

AMERICAN AND FOREIGN CHRISTIAN UNION

OCTOBER 2020

The Bridge

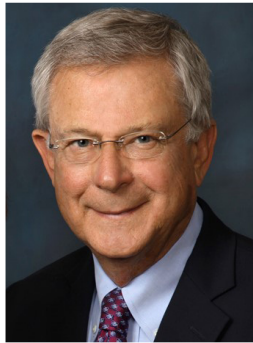
Connecting Our Churches and Friends around the World

"Humble yourselves, therefore,
under God's almighty hand that
He may lift you up in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on Him
because He cares for you."

1 PETER 5 v 6-7



AFCU PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear Christian friends,

Everyone around the world has been and continues to be affected in some way by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, we are living in a very challenging, dynamic, and stressful time. Since last Spring the AFCU has replaced in-person Board and Development Committee meetings with Zoom video sessions. We will continue to do so for all meetings scheduled in the immediate future, including the October 16-17 Board and Development meetings. The European churches are doing the same. Like many of you, I have been watching the virtual worship services of the three

churches and have been incredibly impressed by the quality and innovations of the worship teams. We have great leadership in these churches.

A key objective for the AFCU is to become a more effective organization in supporting our American churches. As a result, during the May 2020 Board Meeting we initiated a Strategic Imperatives study involving four areas:

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 1	STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 2	STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 3	STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE 4
Review and renew the AFCU organization and leadership development	Expand the AFCU financial base	Expand communications	Expand our mission of supporting and sharing the gospel

Team leaders and members were appointed to work on these areas over the summer and will present their findings and recommendations at the October AFCU Board Meeting.

The Board of the AFCU remains focused on supporting the ACB, ACP, and VCC. All three churches are facing severe financial challenges since they have been and still are restricted in the size and number of worship services, meetings, events, and programs. They have especially been impacted by the loss of rental and wedding income. I encourage you to read the letters from pastors in this edition of the "Bridge" for additional enlightenment on this issue.

It's always difficult to ask for money but we are living in unusual times and the need is great. I recognize that the pandemic has created stress on our own families due to job loss, sickness and other hardships. Fortunately, many of us have avoided serious financial issues and have the ability to help out in this time of great need, so I ask for your help. Please remember that the contributions you make through the AFCU are tax deductible since we are a 501(c)(3) organization.

Finally, 2020 has been a year of transitions. Rev. Dr. Scott Herr, who has been the faithful Senior Pastor of the American Church in Paris for the past 12 years, ended his ministry there in July and has begun a new ministry at the First Presbyterian Church in New Canaan, Connecticut. We are extremely thankful for Pastor Scott's wonderful leadership at ACP and wish him, his wife Kim, and the entire Herr family happiness and blessings in their new adventures. We are pleased that Scott has joined the AFCU as a consultant, so he will continue to support the ministries of the European churches through the AFCU.

AFCU PRESIDENT'S LETTER

(CONTINUED)

Rev. Dr. Odette Lockwood-Stewart has replaced Scott as Interim Senior Pastor at ACP. Odette has been serving her role virtually from California due to travel and visa restrictions. She and her husband, Jim, finally received their visas the last week of August and moved to Paris on August 31. We thank Odette for accepting this call and being flexible during these very uncertain and stressful times. Please keep Odette and Jim in your prayers.

We have also had transitions on the AFCU Board. Joining the Board, effective May 2020, are John and Lexi Benson and Jim Hobbs, all prior members of the ACP. Unfortunately, we also have sad news with the passing of Walter Deitrich. Walter was a strong supporter of the VCC and an effective and valued member of the Development and Executive committees as well as the Board. Our sympathy goes out to his wife Pat and family.

In closing, I quote 1 Peter 5 v 6-7: **"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's almighty hand that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."**

May the peace of the Lord be with you always.

In Christ,



Ted Ziemann
President, AFCU

HERITAGE SOCIETY

The Heritage Society of the AFCU recognizes members and friends of the American Church in Paris, the American Church in Berlin and the Vienna Community Church who have included one or more of these churches in their estate planning. Perhaps you would like to make a significant contribution to help the American and Foreign Christian Union support the commitment it has with the member churches it serves. Endowment funds for each church have been established to help sustain long-term ministry in these churches.

To learn more about the Heritage Society, please visit the AFCU website at AFCUBridge.com and look at The Heritage Society under the Support the AFCU tab.

Also, you may contact the AFCU at AFCUHeritage@AFCUBridge.com.

AFCU UPDATE

RECIPE FOR SISTER CHURCH SUPPORT

Friends in Christ, numerous congregations in the United States have entered into relationships with our three churches in Europe as “Sister or Partner Congregations.” By doing so, they established formal agreements between their congregation and our foreign congregations. Key items in such agreements include but are not limited to the following:

- Enhance the worship, sharing and mission experiences of both churches and their congregations.
- Invite each congregation to visit one another.
- Exchange pastor visits in person or virtually.
- Share periodic congregational ministry stories to publish in respective newsletters and on websites.
- Exchange youth visits and experience multi-cultural settings to include visitation to historic religious sites in either location.
- Share musical talents by choir and musician exchange visits, again in person or virtually.
- Exchange historical church information.
- Participate in congregational outreach projects such as food pantries, community cleanup efforts, etc.
- Coordination and cooperation with like church committees such as Christian Education, Global Missions, Worship, Music and Youth Programs.

Obviously both congregations benefit. One might ask then, what is the best way to establish such a mutual and beneficial agreement. **The recipe that has given some AFCU board members success includes the following:**

- Personal contact with US home church pastors, mission/outreach committees and/or congregations.
- Contact with local synod bishop or regional office via e-mail and phone to see which congregations have healthy outreach or mission programs. (See sample attached.)
- Prepare and present to the above short presentations on the missions of the AFCU and our foreign churches. (Sunday Adult Forum or classes are ideal opportunities.)
- Present proposed Sister Congregation agreements for church staff review.

If you have any interest in your congregation pairing with one of our European churches, contact AFCU Board member Don Krump via email dsjetsetters@aol.com



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**The following names were
accidentally omitted from the 2019
Donor list in the Spring Bridge.**

We sincerely regret the omission.

**Rev. Larry and Carol Kalajainen
Rev. Richard Hartman**

**Russ McNaughton,
Financial Secretary**

THANK YOU ALL

AMERICAN CHURCH IN PARIS



Dear Members and Friends of the AFCU,

Grace and peace of Jesus Christ to you from The American Church in Paris. In this sixth month of global pandemic our city is turning from les vacances to la rentrée, from reopenings to rising COVID-19 cases. The strange stillness of fewer tourists in summer will come to an end as students and city residents return. In this extraordinary time, the ACP provides in person and online lifegiving ministries of worship, Bible studies, fellowship, Christian formation, grief support, and well-being. The ACP grieves the loss and celebrates the lives of members, family members, and all those who have died from COVID-19. As one parent of a child living with an underlying condition said, *"We are not living in fear. We are living in faith."* God is with us! *"For in Him we live and move and have our being."* Acts 17:28

In June church buildings re-opened for schools and small groups, beginning with our Open Doors ministry of hospitality, prayer, and presence. At the end of June, we began worship in the Sanctuary at 11h in a way that is safe, sustainable, and fair for all. And thousands of brothers and sisters from over 70 countries join us for online worship at www.acparis.org.

This summer has been a season for transitions in leadership at the ACP. In late June a new Council was elected by a well-attended Zoom Congregational Meeting. In late July, we said a grateful and loving farewell to Scott Herr and his family after 12 years of fruitful ministry, and I began as Interim Senior Pastor ... from California! ACP's Senior Pastor Search Committee began its work in effective partnership with AFCU.

One key element of the June Congregational Meeting was the presentation of financial results for 2019 and the budget for 2020 --- a budget that is MUCH different from the one that our Council was expecting to present before the confinement dramatically changed the vibrant ACP we have all grown accustomed to.

The revised budget includes revenue reductions from 2019 levels of €290k from wedding blessings and almost €170k from building rentals as well as a decline in congregational giving of about €50k reflecting the impact of the confinement on our members' ability to give. The business, finance and property teams are working diligently to reduce costs while also taking advantage of all possible French government programs to take care of our employees. The budget the congregation approved is a loss (before usage of reserves) of €336k. We are hopeful that this budget, which assumes reopening to all rental tenants and resumption of a strong wedding ministry in the autumn, will be feasible. As a safety net, we expect to take out a French government-sponsored loan of up to €400k but we are mindful of the impact of the repayment of that loan on future budgets. We are extremely grateful for our partnership with the AFCU during these uncertain times.

ACP continues to follow government protocols guided and implemented by our Re-Gathering Task Force, pastoral and administrative staff, lay leaders, and volunteers. In August a Re-Gathering Worship Survey was sent to the whole congregation to assess needs and resources for the months ahead. In the autumn we will add interactive dimensions to online worship and we will implement live-streaming.



AMERICAN CHURCH IN PARIS

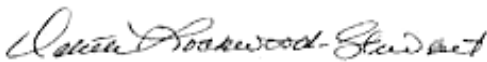
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ACP connects to congregants and community in every ministry area with creativity and hybridity. Ministry Faire, Bloom, Fellowships and Classes are taking place in multiple ways. Four stories express this vividly: 40 ACP young adults met on zoom gatherings and wrote their “God and Me,” testimonies while leaders delivered Pandemic Care Packages to the homes of youth; ACP’s Sandwich ministry continues to feed hundreds of hungry brothers and sisters; ACP’s Alpha course went online for the first time welcoming guests from France, Austria, USA, and India, into small groups. ACP’s prison chaplain sent one-page scripture-full e-epistles of encouragement and love weekly to prisoners when all prisons in France closed their doors. Officers copied and distributed these to women prisoners. When she was allowed back into the prison mid-summer, she learned how helpful these were while they were “cut off from the world,” and that they brought the copies out into the exercise yard where they read them out loud together!

The future state of “the new normal” at ACP will include weekly midweek online ministries such as *Threaded Together: Families staying connected while physically apart* with family small groups; monthly playdates, and family devotionals. Our online presence will be facilitated by a gifted volunteer who felt the call to give back to the ACP community in this time of change.

On behalf of the gifted and gift-led pastoral team, lay leadership, staff, and the whole ACP congregation, thank you for your prayers and your support.

Blessings to you!



Odette Lockwood-Stewart



AMERICAN CHURCH IN BERLIN



Dearest AFCU Family!

Grace and Peace to you from our God who is with us always, who keeps us humored and will never let us go!

Heading into uncharted waters yet being guided by the experiences of the last 24 weeks of successful, creative and energizing online worship services, we are excited to begin gathering again in person for worship. We are planning on worshipping outdoors, God willing, for the month of September beginning on the 6th at 11am for one joint worship service.

We have been encouraged since establishing Open Church on 10 May by an average attendance of 40-50 people each week, coming together for a time of prayer and meditation, live music and our worship service video which is available on youtube.



We have numerous safety practices in place for worship, including hand sanitizing, physical distancing, encouraging face masks, and limited use of our restrooms. We will post song lyrics on our website that can be loaded onto personal phones. Communion will be celebrated on the first Sunday of each month by receiving two disposable cups, one with bread, one with wine or juice, that will be consumed upon the invitation to eat and drink together. The kids time, sharing of peace and the spiritual message will be videoed and offered online each week.

This first week, called Celebration Sunday, we will have a blessing of the backpacks for our children as well as adults. We are going to have a super delightful, grand family reunion together, meeting face to face and heart to heart. We will thank Ric Carpenter, our beloved departing office manager, and welcome Kim Purvis, who just arrived from New York City, as our new office manager. We are blessed to have them working together during a week of transition. We will also be saying Auf Wiedersehen to two ACB members who have served faithfully in Russia for many years as Presbyterian missionaries.

We recognize that our church gatherings are not going to look like they used to for some time. We're going to need to adapt to our new situation, but even so, it will be a huge blessing to gather as a church family and worship together! God is Good!

In general Germany has done a good job in dealing with the COVID virus. Politically it is facing some far right sentiment against the COVID restrictions placed upon them, yet the vast majority of people are supportive of the actions taken by the German government.

When our weekly community-wide food distribution outreach hosted by ACB was discontinued because of the virus, ACB volunteers came together to provide bags of dried food and canned goods to our neighbors in need.

In response to the global pandemic and the desire for listening to spiritual and artistic perspectives in a disruptive time such as this, the American Church in Berlin created a dialogue space of mutual learning from each other on nine summer evenings. Berlin based jazz artists from diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds created a contemplative Jazz Evensong on the meaning of freedom together with theologians who reflected on freedom from Christian perspectives based on their spiritual practice, poetry, biblical narratives and prayers. Silence allowed the music and words a space for personal meditation.

AMERICAN CHURCH IN BERLIN

(CONTINUED)



responding to racist behavior in everyday life. This tremendous undertaking was a life-changing experience of walking in the footsteps of Jesus. This summer was an extremely active time for ACB.

Despite all this stimulating summer activity, as a result of the virus, our giving was significantly down, bank transfers were steady and our spending is down to bare bones necessity. With the simple videoing we are doing, it is more and more evident that our need for two screens and two beamers in our sanctuary is essential to our future mission and ministry. What will the future bring anyway? We know this virus will be with us for awhile. What hopeful things can we imagine?

During this time of disruption and unknowing, I have been drawn to the many God questions – where is God calling us? How has God guided us and been faithful to us? What does God long for in my life, yours and ours? Even though we don't have all the answers, we can live into the questions as we give our best to walk in the way of Jesus and serve our neighbors. I have found that when we begin with God questions, we have a clearer understanding of our church questions.

We at ACB are grateful for your AFCU partnership and commitment, for our connection with the Vienna and Paris churches and colleagues, and the faith that anchors us all in this precarious time.

We celebrated jazz as “global worship music,” as spiritual music which brings cultures together in a time of growing diversity and nationalism. The series is initiated and directed by ACB member Uwe Steinmetz, co-founder of BlueChurch, the international network for Jazz and Christian Spirituality (www.bluechurch.ch). Each evening has been outstanding.

Another summer outreach of putting faith into action was an initiative called *Walk the Talk* led by two ACB members. It featured an educational component on racism followed by a group walk (with placards highlighting black deaths from violence) from ACB to the famous Brandenburg Gate, culminating in an 8 minute, 46 seconds kneel. Two of our walks had to be altered because of the COVID protests at the Brandenburg Gate; instead we gathered in front of ACB to sing, pray and kneel. Talks and discussions over the months of July and August included defining racism, a closer look at race based systems, micro-aggressions, stories of race-based injustice, photo exhibits of police murders before and after George Floyd, the impact of stereotyping, stories of assassinated black leaders in American civil rights movements and



I end this report with Saint Augustine's Evening Prayer which we use to close each Jazz evening:

*Lord, you created us, and our heart is restless,
until it rests in you.
Yours is the light of the day.
Yours is the darkness of the night.
Life and death are yours. I am yours and I pray to you.
Let me sleep in peace, bless the coming day,
And let me awaken to glorify you.*

Pastor Mari Thorkelson
American Church in Berlin

AMERICAN CHURCH IN BERLIN

ENDOWMENT FUND CAMPAIGN

WHAT IS THE ACB ENDOWMENT FUND?

The ACB Endowment Fund is designed to ensure that the ministry of ACB continues into the future. 5% of the fund will be available each year for pastoral ministry. The many other needs of the congregation will be met through congregational stewardship and other interested donors for specific projects.

OBJECTIVE

Increase the ACB Endowment Fund by \$212,000 from its current value of \$311,000 to achieve a \$523,000 balance. Add this amount to the current AFCU Berlin Fund (currently \$534,000) to achieve a total ACB Endowment Fund of over \$1,050,000. This will provide approximately \$52,500/year (5% of Fund) of support to the ACB ministry.

BACKGROUND

During the Quiet Phase of the Campaign, \$238,000 has been raised from lead donors and others, bringing the current value to \$311,000 from its original balance. In addition, matching funds of \$70,000 are available to encourage donors during the Public Phase. Therefore, after matching funds, **an additional \$142,000 must be raised.**

The Matching Funds work as follows: As an example, with a 1:1 match, any gift from a donor of \$5,000 will result in \$10,000 going to the ACB Endowment Fund.

When adding the ACB Endowment Fund at the conclusion of the Campaign (\$523,000) to the value of the AFCU Berlin Fund (Currently \$534,000), the balance available is estimated to be \$1,057,000. This will permit up to \$52,850 per year for distribution due to the current AFCU Endowment Fund Policy distribution limit of up to 5% annually.

NEXT STEPS

With this October 2020 BRIDGE appeal, anyone desiring to give money may do so by going to the AFCU website, afcubridge.org, and click on "support for AFCU". Make a note to donate to the American Church Berlin.

During October/November 2020 a "hardcopy mailing" will take place to all AFCU members, ACB Alumni, former Pastors, Interns and interested donors with the opportunity to give now or make a three-year pledge to meet the goal for the American Church Berlin Endowment Fund.

VIENNA COMMUNITY CHURCH

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU LOSE CONTROL OF EVERYTHING

Rev. Dr. Neil Parker
Interim Pastor, Vienna Community Church
pastor@viennacommunitychurch.com

I am so looking forward to September 20 this year. Because at the Vienna Community Church, we follow the lectionary readings each week, as do our sister churches in Paris and Berlin. And for September 20, the lectionary reading is from the last chapter of the book of the prophet Jonah. Which means I get to preach about what to do when you lose control of everything.

Quick summary: Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, because preaching to **those** people wasn't his plan. So he got out of town, by cruise ship. Bad idea: thunderbolts and lightning very very frightening, and he gets chunked overboard by the crew. And into quarantine, in the belly of a great fish. Unplanned. And uncomfortable, for a whole host of reasons. Until God "spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out." Nice.

So, on to Nineveh, where he preached such a fantastic sermon (You've got 40 days before disaster) that everybody believes him and repents. Wow. Which ticks off the prophet, who sulks in the hot sun. God shades him, then kills the plant. And Jonah is doubly ticked. And God explains mercy to him. Well, you all know the story.

But in the middle of his distress, in the middle of quarantine, Jonah prays,

"When my life was fainting away,

I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple."

And I can preach that. I will preach it to our congregation, who will probably be at 80% strength by then (we're getting close to that now). Our children, we hope, will be worshipping with us again (we don't have the facilities for Sunday School). We can continue to spread out, using every other pew, distant while together, and wear masks when we move through the church. The choir will continue to come to the front and spread out, appropriately separate from one another. We will pass the peace with waves, with symbolic hugs, and with the *añjali mudra* gesture (the one you make when you say, "Namaste" to one another, hands in front, palms pressed together). We say "we stay apart to show our love."

We disinfect, we don't use hymn books, and we don't collect the bulletins after they've been used. This has changed our

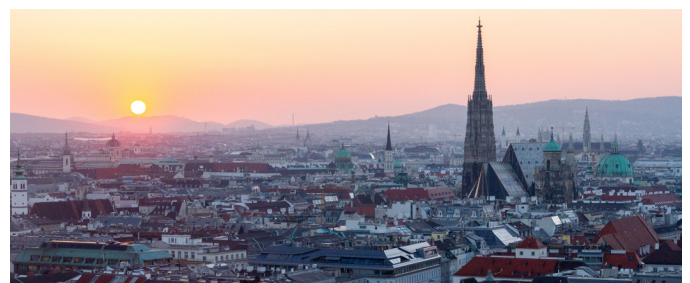
worship in a few ways: fewer written prayers, and shorter hymns printed in the bulletin, for instance. It's also meant more reliance on repetitive litany and responses, and our music leaders have helped to create a much more interactive and flowing service. Freed from the constraints of a single printed hymn book, we have begun to sing more world music, reflecting our diverse congregation.

And our doors are open. Literally. At the back of the church, we have Plexiglas inner doors that are floor to ceiling, and look out onto the street. Because we're using just one entrance for disinfecting, everybody comes through these doors (they used to come through the side door). And we have those doors open during the service. It lets in some noise (I can hear the horses coming down the street pulling the Fiakers), but it also lets in people, who hear our singing and our magnificent organist. Newcomers are starting to show up in church again. Because it's not so usual to hear people singing praise in dark places like quarantines or fish bellies or a world gone crazy.

We're a family sized church, not a programme church. So much of what constitutes our essence goes on still. Women meet for bible study, prayer chains are linked, Sunday School teachers call the children to find out how they're doing. We have continued our work of searching for a new pastor, as well as rewriting our constitution. We are planning how to do safe activities in the fall. We are expanding our website and digital communication, and beginning to build a "digital team." Mostly, we stay connected to each other, through phone and email and small gatherings and online.

Our finances are being stretched, certainly. We are an outreach ministry, and many of our active members are young and are finding their finances severely affected during this time of economic slowdown. Initiatives such as a wedding blessing ministry planned for this summer (similar to that of our sister church in Paris) have not been possible. We don't have much control over our fixed costs, and there are very few items that can be postponed to adapt to the current situation. Our financial team is gifted and positive and committed, but we are struggling to do what we can with less. The support of those who give to uphold our ministry is very, very gratefully received.

When we are fainting away, we remember the Lord.



FINANCE UPDATE

AFCU PROVIDES SUPPORT

The American Church in Paris (ACP), The American Church in Berlin (ACB) and the Vienna Community Church (VCC) are ministering to a diverse population spiritually, culturally and economically. The American & Foreign Christian Union, established in 1848, provides Board guidance and economic support to American and International Christian churches, and is thankful for our current partnerships!

We welcome supporters who want to impact the world through these vibrant ministries. If interested, join us by following the giving instructions below.

The AFCU is an IRS classified 501(c)(3) organization supporting the English-speaking ministries of the ACP, ACB and VCC. Your donations are tax deductible for US tax purposes.

Your gifts are important and appreciated and you can support the International Christian Community by sending your checks to our address shown below.

TO DONATE ONLINE

An alternative gifting option is to donate through the AFCU web site using your credit card or PayPal account. The AFCU web site address is afcubridge.org. Go to the web site and click on DONATE.

TO DONATE VIA CHECK

1. When gifting by check, please designate your donation to one of these ministries, as follows:

American Church in Paris
American Church in Berlin
Vienna Community Church
AFCU General Fund

2. Make the check payable to the AFCU, and include the church designation, noted above. Mail to:

AFCU Treasurer
2885 Sanford Ave. SW # 29934
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