

The Bridge

Connecting Our Churches and Friends around the World

December 2018

AFCU PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear Friends in Christ,

We are now in the season of Advent as we prepare for the anniversary of Christ's birth on earth. This a special time of celebration and gratitude to God for his mercy and blessings.

We are so thankful for the strong support that you as friends have given to the three European churches and the AFCU.

I have recently returned from the annual AFCU board and semi-annual development meetings held in Ridgefield, CT during October 12-13, 2018. This year the meeting was hosted by AFCU Board member Reverend Karen Halac at the historic First Congregational Church. We thank Karen and AFCU members Lynda DeLuryea and Jane Kendall, as well as the many members of the church for the excellent planning and execution of successful meetings and activities. I also thank all the AFCU board members, church representatives and pastors, and spouses who attended the meetings at their own expense 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.

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1 As a follow-up to my last letter, the AFCU development team reviewed their plans 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. The plan is targeted to be presented to the full AFCU board at the next annual board meeting in Paris during May 2019.
- 2 **Mr. Brett Craig** was elected to the Board and **John Smith** was elected as an Associate Member. Brett is leading the Communications Team and John is serving as the AFCU Webmaster. We thank them for their desire to serve.
- 3 We are very pleased that **Senior Pastor, Reverend Dr. Mari Thorkelson**, has arrived at the American Church in Berlin with husband **Patrick Foley**. "They have hit the ground running" and already making a strong impact. We thank the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for their participation in assisting with the interim and permanent call processes. A team of volunteers met with the ELCA at their corporate headquarters in Chicago on December 5th to continue to enhance our partnership. (www.americanchurchberlin.de)
- 4 The American Church in Paris continues its strong mission under the leadership of **Reverend Dr. Scott Herr**. (www.acparis.org)
- 5 The Vienna Community Church is seeing continuous growth under the spiritual leadership of **Reverend Dr. Gabor Lassu**. (www.viennacommunitychurch.com)

The next annual board meeting is set for **May 17-19, 2019 to be held in Paris, France, hosted by the American Church**. Special activities are being planned for friends of the ACP who would like to return and recall the many memories and experience of Paris and the ACP. Mark your calendar and stay tuned for more information to follow.

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.

Let me close by quoting from Proverbs 3 v. 5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight."

In Christ,
Ted Ziemann, AFCU President



AFCU Update

From October 11th through the 14th, pastors and delegates of the American churches in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna flew to the United States for the BODs annual meeting of The American & Foreign Christian Union held for the first time in Ridgefield, Connecticut. European representatives assembled with U.S. board members who traveled from twelve states to do the work of the ecumenical and global American churches in Europe. The First Congregational Church Ridgefield hosted the meetings, and generous volunteers offered hospitality to their international guests in the newly renovated “church by the fountain,” that was gathered as a congregation in 1712.



Ridgefield congregants and volunteers observed how the AFCU and its member congregations possess hard-won wisdom to

share in a pluralistic society too often marked by fear, hostility, and a climate of alienation. Delegates attested to the ways that these international congregations are able to bear witness to Our Lord’s love and grace for the entire world, because the entire world worships in these churches, and participants ultimately take these Christ centered lifestyles and teachings back to every continent.

These vibrant and diverse European partner churches demonstrate what it means to live their faith in unified and reconciled ways. At a time when many increasingly secular European countries are often said to be post-Christian, strengthening these international and interdenominational faith connections makes a real difference. These Holy Spirit-ed houses of worship serve as beacons of hope for a world that is troubled by rapid globalization and mass migrations.

In addition, although a packed BODs agenda, some managed to take a little personal time and walk through historic Ridgefield. One of their highlights was discovering the pumpkin garden where Autumn and Halloween aficionados could feast on the wonderful Autumn colors. They also passed by the

Keeler Tavern Museum and, although closed, they managed to convince the wonderfully cooperative curator to show us the cannonball which was fired by the British on April 27, 1777 during the Revolutionary War, as Generals Benedict Arnold (before he betrayed “the Americans”) and Benjamin Silliman, staved off an attack from the advancing British army.



Staying in the historic West Inn Lane was a wonderful experience. Built as a summer home for a wealthy New Yorker in the late 1800’s, it is now a boutique hotel, giving the sense of walking into the cozy home of one’s aging grandparents but clearly in the 21st Century with vegetarian choices for breakfast and WiFi.



Warm greetings from Paris! As I write this for a new edition of the *Bridge*, France has just come through four weeks of *Gilets Jaunes* demonstrations, the last weekend including widespread violence around Paris and even a barricade and fire just outside of the church. Around a hundred protesters swarmed down the quai smashing windows and destroying cars in front of the church. Thankfully there was no damage to the church... But now on the news I am hearing about a shooting in Strasbourg at the Christmas Market.

We sometimes forget that the birth of Jesus happened in a similarly indifferent and violent world. We read in the gospel according to Luke,

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).



“Nativity,” by Chinese artist He Qi

I've always found this to be one of the most poignant verses in the biblical narratives of Jesus' birth. Luke tells us that by decree of the Roman Emperor Augustus, the Syrian Governor Quirinius required that all people should go *“to their own towns to be registered.”* And so even before Jesus is born Joseph and Mary are displaced and find themselves on the road and without proper lodging.

Later on, Matthew writes about how Herod sought to kill Jesus, resulting in the “massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem. The holy family was spared, as

“an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Her’od is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (Matthew 2:13).



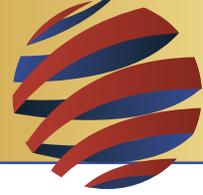
It all sounds so common with so many refugees of today. According to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, there are currently 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of that number 40 million are internally displaced people, and the remaining 28.5 million have had to flee their home countries to seek safety in another country. That is a staggering number of people. If you had to hold your breath

for one second for each of the 68.5 million refugees in the world today, you would be able to breathe again only in 2.17 years.

In September I received a phone call from Helsinki from a colleague I had met at one of our *Association of International Church in Europe and the Middle East* conferences. He said, some Christian refugees were coming to Paris and asked if I might help find shelter for them. I called a friend I knew working with refugees here in Paris and asked about getting them a place to sleep. She said bluntly and without hesitation, “Scott, I’m so sorry, but there are hundreds who are having to sleep on the street already. There is no room for him.” I was so sorry to have to tell my friend *there was no room for them*. That brought those big numbers of refugees into focus in a very personal way for me.

So I am *very thankful* for the ACP Council voting to approve going forward with *100 Nights of Welcome* to provide a safe place to shower and sleep for refugees, and as of Sunday night, we have begun to welcome guests in the gym! We have wonderful volunteers to act as hosts and it has become a strong source of building community for the ACP while at the same time providing a safe place for men who otherwise would be on the street.

¹ Referenced November 26, 2018: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.



It was because of the violence in our city that we had to postpone the annual Christmas Candlelight concerts from December 8 to December 9. It was no small miracle that Fred Gramann and all of the choir members and musicians were able to agree to still perform *the next night* and in a period of 24 hours get out the information to all of the ticketholders... But they did it! How wonderful it was to be able to welcome two full sanctuary crowds for the concerts while at the same time we welcomed refugees to sleep just underneath the sanctuary in the gym! I heard many guests saying things like, "We really needed this." "This was the best concert ever!"



I also am excited about our *Princeton Theological Seminary* intern, **Julia Metcalf's** *Advent Icon Collage Project*. After each service, members of the church during coffee hour have been cutting out images from magazines and helping put pieces together (think: painting by numbers) which has already resulted in a large "icon" that is hanging in the sanctuary, helping us to reflect on the strangers of the Christmas story, and "the least of these" in our own time and place who in fact may be Jesus wanting to come to us in a new way! It's been fun to create a bit of art together that also helps us to remember that the miracle of the incarnation still happens...

So much is happening at the ACP. God is at work here helping us to continue to proclaim in word and deed the gospel of God's love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are so thankful for your continuing prayers and financial support that so encourages us and helps us to continue to realize our mission be a light that shines in the often violent darkness of this world.

In May 16-19, 2019, The *American & Foreign Christian Union* board will be holding its Annual General Meeting here in Paris and we would love for you to come and join us! We will have cocktails at our apartment to welcome you Thursday. We will offer tours of the church on Friday with a nice French dinner somewhere near the church. Fred is planning a concert for Saturday night preceded by an international buffet and probably followed by a wine and cheese reception, then we hope inspiring worship services on Sunday! We would love to have you mark your calendars and plan to celebrate all that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do through this dynamic congregation!

In the meantime, when you are surrounded by candlelight on Christmas Eve with friends and loved ones, say a prayer for Paris. Join us in bringing all our hopes and fears of all the years to the One who welcomes us, full of grace and truth. And may God inspire you to make room for and welcome the stranger, just as God has made room for and welcomed you! You may just be welcoming Jesus!

On behalf of the Council and the ACP congregation, Merry Christmas and all of God's richest blessings of faith, hope, peace, love and joy to you in 2019.

In Christ, Scott



Vienna Community Church

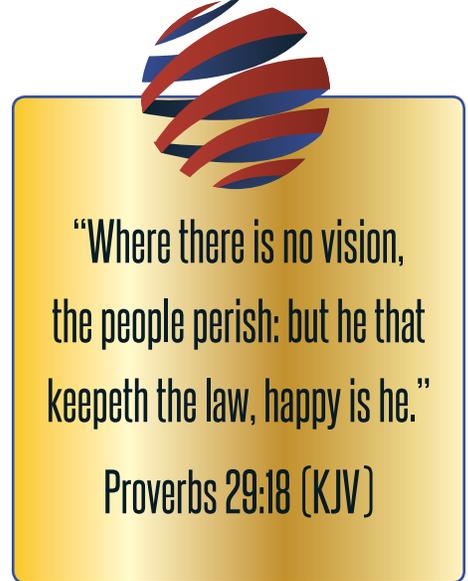
The request by the AFCU Strategic Planning Committee that the Berlin, Paris and Vienna churches prepare a comprehensive Strategic Plan has come at a pivotal moment for the VCC, which is going into its 62nd year. The acquisition of the VCC Meeting Point in 2015 provided a permanent platform since its 1957 founding to plan and hold fellowship and outreach activities. The arrival of **Pastor Gábor** in 2016 and his efforts to follow a God-led vision has created spiritual momentum and leadership within the Church and motivated many to support his ministry. Indeed, God has blessed the VCC in many ways since he began his call - high membership growth, child and adult baptisms, a flourishing Sunday School, and four different Bible study opportunities, in addition to other fellowship initiatives.



There is currently a Draft Strategic Plan containing draft Mission and Vision statements and it is intended to provide a draft to the VCC members for review and comment in early 2019. In order that our congregation finds a consensus on the Mission and Vision statements, as well as the rest of the Strategic Plan, some important decisions need to be made as follows:

- That the required majority of members agree to renew **Pastor Gabor's** call at the Special Congregational Meeting to be held at the end of February 2019
- That a consensus is reached on a common identity about what it means to be an international, inter-denominational, and ecumenical Church as an international congregation of the Austrian Protestant Church within the legal framework of Austrian Church and Civil law

Once these fundamentals are decided, then it is hoped that consensus can be reached on other important aspects of the Strategic Plan. It is intended that members have ample opportunity to provide comments and express their opinions. It is anticipated that others in the congregation who are not members, but give of their time, talents and gifts to the VCC would also be able to provide input, with the



hope that they will commit themselves to VCC. We are hopeful that by making this process more transparent and inclusive, it will serve as a precedent for the future on how to reach a workable consensus on important issues in the Church.

We pray that the VCC congregation agrees a strategic plan that is faithful to God, realistic and workable, and is a good framework and roadmap for the future.

Pastor Gábor and
Mickela Moore, Moderator



American Church in Berlin Update
Dennewitzplatz, 10783 Berlin-Schöneberg

Advent & Christmas Worship 2018

Friday, November 30

Christmas Wreath Preparation at American Church in Berlin from 14:00

Sunday, December 2

First Sunday in Advent Service

Taizé Worship 11:00 & Gospel Praise/Taizé Worship 13:30

Sunday, December 9

Second Sunday in Advent

Children's Christmas Pageant 11:00

Gospel Praise Worship 13:30

Sunday, December 16

Third Sunday in Advent

Service of Lessons and Carols 11:00

Gospel Praise Worship 13:30

Sunday, December 23

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Traditional Worship 11:00

Gospel Praise Worship 13:30

Monday, December 24

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 16:00

A service especially for families with young children

Traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Holy Communion 20:00

Worship for all

Tuesday, December 25

Christmas Day Gospel Praise Service with Holy Communion 11:00

With the ACB Gospel Choir & ACB Praise Band leading Carols

Sunday, December 30

Traditional Worship 11:00

Gospel Praise Worship 13:30

Monday, December 31

New Year's Eve (Sylvester) Worship with Holy Communion 18:00

Sunday, January 6

Epiphany of our Lord - Mission Sunday

Traditional Worship 11:00 & Gospel Praise Worship 13:30

AFCU provides the Platform



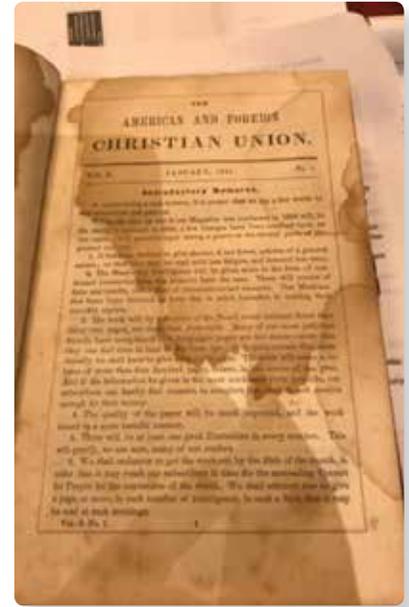
These (ACP, ACB and VCC) churches are ministering to a diverse population spiritually, culturally and economically. They are guided through our Lord’s Headship via three spiritually gifted Pastors, whose vision encompasses the local environments by which they operate. To that end, they are impacting eternal souls, physical needs and direction in their local communities.

The American & Foreign Christian Union, historically established to provide Board guidance and economic support to American and internationally based Christian churches, are thankful for our current partnerships! In addition, we are seeking gospel centered supporters, who want to impact the world via these vibrant churches. If you are interested, you can participate via the instructions below.

Background

The AFCU is a US based 501(c)(3) organization supporting the English-speaking ministries of the American Church in Paris, the American Church in Berlin, and the Vienna Community Church. Your donations are tax deductible for US tax purposes.

In 2017, The AFCU raised over \$400,000 in donations to support these important Christian ministries. Our 2018 budget includes commitments to support the Senior Pastor at the ACP and the to pay taxes, insurance, and maintenance on the ACP church building which is owned by the AFCU.



Please support this unique international Christian community

You can designate your donation to one of these ministries either via check; please indicate your interest below:

- _____ American Church in Paris
- _____ American Church in Berlin
- _____ Vienna Community Church
- _____ AFCU general expenses

Make the check payable to the American & Foreign Christian Union

Mail to:

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

OR; to contribute electronically, go to the AFCU website: www.afcubridge.org, then click on “support” and contribute electronically through **PayPal** or credit card. We thank you for your time, services and economic support of the ACP, ACB, VCC, through the AFCU!