostly outward reactions and actions taken for self-defense. In this matter, Her adaptation of Her appearance and effectiveness in most cases is obsolete for the pluralistic Western society, where the Christian Church offers a traditional form of worship, faith formation, engagement, and spiritual community through an outdated worship format which cannot keep up with the demands of modern society, and is incapable of truly reaching and touching the unchurched population. U.S. data in the George Barna survey (Barna Reviews Top Religious Trends of 2005) shows, that among Protestant Churches, *"less than one out of every five churches rated worship to be a top ministry priority, and that most of those in attendance say they did not experience the presence of God during the service."*

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Lesslie Newbigin (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 1989) describes the capability of adaptation of the Church as “*The fulfillment of the mission of the Church thus requires that the Church itself be changed and learn new things... as new people are brought to Christ.*” It is unmistakable that the lack of comprehensive and flexible procedures is holding the Church back from fully delivering the message of the Good News. Richard Niebuhr (*Christ and Culture*, 1951) also argues that historical and cultural relativity of human reasoning influences decisions. He says that “*Christians in an industrial culture cannot think and act as if they lived in feudal society.*” It is clear that when Christians are busy keeping the traditions, following the set social structure, and giving the impression of being what they would like to be, they voluntarily shrink themselves into a closed community of believers, where time and development fly over the Church’s head and She loses her capability to connect to the people in the present society.

Thus, a thorough evaluation of the Church brings about the diagnosis that She is in a crisis! This may seem like nothing but a dilemma, but it is not mutually exclusive of a great opportunity! In fact, this decline is the greatest good news for the Church according to Klaus Douglass (*Die neue Reformation*, 2001). In fact, Douglass is convinced that the current crisis of the Church is God’s provocation. This provocation is very powerful and very necessary in order for humankind to see the problems and also reopen a new opportunity for them to recognize and overcome the crisis. There is hope, because the statistical numbers are symptoms of reality, so consequently, they can be used as tools of guidance, to see all circumstances in this regard and to develop a powerful solution to face the crisis.

In this situation, according to Jürgen Moltmann (*The Crucified Christ*, 1977) it is imperative that the Church must confront this dilemma not by merely treating the symptom, but on the contrary, by finding the root of the problem, because the “*Church, which cannot change in order to exist for the humanity of man in changed circumstances becomes ossified and dies.*” By turning towards the core of this issue, the Church will be able to find those whom She is called to reach instead of retreating into a defensive state or giving up Her future. As a result, a change of direction and a more radical approach to spiritual growth is needed in order to triumph over obstacles and limitations that have been

previously set by a Church population who has clearly settled into a comfortable spiritual routine and perspectives, due to the consequences of their actions. The Biblical guidelines however in Romans 12:12 command the following: “*do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is -his good, pleasing and perfect will.*” Also, Paul addresses the importance of perpetual action in Galatians 4:19: “*my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.*”

Founded in these teachings, Valyi-Nagy explains “*soma tou Christou*” as a Christ event (*At the Edge of All Times*, 1993) encapsulating that in this case, the continuous reformation (*ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda*) is basically a guideline for how the Church should not form to the face of the ages, but instead, to the face of Christ. This means that continuous reformation is not an action towards the direction and a conformation to the world, but on the contrary, it is an action, which leads towards the reintegration of Christ as the relevant image of change.



VCC children’s time

Looking at this path, the word ‘*ecclesia*’, with its two meanings of local and universal helps to explain the distance and difference between what is called the visible and the invisible Church. According to John Calvin (*Institution IV. 1.10*) the attributes of the Church (*attributae ecclesiae*) in the universal form, declare that God is the only one whom the Church is visible to from all aspects. He knows who has membership in His Church. Moreover, the recognition of the visible Church is in the Sacraments and the clear proclamation of the

Gospel (*notae ecclesiae*). Since the visible Church exists only through its congregations, their way of representing the invisible, almighty God is fundamental. This sheds light on the dilemma that the Church in the 21st century struggles with how it is possible to faithfully and successfully represents God, live an authentic Christian life, and fulfill God’s requirement for His Church.

In this case, it is imperative to ask, whom does the Church consist of? Calvin answers this question by describing the Church as “*the congregation of elect people*” (*Institution IV. 1.2.*) which is based on “*the secret choice of God.*” Calvin continues to explain that “*hence, as it is necessary to*

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believe the invisible Church, which is manifest to the eye of God only, so we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so called with reference to man, and to cultivate its communion.” (Institution IV. 1.7.) Wilhelm Niesel interprets this representation (*The Theology of Calvin, 2002*) based on Calvin’s notion of the invisible Church, by seeing the invisible Church as the permanent critic of the visible one.

This representation must be more than just a display of all that Christianity can offer! There is no longer a natural and historical need among ‘*the buyers*’ in the ‘*market of values*’. It is not enough to ‘*sell the same product*’ by defending the religion, keeping the traditions alive, and moving on with an unchanged form of Church life. The Church no longer holds a monopoly. There are other vendors as well, who all offer the same looking values with an even more attractive package to those who are in need of direction, understanding, a boost in self-esteem, comfort, consolation, attention, and love. These new vendors are not just atheists with money and pleasure-centered teachings. The challengers of the Christian faith are not only those religions who reject Jesus Christ, but also those that claim to be Christian, but either weaken

the Biblical teachings or choose only those teachings that they consider attractive. The individuals searching for the previously stated values are all potential ‘*customers*’ of the Church but also of the other vendors. The Church in Western societies has become only one option among many others. In addition, as many of these ‘*vendors*’, the Church is also being tempted to ‘*convert resources into cash*’ by watering down values or holding fast to traditions. At the same time, in recent history, an unprecedented wave of demographic alteration, political and economical transformation, sociological restructuring, cultural, social, mental, and technological changes are taking place, and all of these have unexpectedly struck the leaders and the members of the local Church.

In this real and dangerous situation, it is crucial to ask the same question over and over again: what is the Church?

Pastor Dr. Gábor Lassu

Letter from New VCC Alumni Coordinator

I would like to introduce myself to you: My name is **Sita Weinrich**. I am the **VCC Membership Committee Chair** and now also **Alumni Coordinator of the VCC**.

I am getting ready to strengthen the relationship between VCC and its alumni members. First I made a list of VCC alumni who are not yet on the list of AFCU’s VCC alumni members as of 14 December 2017. I will talk to those leaving Vienna informing them about AFCU’s support to VCC and ensure the continuous contact with them.

I herewith cordially invite VCC alumni members to continue sharing information after they have left Vienna about the impact the VCC has had on their lives, either by writing to me, or the Editor of the VCC Voice (this is the monthly online VCC newsletter), or to the AFCU Bridge.

In turn I will present a column addressing the VCC alumni directly, keeping them informed of VCC activities through VOICE and AFCU Bridge. I would welcome any suggestions from you as to what you would love to read about!

Sending you many greetings from Vienna,

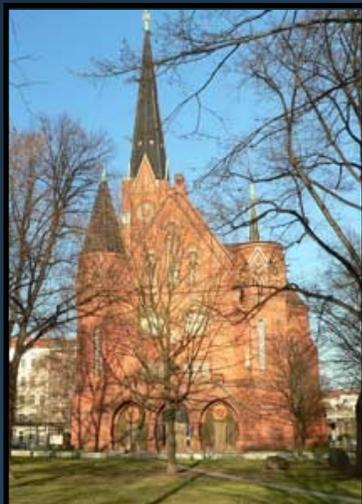
Blessings,

Sita

roswitha.weinrich@gmail.com



The Berlin Connection



www.americanchurchberlin.de

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1



Peace be with you!
 Friede sei mit Dir!
 平和は貴方とともに！
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Exciting times at ACB indeed have filled us with hope and make us mindful of God's unfailing faithfulness and Grace towards us this Pentecost Season!

We are grateful to announce that God has answered our prayers with a resounding 89.5% YES vote at the special Congregational Meeting on Mother's Day, May 13th 2018, to call **Rev. Dr. Mari L. Thorkelson** to become our next Senior Pastor at ACB! Pastor Mari has accepted the Letter of Call to come as an ELCA Global Mission Associate assigned to the American Church in Berlin, together with her husband Patrick, beginning August 1st. Final contract details are being worked out in tight collaboration with our supporters and partners in the ELCA, for whom we are deeply grateful and indebted. Having Bishop Cindy Halmarson join us from Chicago this last Trinity Sunday, preaching at both of our services on Confirmation Sunday, underscores this rich and strong bond ACB feels growing up again with the ELCA, and we look forward to future opportunities to connect more with other sister churches who work closely with ELCA's Global Mission!

On the weekend before this, ACB was blessed with being asked to host this year's **Fest der Religionsgemeinden** (Festival of the Interfaith Religious Communities) on May 5th. This gave us truly the opportunity to live up to our vision

statement, to be a *model community of Christian love, that embraces diversity, serves and inspires the people of Berlin!* Also our participation in the **18. Pfingstfest der Kirchen**; 18th Pentecost Celebration of the Churches together with 17 different faith communities (Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant communities) is a witness to the opportunity to embrace the diversity of our immediate neighbourhood at a wonderful ecumenical outdoor service in front of the Schöneberger Rathaus, where Kennedy gave his famous 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech in 1963. Thanks to the diligent work of our

previous Pastor Steve Kienberg, carried actively now by Vice President Kumar Vasanth and QM representative Anna Grant, we are active members of the Netzwerk der Religionsgemeinden (NR); a network of 8 interfaith communities from our district in Berlin of North Schöneberg and South Tiergarten, which is supported by and collaborates with the local community



Musicians at Pfingstfest in front of the Schönenberger Rathaus

services; the Quartiersmanagement (QM) bridging cultural and interfaith understanding. The attached pictures speak for themselves about the vibrant

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Berlin, *continued from page 13*

ecumenical ministry we are privileged to be part of here in the heart of Berlin's capital: What a day of rich



People gathered for the fest

diversity in music, dancing, food and personal exchanges. We were astonished to learn from the Assistant Mayor, Herr Jörn Oltmann, who opened the festivities, that the district is planning to close down the work of the QM. In response, ACB along with our partners in the NR are starting up petitions to protest this short sighted plan. Our church on Dennewitzplatz was known as needle park and prostitute village when ACB first came to Luther Kirche 18 years ago. Our partnership with the QM and our neighbors in the NR have grown over the years and contributed to amazing changes in the district, but much work has yet to be done! Hence our efforts are focusing more on actively listening to God's Call as a missional congregation and hearing "What is God's preferred and promised future for our church in the heart of



Leaders of many faith communities at the Pfingstfest

Berlin" as we seek to collaborate ever more with our neighbors in Schöenberg. We pray we will be able to provide purposeful outreach ministry to a rapidly changing area in which gentrification is transforming the entire community and be able to provide more "open door" programs inviting the community, but

also visiting traveling groups, college and university study groups in the future; true to our mission: We welcome all people. We serve the neighbors of Berlin. We grow together in Christ. We celebrate God's amazing love.

As I write this, our new Interim Pastor Janice Kibler is preparing with her husband Jim to join us during June and July. We are joyful in anticipation of growing and learning during this transitional phase together with them. May ACB greet them with open hearts, minds and arms as they guide us and strengthen us for the new phase ahead! We are now readying ourselves to begin formulating a strategic plan as a missional church in a prayerfully discerning, Triune God



Assistant Mayor Herr Jörn Oltmann

centered format with our new pastor, and hence preparing to hire a new Office Manager. Five applications have arrived and interviews with the top candidates will take place the first week of June. We pray our choice candidate will begin mid-June with a two-week overlap with our current Bookkeeper, Diale Conrad, and Communication Coordinator, Eva Diestel. We are deeply grateful to Diale and Eva for their loyal, hard work as part time staff in laying the valuable groundwork for this new position at ACB! Thank you!

As our current Intern Pastor Jim stated in response to our recent 5 year review and presentation to the AFCU, "As you can see, the Triune God is living and active at ACB. In the midst of some real challenges, God has kept His promise in Christ Jesus to send us the Holy Spirit, and She is drawing us ever deeper into God's ministry for our congregation, Berlin, and the world!" Amen!

Yours with love in Christ,

Karin

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Unsolicited articles and pictures are welcomed. Next Deadline: Oct 10, 2018

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