



*Faithful Living*  
Holy Week and Easter 2016

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*Easter Vigil 2014*

## If These Stones Could Talk

Pastor Andy Willis



*... and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house . . .  
(1 Peter 2:5)*

If these stones could talk, they might tell us about a group of merchants more than 250 years ago, people far from home who wished to worship in their own language and with the theology they held dear; who bought and knocked down a château in decline and built in its place a house for worship.

They might tell us about a military occupation in Geneva and a period of years when the church was used as a guardhouse and worship services had to be held elsewhere.

They might tell us about the year another occupying army turned the building into a hospital, a place for wounds to be bound up and the sick to be tended.

They might tell us about the music that has drifted out of these windows and into the Bourg-de-Four, sung by many voices and played on organ and piano, guitar and djembe and didgeridoo.

They might tell us about the many languages that have bounced off these walls to offer prayer and praise and lament, including German, English, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Malagasy . . .

They might tell us about a city that has changed and grown dramatically while this building has held its place.

They might tell us about any of those things. But I imagine that above all, they would tell us about faithful people. People who have brought these stones to life with their faith and hope and love. People who have lovingly tended this house over the years and made it a home for travelers and pilgrims and seekers and refugees.

You probably know that in February, we celebrated the 250th birthday of our church building. It was on 9 February 1766 that the first worship service was held here, and we marked the occasion this year by filling the building with prayer. We painted stones on the top floor, sang Taizé chants in the cave, and baked bread in the kitchen, together with the German and Malagasy congregations.

It was a joyful day and a reminder that this place is so much more than a building. It's a house of living stones because of the faithful people who make it a home for ministry. We'll be continuing to celebrate throughout the year, giving thanks for this place and the ministry it enables.

So thank you for your part in it. If these stones could talk, they would talk about you and about people like you who have brought this place to life.

### **Report from Centro Bartolome de las Casas, El Salvador** **A Recipient of Our Sharing Funds**



In early 2015, our congregation sent a gift from our sharing fund to Centro Bartolome de las Casas, an organization working in social justice, development, and education in El Salvador. The funds were marked for workshops supporting volunteer facilitators who work with youth in areas heavily affected by violence.

They report two successful workshops for facilitators in 2015 and say they learned "that the issues that affect our communities highly affect the work with children and youth, and that there is a connection with increasing violent actions in our communities. We need to enhance our creativity to deal with those issues, learn about the causes of violence in our societies and how those affect our children and youth."

*Thank you for your support of our congregation's sharing ministry!*

## Reflecting on 34 Years of Ministry

### Nyambura Njoroge



#### **What has been your highlight in being part of the ELGC?**

The church takes children seriously. Ever since I joined the church, discussions on how best to make kids at home and their spiritual nurture has always been important. People learn very quickly not to be upset when a kid makes noise or when they just dash to the altar. They make parents not to feel guilty or uncomfortable but together we act responsibly. Some of us act as grannies or big sister or brother, auntie, uncle or simply a friendly smile.

#### **Regarding women serving as ordained ministers, thirty four years ago, what were you doing and the context of women as faith leaders in Kenya?**

Busy having my children and learning to model ministry not as it has always been or following in my clergy father's model but being myself and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I very quickly started to look for women role models in the Bible and in my Presbyterian church because women were very much part of my childhood and upbringing. Then I heard about women like the late Nobel Laureate Prof Wangari Maathai and knew I was not the first to venture into the male dominated space. Trail blazing is a responsibility that comes with many opportunities, challenges and blessings and I had to learn to balance all. Sometimes not very successfully but I have come this far by the grace and love of God who sends faithful companions on the way who have helped me to manage the distractors and anti-women ecclesiastical leaders.

#### **What was the impact of your ordination as a minister in your PCEA church in addressing gender norms?**

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa in its formative years in Kenya produced dynamic Gikuyu women leaders who actually pioneered in the struggle against female genital mutilation (FGM), commonly known at that time (the 1920s) as female circumcision. So in 1922 this pioneering group of young women (mostly still unmarried) vowed against FGM and created the Council of the Shield (Kiama Kia Ngo), which the women missionaries from Church of Scotland renamed the Woman's Guild (as churchwomen's organization was called in Church of Scotland). There was also girl's guild.

Woman's Guild became the first churchwomen's organization in Kenya and had all the hallmarks of a 'resistance and transformation' movement before it was domesticated and conformed into patriarchal ways. But in the 1940s women in PCEA were appointed as deacons and in 1964 the first women Church Elders were ordained. It took the church more years to vote for theological training for women and at the same time their ordination to the ordained ministry of word and sacrament in April 1976 at the 8th General Assembly. Many women church elders participate in the three important decision and policy making bodies, namely: parish council, presbytery and general assembly. A few women clergy hold positions of leadership at the presbytery level but up to now the three most senior positions of the general assembly headquarters remain in the hands of men. Like many churches in Kenya gender inequalities and discrimination are deeply entrenched in theology, sermons, language, and culture, and we have a long way to go. But I do not take for granted the few achievements we have made especially in having theologically trained women, most of who are parish ministers and to a less extent theological educators.

**HIV/ AIDS in Africa was a death sentence for those infected, what role has the church played in the evolution from stigma to support?**

We have come a long way -- especially through the active engagement of World Council of Churches. Since 1986, the churches have been part of the actors that have militated against stigma, silence, shame denial, discrimination, misinformation and inaction. Long before we knew much about HIV the virus that causes AIDS, women in the churches and communities were doing what women do best when a member of the family or church is sick: take care and provide for the family. Home-based care was started by church women in Zambia in 1987, something rarely acknowledged in the secular HIV movement.

It is true faith communities still remain part of the problem, especially with stigma, but we have come a long way in creating life-giving theologies and HIV prevention interventions, and some of the clergy living with HIV have disclosed their status and created the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by AIDS (INERELA+), and that has helped a lot to break the silence in faith communities. But we must learn intergenerational communication and dialogue with our children, adolescents and young people in age and culturally appropriate ways about sex, sexuality, injecting drug abuse, and elimination of mother to child HIV transmission education in the churches to end the pandemic.

**What is the role of the church in addressing gender inequality and social injustices? Would you have any recommendations?**

Churches must demonstrate leadership by doing and acting according to the Gospel. We cannot claim to follow Christ and then we act contrary to his teachings. When it comes to gender issues we love to quote Paul and forget that Jesus had already shattered gender barriers by the way he spoke and treated women. He even allowed women to challenge his views and in one case a bleeding woman took healing power out of him and another washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Today we are faced by daunting social injustices beginning with violence, racism and exclusion of people created by God, simply because we do not understand their sexuality or hate their God-given

identity. Christian teachings should be guiding us through these challenging issues. Christians, among others, have challenged slavery, racism, apartheid, etc., so we must rise to the occasion to lead and to faithfully follow Christ.

### **If you had to say three things to your younger self, what would it be?**

In Geneva, I should have created a broader social network, followed my first love of teaching career in Kenya, and kept to jogging and walking, with or without company, and in all weather!

### **The Christian Idea of Sin**

**Tatha Wiley**



A year ago I was asked to write book which would be included with other theological topics. I was assigned The Christian Idea of Sin. It was to be an historical study, exploring the diverse ways sin has been understood in the Hebrew Bible—the scripture of Jesus—the early church fathers, the medieval theologians, the Reformation, and modernity.

Some years ago, after finishing my dissertation—on the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan’s notion of sin—I was searching around for a first book project, and my editor-husband suggested taking the paragraph about original sin that I had written and turn that into a book proposal for the short books of Paulist Press: *What Are They Saying?* The “they” refers to theologians. The proposal was accepted and a short project turned into a 300-page account of the development of the doctrine of original sin. I told the publisher of Paulist, Larryt Boadt, that I needed to write all out and then I would cut it down for the series and he responded that he would do it as a free-standing book, outside the series. So it remained a 300-page account.

I was pleased at the next Catholic Theological Society of America meeting, my book on original sin was voted “Best Book of the Year” by the Catholic Press Association, not, I was informed, “Best First Book” but “Best Book.” This new book is a detailed historical study like Original Sin but much broader in scope.

I have been interested in sin, especially original sin, my whole teaching career. It was clear to me that students needed a credible reinterpretation of the doctrine or else everything

could be lost. We can't ask them to go from a science class where they learn about Darwin, evolution, the immense age of the universe, black holes and all the rest to a theology class that still talks about first parents, an inherited sin, and a garden. There is no conflict between evolution and creation. Once we break ourselves of thinking Genesis 1 is somehow historical, we more easily understand that evolution has to do with development and creation with being. More is required but that is a first step. The problem with original sin is that since the early church it has been linked to the Incarnation: "Why does Christ come? To forgive original sin." Until we rethink our atonement theory, we can't do without Adam and Eve. We must, though, to fully enter the modern world, one that is fast becoming post-modern.

*Tatha Wiley, Ph.D., taught at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. for five years, as well as at St. Thomas University, St. Paul, Minn.*

### Rendez-Vous with Desta Melles



Desta Melles lives in Geneva with his wife Lucia and his daughters Demarise, Sidona, Ludesia. He is a polyvalent office clerk and driver, and has been part of our church since 2005.

#### **When and why did you come to Geneva?**

I arrived to Geneva in 2000, the reason due to the situation in my country and to have a better life.

#### **What does being a friend mean to you?**

A Friend means for me is...

- Someone keeps his or her word
- Keeps me confident and stands by my side through thick and thin
- Someone that I can trust to support me
- Someone who keeps balance and respect in relationship, making us true and equal
- Frank and does not hold grudges against for past mistakes

As it is written in John 15:13-15, Jesus is the pure example of a true friend, for He laid down His life for His "friends."

**Have you had a mentor at some point in your life or career? What did s/he teach you?**

I learned ...

- To have positive outlook on life. Helped me through tough times and showed me how to find the opportunity in the difficulties I was facing
- To respect colleagues for their knowledge and skills
- To accept direct, constructive feedback, to build my relationship based on mutual desire

My best mentor always told me to listen most carefully to the people with whom I disagreed – in that way I might learn something. And, he was right.

**What place does our congregation have in your life? How do you participate in our ministries and activities?**

For the moment I cannot say much because I participate only in my neighborhood group for refreshments, but may be later...

**Can you share a childhood memory? How did your family spend Sundays?**

We got together every Sunday. The kids we went to the Sunday school, and the older ones went to church. After we finished the church programme and following lunch with family, we had traditional coffee in my grandparents' house

**What is one of your favorite places and why do you love it?**

My favorite place is my home, and the reason is that there is no sweeter or better place than at home, where I get peace and enjoy life with my beloved ones.

**What is your idea of the perfect dinner? Who is present?**

For me the perfect dinner is being together with family. We always invite our God to be present among us with a blessing, as it says in Luke 9:16.

**How would you describe the way you approach faith? God? Prayer?**

Believing without doubt and praying with confidence, I ask God for my needs.

**What is the best decision you have ever made?**

In life there are always ups and downs, but whatever the case, the best decision is to be myself and to follow Jesus.

**Can you name a piece of art (painting, music, etc.) or writing (literature, essays, etc.) that touches you and tell us why?**

A song called “BAHRI” means (SEA) which is dedicated by an Eritrean singer to those who lost their life in the Mediterranean Sea while crossing to the Europe.

**What is your greatest fear?**

I do not have any fear, I was told in Isaiah 41:10:

‘Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’

**Would you say that you’re basically an optimistic person? Do you have hope for the future of the world?**

As son of God always I live and believe with hope, and there is always bright future by following God. As He says, He is the way and light.

**How do you relax?**

I relax by praying and positive thinking by listening to my favorite music.

**Can you describe something beautiful?**

The beauty which does not come from appearances, such as elaborate hairstyles and wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes, but from within, such as a gentle and quiet spirit.

**When you do feel uncomfortable in a social situation?**

When I am not able to help people from suffering in their bad situation.

**What is something that you miss from your home country or town?**

I miss the get-together with families for Sunday afternoon traditional coffee. As it says in psalm 133:1, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

**How do you and your family celebrate Easter? Do you have any unique family traditions?**

Easter in Tigrigna (the Eritrean language) is called ‘Fasica’ or ‘Tensae.’ We celebrate this by fasting around the 56-day period of Lent, when no meat or animal products of any kind, including milk and butter, are eaten. Good Friday starts off by going to church, and is a day of preparation for breaking this long fasting period.

## Update from Ghana

### John Evans-Klock

We moved to Ghana last year because of Chris' appointment as UN Resident Co-ordinator. It has certainly been a year of new challenges. Chris is engaged with co-ordinating the efforts of the various UN agencies here, promoting the UN goals such as economic development, human rights, peaceful elections and crisis readiness. My challenges were easier – free time (I have set up an enrichment website about IB economics, and helped write a review guide for econ students, among other things), and adjusting to being part of the diplomatic community. Our favourite time was the visit by Cory and Jasper at Christmas.

To give a sense of our experience of living here, it might be better to use a single event, rather than snippets from the year. The Friday and Saturday spent at the Millennium Excellence Awards might capture it well. From my point of view, it began in confusion: we were expected to appear in formal clothes, but I learned quite late that this included a "black tie" event. Scrambling to find my first bow tie, I found three stores with bow ties, but only the colourful ones favoured here for weddings. Finally a wedding outfitter ordered one from the depths of the enormous outdoor market, traveling by "tro-tro" (taxivan) to sell it to me

Chris has a driver, in part because the roads of Accra are poorly lit and the deep drain gulleys at the sides of roads can be hazardous to night driving. He drove us to Kumasi, Ghana's second city and the seat of the Asantahene or King of the Ashantis, for the Awards of which the King is a major sponsor. In a rather moving ceremony, awards were presented to Ghanaian scientists, peacemakers, playwrights, humanitarians, and the like, many of them interviewed live. For me the high point was the award to Anas Aremeyaw Anas, the undercover "sting" journalist who created a furor this year by exposing corruption in the judiciary. He covers his face with bead chains so pictures do not reveal his identity, and there were two others dressed the same for the acceptance, to further confuse revenge attempts.

At the end we were treated to a somewhat extemporaneous address by former president Jerry Rawlings, whose speech from jail back in 1980 led to his rescue and the end of a military coup, but who staged his own military coup after less than a year of civilian government. After more than a decade as dictator he instituted democracy and was elected president twice, then allowed power to pass democratically to the opposition. He remains a force on the political scene.



He was followed by an urbane but pointed speech from the Asantahene, complete with traditional horn-blowing introduction. The evening was unforgettable. Living in Ghana is like that: encountering contradictions held in suspension, feeling that the past and the future are close together.



### Annual Spring Assembly: Sunday 29 May

Our annual spring assembly is scheduled for 29 May. Among other things, we'll hear reports from various ministries in the congregation and elect new members of the Congregation Council. Members, please mark your calendars now and plan to join.

### Save the Date: Celebration of Our Building - 4 and 5 June

We began a year of celebrating our building's 250th birthday with a festive Sunday on 7 February. And we will be continuing with a weekend-long celebration in June.

Save the date now: on Saturday 4 June, there will be activities throughout the church, including a treasure hunt for children, good food, and a concert by *duo N'imPorte Quoi* (featuring our own Koko Taylor). On Sunday 5 June, we will be worshipping at the Madeleine Church in the Old Town, along with other Lutheran congregations, and sharing a meal together afterward.

*Please plan to join in the celebration!*

## Holy Week Worship

(All services held at the church)

- **Sunday 20 March: Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion, 11h00**

*We begin with the joyful story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and continue through a reading of the passion narrative.*

- **Thursday 24 March: Maundy Thursday, 19h30**

*We commemorate Jesus' last night with his disciples with a service of Communion and footwashing.*

- **Friday 25 March: Good Friday, 19h30**

*We tell the story of Jesus' trial and death and depart in silence.*

- **Saturday 26 March: Easter Vigil, 20h30**

*We gather with the German-Speaking Congregation for the Great Vigil of Easter – telling biblical stories of deliverance and celebrating the light of the resurrection. The service concludes with a feast in the sanctuary.*

- **Sunday 27 March: Easter Sunday, 11h00**

*The celebration of Easter continues with a festive worship on Easter Sunday.*