



The Rector writes



*You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,
nor of the arrow that flies by day;
Of the plague that stalks in the darkness,
nor of sickness that lays waste at mid-day.*

Psalm 91:5-6

Like many people I had no real concept of what a pandemic might be like. The Spanish flu of 1918-20 had only been rarely mentioned in the course of my life; Aids and Ebola were more real to me but experienced at arms' length. It was only when I visited Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, and prayed in the Chapel there dedicated to all those who have lost their lives from Aids, that I was confronted with the enormous tragedy of Aids and overwhelmed with grief. For me, like many in my generation, the battle for public health had been fought and won. There was nothing to worry about. Any thought of a global pandemic never crossed my mind. If catastrophe were to hit the world, it would be as a result of nuclear war, a financial crash, or the devastating, progressive impacts of climate change.

My initial reaction to reports that the respiratory illness which had caused such illness, death, and a total shutdown of the Chinese province of Wuhan in December 2019 and which was now about to surface in Switzerland, was one of denial. When Noël Urassa, the Parish Administrator, texted me a headline from a local paper "*la peste est aux portes de Genève*", I texted back immediately assuring him that this was not the case. I had followed the outbreak in Les Contamines-Montjoie in the Haute Savoie and none of the British skiers had travelled via Geneva airport. This was in late February. Within two weeks such denialism was swept away. Reports of a deteriorating situation in Italy and the spread of the virus to Ticino and the Valais brought a sobering reality close to home.

By mid-March, the public mood had changed. People had become aware that this virus was highly contagious. Experts were not exactly certain how it was transmitted but it was clear that human to human contact was involved. People began to wear gloves and sanitize their hands. Then Bishop Mark issued a post in which he was masked: a colorful silk scarf covering his face. Few others at that point were wearing masks, and with the science not having made a ruling, many, including myself, considered contact with infected surfaces a more likely source of infection. Before long, scientists confirmed that the major vehicle of transmission was through droplets and aerosols from people infected. Evidence had begun to emerge that superspreaders – that is highly contagious individuals – could infect many people with whom they had been in contact. Worryingly, evidence was emerging that some of these superspreader events had taken place in church gatherings and among choirs.

Emmanuel held its last gathered service before the first lockdown on Sunday March 15th. About 23 people attended: the nervousness and fear were palpable. Laura Messenger did a wonderful job as Usher, taking a list of those attending and ensuring hand sanitizing and socially distanced seating. And so, for the first time since the Second World War, Emmanuel had to close its doors. But while the church building was shut for public worship, Emmanuel was very much open as worship was transformed into an on-line experience. A church without walls was being born. It was as if the Staff Team had been hand-picked for such a crisis: Shauna Beesley drew on her experience as a former BBC singer and adapted instantly and skilfully to recording hymns and organ voluntaries. Most movingly, her mother back in Australia was able to watch and hear her daughter sing and play at Emmanuel. Deacon Richard, too, found that his fine singing voice enabled him to bring to life the beautiful but largely forgotten canticles in the Prayer Book. The Easter Dawn Service in the garden of Emmanuel was particularly memorable. And Noël Urassa brought his interest in filming and editing into play:

services were recorded on his iPhone and then carefully edited over many hours. The Emmanuel community from the safety of their own homes was astonished and ecstatic at the quality of on-line worship. Eager faces appeared at the new zoom coffee hour. Everyone marvelled at how people could contribute to worship by reading lessons or leading prayers from their own homes and that all this could be



woven seamlessly into one coherent offering to God. To crown it all, the Emmanuel Virtual Choir was born thanks to the ingenuity and dedication of Andrew Close. It is still hard to conceive how 15 to 20 choir members from around the world could record their voices individually and that these could all be put together to create one sound. The Emmanuel Virtual Choir was one of the earliest virtual choirs to emerge and made quite an impact on the wider Episcopal Church. For Emmanuel parishioners, the Offertory on Easter Day perhaps had the most meaning: the hymn "I am the bread of life" culminated in a great many of the Emmanuel family rising up from their chairs for the final chorus "I will raise him up". It was a true sign of resurrection faith and that the pandemic would not overcome the resilience and faith of this community.

From mid-March, Emmanuel's midweek prayers and bible study along with Vestry and Commission meetings moved to the online platform, Zoom. Some new members joined – it was particularly delightful to have people join who live many miles from Geneva. Virtual church was emerging as the new reality. The Inreach team was expanded and a team of 18 appointed whose task was to contact everyone in the parish initially once a week and then more latterly once a fortnight. A regular Sunday evening Inreach meeting online held the whole parish in prayer and forged a real sense of purpose and pastoral care.

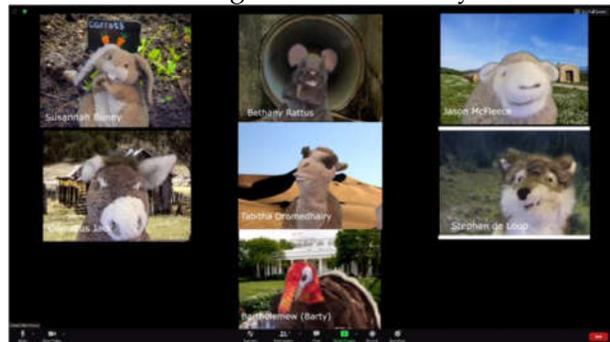
Throughout the spring and early summer, Geneva experienced glorious weather. The confinement in Switzerland was not as severe as that in France. One could go out for a walk or a cycle ride. At times with the sun shining it was hard to believe that a very different reality was taking place behind the doors of the HUG as the university hospital receiving a surge in ill and dying patients suffering from Covid-19.

In early July, Emmanuel was able to open its doors again: some significant changes had been made: remote hand sanitizer machines were at each door; a strict cleaning schedule was in place; pew cushions had been removed along with prayer books and hymnals. Parishioners were required to wear masks at all times and had to sit in designated seats well distanced from each other. By this stage, WiFi had been extended to the church and the services could still be live streamed. Mid-week the African Singing Group began to meet in one of the parks, and a rota of choir members would form quartets to sing the hymns in church. Church attendance had dropped by 66% but gradually confidence began to return and numbers increased to 30 at the 10:30 service. Peter Cloutier managed to devise safe protocols for Coffee Hour outside. Everyone really missed Breaking Bread and other activities that brought the community together socially on a regular basis but such gatherings remained out of the question.

A visit from Bishop Mark in mid-September led to a re-evaluation of our procedures. It was clear that Emmanuel was operating safely and that robust procedures were in place. However, it was decided to reduce the number of those singing to four. Gathered services continued throughout the autumn but by November it was clear that infection rates were rising and that a second lockdown had to take place. The Feast of All Saints was celebrated at St Germain on Sunday November 1st and after that Emmanuel had to close its doors again. Gathered worship was restored on Christmas Eve for the midnight Communion.

The Virtual Commission behind the scenes was busy planning to upgrade the equipment - Noël's phone had done stalwart service but for regular livestreaming some serious equipment was needed. The Vestry gave a grant of CHF 10'000 and together with some generous donations from parishioners state-of-the-art cameras and recording equipment were purchased and installed. David Pittuck spent many hours on his knees fitting new cabling to the newly created sound and video desk at the back of the church. The results of the new cameras were widely welcomed. So powerful were the lenses that the Rector remarked in a sermon that "even the hairs on your head are all numbered!" Mike Romer made a purpose-built desk to house the new equipment and the team of Noël Urassa, Andrew Close, and David Pittuck began to master how to operate it.

Christmas 2020 was quite different from anything that had been experienced before. People were unable to travel abroad to be with family and loved ones. In Geneva, a population that had been confined for such a long time often took to the shops abandoning all concept of social distancing. All the time, the likelihood of a resurgence of the virus lurked in the background. On Sunday December 20th, Emmanuel held a beautiful and creative virtual Service of 9 Lessons and Carols. People from all over the world shared in the readings and virtual singing. A family Christmas Eve service revealed that the Emmanuel Puppet Company could still bring joy and laughter. Christmas Midnight Communion was profoundly moving both for those gathered in church and those participating at home.



Throughout Switzerland questions began to be raised by faith communities as to whether worship could continue under strict conditions. In Geneva, a court ruled that worship could take place. Nevertheless, the Canton's health experts drew up a list of conditions: this included a total ban on singing except for the chanting of the ministers. This has proved immensely challenging.

By mid-January 2021, there had been a significant rise in infections throughout Switzerland. The federal authorities acted promptly and introduced a confinement throughout the whole of Switzerland. Restaurants, cafés, and all but essential shops had to close again. Technically Emmanuel

could have stayed open but with singing banned and with serious warnings from the Federal authorities about the perilous situation, the Vestry made the decision to close the church until March – the sole exception being Ash Wednesday.

So what have we learned from this experience of living through a global pandemic?

First, the theme of lament is close to our hearts. It is heart-breaking to see shops and restaurants closed; airports deserted; all forms of social gatherings including sports events banned. Hard too to think that one cannot travel to see loved ones; that hugs and kisses and all the easy interactions that we took for granted are now no longer permissible. That human contact that is so precious, so incarnational, is replaced by the virtual. The Book of Lamentations that describes the destruction of Jerusalem speaks today of our experience:

*The roads to Zion mourn,
for no one comes to the festivals;
all her gates are desolate,
her priests groan;
her young girls grieve,
and her lot is bitter.*

Lamentations 1:4

Second is the call to trust the science. The assault on the World Health Organization and the constant denialism of science if inconvenient to the political aims of some governments has been deeply worrying. The assault on the truth by conspiracy theories and discrediting of vaccines is even more disturbing. Overcoming lies, deception, denialism is crucial in order to overcome the pandemic. Bearing witness to truth requires courage, determination and application. It saves lives.

Third, the hope, creativity and resilience that faith brings. Stories of care; the digging deep to discover deep inner spiritual strength, and when empty and devoid of such well springs of well-being to be spiritually replenished through prayer, scripture and friendship. As St. Paul writes: *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is about to be revealed to us.”* Romans 8:18

Finally, thank you! Thank you for being part of this extraordinary family of Emmanuel and for playing your part throughout the pandemic in encouraging and enabling Emmanuel to flourish. Your creativity, love, and hope will be always remembered. I am confident that Emmanuel will emerge from this pandemic with a deeper confidence in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and will go from strength to strength.

Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Michael



Covid-19 and Emmanuel

From a Virtual Emmanuelite

I'd been meaning to visit Emmanuel for eight years.

As a more-or-less lifelong Episcopalian, growing up at St. Andrew's by-the-Lake in Duluth, Minnesota, and attending St. Paul's on-the-Hill in St. Paul, Minnesota, one of the first things I did when we moved to Zug was to look up churches. I was disappointed to find out that the only Episcopal congregation in the confederation was on the other side of Switzerland (and didn't have a single hyphen in its name) but I vowed to take a weekend trip to Geneva to check it out. Alas, the *Röstigraben* proved too deep (*en français*: the *Barrière des Röstis* proved too high), so I was pleased to read during the first lockdown – more than seven years after that fateful vow – that Emmanuel Geneva would be offering virtual Midday Prayer.



When I clicked on the Zoom link for the first time, I wasn't sure what to expect. Usually, when visiting a new church, I would sneak in and take a seat in the last row... But there are no back pews in a Zoom call. Luckily, the three strange faces staring back at me though my monitor turned out to be incredibly welcoming, friendly, and kind – as has every other Emmanuelite that I've encountered since then. I've been attending both Midday Prayer and Bible Study regularly for the last ten months, and I feel at home.

I'm no stranger to Online Church. My younger sister is a priest, so every Saturday via Skype, we used to hear a sermon. Then we would analyze it and offer (mostly) constructive

criticism so that she could tweak it before delivering it to her congregation the next day. [NOTE: Do not try this at home; we've found that not every priest appreciates immediate, unfiltered feedback on their homilies].

I've also watched recorded services off and on for years. When lockdown hit, there were suddenly more options: I watched livestreamed Eucharists from the Washington National Cathedral, Evening Prayers from Canterbury Cathedral, and Holy Week services from Smoky Mary's in NYC.

But by far the best virtual church I've experienced is at Emmanuel. I cherish the Midday Prayer and Bible Study sessions for their interactivity (St. Chrysostom says 'When *two or three* are gathered together in his Name', not '*two or three hundred who are all on mute*'). I also love the recorded Sunday services. I recognize names and people, even some that I've never met, and I can feel the sense of community and life during the Announcements. As I sit at my desk with my Agape Orange, I don't feel like a spectator; I feel like a member.

As an Episcopalian on the far side of the *Röstigraben*, I am incredibly blessed to be able to participate virtually. The chance to become involved with this community during the past ten months has been a sparkling silver lining to the somber grey of lockdown. Thank you all for welcoming me to Emmanuel on-the-Internet, and I look forward to meeting you in real life someday soon!

Megan Meyer



Ah – the good old days ...

and more to come ...

10:28 Rue Alfred-Vincent – Michael welcoming at the door, Richard putzing about, Evelyne pinching a blossom or weed, French cars pulling up on the sidewalk,... then the bell!

Remember?

Inside – Miss Jones' and Jeya's hats, toddlers kicking over the kneelers, phones being hushed, the choir jostling at the rear, ushers coaxing people forward, African colors vying with the stained glass windows – then the music!

Remember?

People – singing – reading – a thought provoking sermon – the Peace – quiet reflection –musical bursts of joy – subtle chit chat to coffee hour – munchies and more conversation. Crowning it all: Breaking Bread and cultural gastronomy!

Remember?

Covid gathered version: take out singing, chit chat, it's almost the same, except now you're registered, a number and not many of them! A certain serenity in a reduced church – masked coffee hour outside – no Breaking Bread.

Remember?

Well, now it's pyjamas and coffee and a comfy couch – the coffee hour community reduced to moveable tiles (munchies DIY).

Community remembered? Just.

A little fast backwards to "The American Church" with two ordained ministers, a lay associate, a full-time secretary, and a concierge! Coffee hour a noisy social scramble between Sunday school collection, out-of-office politics, mix and match and even romance.

Brooks and Marilyn remember.

Back to the present, time marches on and so does the community. Change is the theme. Waxing and waning in numbers and mix, but flexibility, solid spirituality, hospitality, charitability, conviviality – it's all still here.



The oldies are possibly less adaptable, missing coming together with the generations, their little routines before and after church, singing the hymns (Miss Jones won't come 'til we can), struggling with the techniques of Zoom and Bluetooth, Robert appreciating the contacts, but no substitute for real coffee hour, not comfortable with Bible studies or discussions on line, yet some appreciate replaying earlier sermons, as well as the flexibility of enjoying a Sunday morning walk, catching the church service later in the day. Great for the hard of hearing...and getting to know a few names!

And think of the talent we have discovered among us! Who would have thought an office administrator could turn into a Golden Globe film producer? The Beesley-Close combo was known for its surprising skills, now cyber miracles crossing oceans with a virtual choir. Would a CERN physicist expect to retire as a sound engineer? The depth of African music and always the pertinent sentiments poetically expressed by Kathleen. Who knew we had Cantors? Helena's carefully selected artwork to inspire. Polyvalent Richard, readers we knew and more we didn't, with Megan and Tommy injecting youthful insights.

But none of these blessings could materialize without the thoughtful and artistic orchestration of our noble leader, Michael, and his creative inspiration.

Not your stodgy old Episcopal Church, but energy, adaptability, youth and vigor, for young and old.

Will we remember?

You bet we will !

Marilynn Geiger – with input from Miss Jones, Brooks Hansen, and Robert Race

A Virtual Church

This is part of the long story of how Emmanuel Church struggled with the Covid-19 lockdowns and ended up by redefining itself, serving a global membership.

By the beginning of March 2020 it had become clear that Covid-19 was going to be a serious problem, but I don't think anyone expected things to move so fast in the middle of the month. The building was closed to the public with about two days' notice. At the time of that last gathered service, no one had any idea that we would be still fighting the pandemic a year later.

Immediately after the lockdown, Noel leaped into action to see if it was possible to livestream a service just using his phone and the church Wi-Fi. The answer was a resounding "no", but it was a good test because we knew why it failed – the Wi-Fi wasn't up to it.

Some more rapid action resulted in the first lockdown service being recorded just five days after the announcement, in time to be made available on the following Sunday. Andrew and Noel would find themselves filming and editing services for many months.

Very soon after, Shauna and Andrew had the idea to call on the choristers of Emmanuel, past and present, to join in a Virtual Choir and sing an anthem for inclusion in the service. So a choir was formed that could never have existed in "real life", with singers from Switzerland, France, UK, USA and Australia. Following this lead, we also enjoyed services with the lessons being read out in Taiwan and California as well.

In many ways the recorded services were too successful. A very high standard of the final product meant that to maintain the standard, many takes may have been

required on a Thursday evening, when everyone was tired from a full day's work. And then Andrew and Noel would have to spend hours over the weekend putting it all together. I also wondered about the cognitive dissonance experienced by Michael as he stood on the threshold of the church, proclaiming "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" on the morning of Good Friday!

Because the recorded services were going so well, there was no urgency to do anything different. Livestreaming seemed risky in comparison and we were living in constant hope that this would be a temporary thing. One opinion was that the major driver for good Wi-Fi in the sanctuary was to enable people to read the bulletin on their phones and save paper. I was worried that this might lead to people watching Netflix during the sermon!

So it was mid-May before our thoughts turned back to establishing good internet access in the sanctuary. Some experiments showed that a simple Wi-Fi signal extender wasn't going to work, and that running a cable from the office area to (probably) the back of the church was the way to go. During this period, I learned a lot about the layout of the church, as we considered routes a cable might take. At one point I even considered running it down into the basement, up into the organ, out amongst the pipes and into the rafters. Other suggestions

included going via the Grande Salle and out through the frame of the altar window. In the end a KISS approach was taken and I further learned that, under the hand of Mike Römer, 20cm of 19th century stone-work, was only a minor obstacle.

If you really want to know: the cable starts in a cupboard in the office area, goes through the first wall, runs down the stairs to the basement, through the second hole,



along the wall of the “children's room”, then the third hole, into the organ blower-room, into the heating duct that runs the length of the sanctuary, up under the threshold of the west entrance, and finally runs below the cupboards at the back to the new Audio-Visual control desk.

Even that wasn't obvious – half-way through the project, we changed our minds about which side the control desk should go. A short and rarely used pew had to be sacrificed to make room.

And you haven't yet heard about the Hammer Horrors of “The Thing in the Crypt”! Well, it didn't drip blood, but masses of sawdust, if you did but look at it, let alone touch it, and it was actually in the heating duct (we don't really have a crypt). It had to go; and I needed a bath afterwards.

(Ditto, after crawling several times the length of the heating duct, through the dust and dirt, with the heating on.)

With this essential cable in place, we had the possibility to provide internet connection in the church, both by a good Wi-Fi signal, and by using the cable for a hard-wired connection in the final configuration. This gave Noel his next chance to try livestreaming at the end of June, and make the first successful “live” broadcast of the 5th July service, using just a phone.

All this time, Andrew, besides assembling the many tracks required to make up the regular virtual choir contributions (37 of them for “The Three Kings”!), was hunting around for the right equipment to use to marry a combination of two (or more) cameras, for interesting visuals, with our existing sound system, to provide clearer sound than could be achieved with just a mobile phone. This is an area where it's very easy to spend a small fortune on high-tech and the challenge is to keep within a modest budget. He did a good job and secured some great cameras at a big discount, and a control system that we could install ourselves, with the associated savings. We also managed



to obtain a couple of special microphones, second-hand, from our friends at GAOS (they are the ones that point unashamedly out of the rafters above the chancel).

Taking delivery in the middle of November, we needed a little time to install and configure the system and learn a complex set-up. A week later the first recordings were made with the new equipment – recording permits errors to be made and then corrected. By the end of the month we had made a successful livestream test, and it was sadly Gérard Fatio's funeral in the first week of December when we broadcast the first “live” service this way.

Since then, nearly all the services have been livestreamed and we have developed a way to insert pre-recorded material, so that it is experienced by both the remote audience and those physically present in the church. This is something that we will surely retain for the future. We are still learning, and sometimes it does go wrong. But mostly our output is something I'm proud to put my name to.

What have we achieved? We are making our services available to nearly all our parishioners (one without a computer gets a DVD in the post) and, on a sad note, we permitted hundreds of people to share in two funeral services, unhindered by travel restrictions. We have involved past and distant members of the church in our activities (notably in the virtual choir). And we have been discovered by people outside our immediate geographical area – for example, we have new members in Zug and Zurich – and the videos of the virtual choir have received over 6'000 views world-wide, with some being broadcast by John Beach, our former rector, as part of his services in Massachusetts.

I'm not the person to evangelize on a street corner, but I think we can make you a mighty fine soap-box to stand on.

David Pittuck

The Importance of the 8th Sacrament

Episcopalians like to joke that coffee hour is the 8th Sacrament. Actually, it's a very important sacrament. During the service we are fed the spiritual food through the primary sacrament of the Eucharist. We also hear the Word of God, pray, give praise and thanksgiving – and are then sent out into the world to do the work God has given us to do. That work begins at coffee hour, when we visit with friends, exchange a few casual words with people we may not know as well, mention how good the sermon was (or wasn't), laugh, commiserate, support – when, mingling with fellow parishioners and visitors, we build community.

The service may be central to the life of any parish. But we don't build community sitting in the pews. Ministry and fellowship take place in all the things we do for the rest of the week when the main service is over.



As the restrictions due to the current pandemic continue, and we don't know for how much longer, more and more I am feeling that what we miss most – and perhaps need most – is conversation. Conversation with good friends over a cup of coffee, a beer, or a meal. Conversations with your close friends that cover all sorts of shared interests, with joy, laughter, or sorrow. Conversations with colleagues as you get a cup of coffee together, walk down the hall, go for lunch, ... that may be about work and may be about family or other interests. Conversations with fellow students about today's class, working through the subject. Probably shorter conversations with people you don't know as well but see on a fairly regular basis – at church, work,

rehearsal, store, concert, ... And just short exchanges with people you don't know at all as you pay your bill, get on the bus, wait for the train, acknowledge service, ...

All of these conversations keep us connected, give support, and build community. Everyone is discovering how much can be done on line, to the point that some work places are considering never going back to the office. We can have meetings with people not just down the hall but people from around the world, and those meetings can be effective and get the work done. We can have classes for all age groups, wherever the students are. We can continue our regular church services – and include people now far away. This is all wonderful. My first reaction to Covid-19 restrictions was how marvelous this is, and to rejoice that even people not in the area can join in.

We're probably all doing things we weren't doing before, even though the possibility isn't new. Most churches never thought of livestreaming their service. Most family and friends never thought of getting together over zoom – even with those who live far away. What concerts and theatre there is have gone online, making it possible for people to "attend" from around the world. The examples could go on and on.

But we are social animals who converse, care for one another, and do things together. Wonderful as modern technology is in keeping us together in many ways, and facilitating getting the work done, it's not the same as doing it side-by-side and having all those conversations.

Casual conversations around the actual work or event are when we catch up on how people are, hear anecdotes major and minor about other people, keep up with the current life around us. It's also when we sound out their reactions, share ideas, seek advice, solve tension or minor problems before they become major problems. It's how we get to know one another, care for one another, develop relationships and build community in a way that just doesn't happen on zoom meetings.

Just one example. The Annual Convention of the Convocation had to go online last October. It was a very productive meeting. We heard good reports, complete with exciting pictures and videos about our task forces. Our bishop challenged us, as usual, as we continue to move ahead. We had very meaningful services. For those of us who have been before, it was good to see all those friends in their little rectangles. But for newcomers, there was no opportunity to get informal guidance and background between meetings. For all of us, there was no opportunity to talk informally about the items on the agenda or anything else. Not sharing meals and those joyful dinners, we couldn't really bring in the new participants, share fully in the joys of our Convocation, further build that wonderful community we have become. We simply couldn't have all those conversations. Pray that everyone can be in Nice this coming October.

Work is getting done. We're probably keeping up with close friends, one way or another. But we're losing contact with a lot of those people we know less well or see only in settings we no

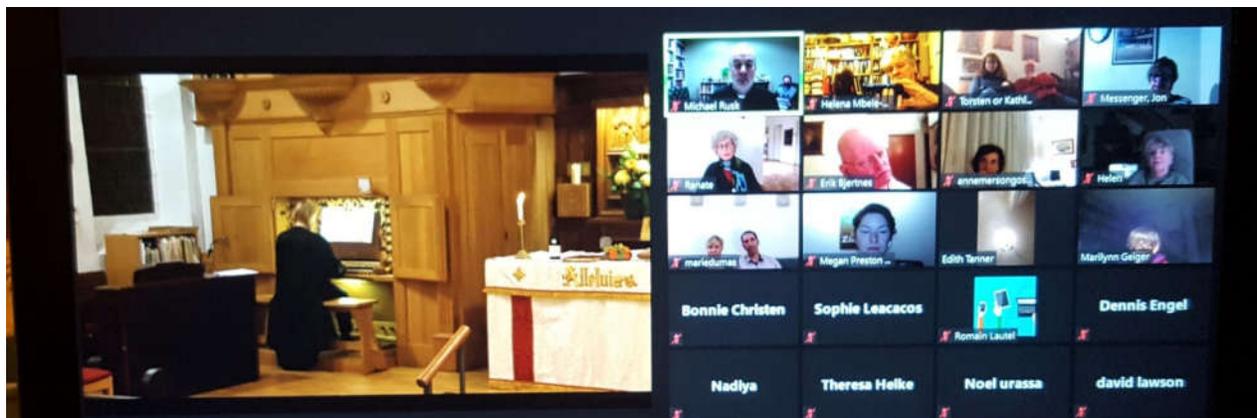
longer have. We're just not having very many conversations.



Which brings me back to the 8th sacrament. As Michael pointed out in his sermon the other week, through conversation we carry on the healing work of Jesus, caring for the other, lifting up those who are down, rejoicing and grieving together. We're all anxious for the day we can come back to church, sit in the pews, sing the hymns, listen to the sermon, receive the sacraments in the palm of our hand and from the common chalice. Then go up for coffee, say Hello to all the people we recognize, welcome the ones we don't, and have a longer conversation - at last - with our friends. To rejoice in our living community.

In the meantime, take care of yourself and of others. Come to the Zoom Coffee Hour. It's better than no coffee hour. You'll see people you know and some you don't and, actually, may get to know some of them better than you have after church. Even with their limitations, you'll be doubly refreshed - from the service and from the conversation.

Helena Mbele-Mbong



Outreach

Christmas 2020 at Arabelle Foyer and Creche

The Emmanuel Outreach Commission, on behalf of our congregation, gave a Christmas donation and an oversize Christmas cake to this very special Geneva home for the protection of women suffering from abuse and family distress. The children's creche, which currently serves 22 children ages 0 to 5, did a great job of organizing: new equipment for the outdoor play area was wrapped in Christmas paper for the older kids to open with much animation, and everyone really enjoyed the cake! The creche director, Joëlle Gaspoz, has expressed sincere gratitude from the families and staff along with these photos to show us what they purchased. As we were unable to do our annual Christmas toy collection for needy Geneva children (due to restrictions of Covid-19), we are very happy we could do this instead. Hopefully for Christmas 2021 we will be able to return to our normal project of toy distribution, which is very popular and well supported by our congregation.



Sophie Leacacos

Lalgadh Leprosy Hospital, Nepal

The hospital, run by Graeme and Meena Clugston, is one of the world's busiest leprosy hospitals, diagnosing and treating nearly one-third of Nepal's new leprosy cases. Patient numbers are huge (over 117,000 in 2018). All care and treatment for patients is provided without charge. Emmanuel Church through its Outreach Commission has provided funds for several years, most recently to support care for leprosy-affected children and to reach and support needy children and schools in remote areas. We have just received a detailed report from Graeme which reads in part:

Grateful

"As we start this new year of 2021 wondering (with faith) what we will face, we look back over 2020 with much gratitude to God, and to you for your encouragement, love, prayers and support. Grateful that this has enabled us to continue tackling the accumulated mountains of leprosy work here, despite the COVID-pandemic, restrictions, lockdowns, and community fears. Also grateful that despite COVID-19 in the surrounding communities, our staff have remained COVID-free.



This is Saraswati – she has a claw hand already from leprosy. She is having physiotherapy daily and will have reconstructive surgery next Tuesday

COVID-19 numbers – and Leprosy Numbers – both still rising here in Nepal.

Covid-19 infections continue, but much are unmapped since people tend to be unwilling to take PCR tests even where these are available (which they aren't in remoter areas). Nepal is unable to distinguish whether a COVID infection is the usual variety or a new aggressive variant. Meantime, the Government (Communist Party of Nepal) has split, and has lost interest in encouraging or enforcing masks or social distancing. A batch of vaccines (Astra Zeneca Oxford) has been arranged with India, and front-line health workers are getting them first. So we (our Lalgadh clinical staff) got our first jab last Monday.

Likewise, leprosy has increased especially along the border areas of Nepal with India. Inability to get diagnosed early and treated over the past 12 months has increased the spread of the disease. We have a large back-log of leprosy – old and new – to catch up with.

Managing about 400 outpatients a day each day now – and in this daily load we have about 60 leprosy patients of whom 5-10 are new leprosy cases. This will progressively increase when the cold freezing weather starts to warm up towards end-February.

Christmas at Lalgadh Hospital

A lovely moving Christmas Eve program on 24 December. This remote region of Nepal – being mostly a Hindu population – many have never heard of Christmas nor its meaning. Although it's now against the law to preach Christianity, our Christmas Eve program is a fabulous occasion and an opportunity that no-one seems to object to, to sing carols, and tell the story of Jesus and meaning of Christmas. Then follows distribution presents – this year colourful pink and blue warm blankets and woolly hats to all the patients (about 70 altogether), and then Christmas snacks for all.

Children With Leprosy – rescued with your help

We have several children in hospital at the moment, including Bipin (15) pictured below. Above are some pics from yesterday... I caught them at meal-time. We try hard to rescue these children and many like them from leprosy early – before too much leprosy-damage distorts their hands, eyes and feet, and destroys their lives and futures... doing so enabled with your lovely help and support. We are so proud of you – truly!... and so profoundly grateful to you (as are these children and their mostly illiterate parents, who do not know you, nor even heard of Geneva nor where it is).



Bipin's hand has just been fixed, He is happy.

Bob White with Graeme Clugston



Ayadina Association

Where were you on August 4th, 2020? No matter where you were, you probably remember the shocking explosion at the port in Beirut that day, that claimed many lives and inflicted damage on countless homes and businesses in a wide radius. This, in a city already pummeled by the pandemic and an influx of refugees from neighboring Syria; the explosion and the misery it left in its wake prompted your Outreach Commission to see if there was anything Emmanuel might do to help in such a desperate emergency. We were quickly able to identify a small local NGO, Ayadina Association, whose approach and activities seemed to match both our desire to help, and our modest funds. The Ayadina Association was started some 15 years ago, in an underserved section of Beirut, by one woman who saw much need, and many possibilities. Today it is a vibrant center of community life, serving senior citizens and children. It's a clubhouse for Senior citizens, where they can socialize, and regain some independence, and also an arts education center for children. Ayadina believes that encouraging children and young people to express themselves through theatre, dance and music can be healing and transformative, a gateway to hope and a healthy alternative to delinquency and despair.

First the economy went into a crisis, then the pandemic hit, and then the port explosion. Ayadina met these challenges with determination: Seniors could no longer gather,

Jardin de Montbrillant

Lunch to feed one hundred and eighty-six
 Is not necessarily easy to fix
 Except if your team is a whole lot of fun
 And made up of friends good at getting things done
 The smiles we got from those who live on the street
 Filled all of our hearts with a joy hard to beat
 It's truly through giving we're blessed and receive
 The happiness we all so long to perceive

on account of social distancing, so the center became a soup kitchen providing hot meals for seniors to collect and share with their families (many are struggling financially because of the economic and health crisis, not to mention the explosion at the port). The very day after the explosion, staff and volunteers were cleaning the debris away, to be able to continue providing meals, psychosocial support and trauma recovery, both for seniors and kids.

As soon as we reached out to the association, they responded warmly and gratefully. After that, it was not hard to decide to add them to our list of recipients. The fact that they offer a sense of community to both the elderly and children, and to their whole families, appealed to us, because it mirrors the sense of community and fellowship that Emmanuel seeks to provide, across generational lines. We are in regular correspondence with Ayadina, most recently when they sent us their annual report for 2020. To sum it up, the best thing is to quote their own description of what they do and why: *At Ayadina Association, everyone is welcome and is treated with dignity and respect. We believe that by truly touching one person, a positive ripple effect is created, and an entire community is moved. By opening up opportunities at the center, hope trickles outward nourishing every home in every corner of the community.*

We urge you to visit

www.ayadinaassociation.org, to get a glimpse of this important work Emmanuel was able to contribute to, thanks to your generosity.

Ann Goslin



Kathleen Koch

Art



Helen Lom (January 2021)

“LIKE THE PHOENIX RISING FROM THE
ASHES ...”

Like the Phoenix rising from the ashes,
After the plague, the isolation, the destitution,
the fear, the shared pain,
We too shall rise.

Grateful for the gift of life still inside us and for
those we love who surround us,
Mindful of the many lessons learned about
ourselves, both the good and the bad.
We too shall rise.

Strengthened by the memory of dear souls lost
during these troubled times.
Inspired to live honorably, with purpose,
confidently looking up, not down, to make
them proud.
We too shall rise.

Hopeful for a brighter future, a better world, for
more kindness, more love, more compassion,
Guided always on this journey, oh God, by the
light of your presence and by your Grace,
We too shall rise.



Rosemary Ades

Jesus Mafa, Cameroon

You will have noticed a number of the illustrations reflecting the readings in the Weekly Epistle and the Sunday Bulletin are attributed to Jesus Mafa, Cameroon. But where are they from, exactly?

The Mafa are an ethnic group of agriculturalists in Northern Cameroon. In a predominately Muslim area, they are 50% Christian, but the Biblical images they were shown, largely European based, had no connection to their own community and life. In the 1970s the *Vie de Jesus* Mafa initiative was born. Led by the French Catholic missionary François Vidil, working with the Mafa Christian communities, a team of local church leaders, theologians and a carefully selected artist spent time with the people, reading Bible passages which were then reenacted by the people. These reenactments were photographed and sketched, forming the basis for the final paintings. There are more than 70 paintings depicting the stories from the four Gospels. One of the Mafa leaders

commented that many people of different cultures over time have depicted Jesus in their surroundings without in any way betraying the historical Christ. "The creation of a black Christ in Africa does not diminish at all the historical Christ, on the contrary, it enriches the universal meaning of the message of God." Indeed, the many Christian paintings being produced in recent times in the local vernacular enrich the understanding of the universal message of Christ to all of us.

Sources: Global Christian Worship, of Dec 7th, 2011, <https://globalworship.tumblr.com/post/13908904724/pictures-of-the-nativity-story-in-africa-jesus>, including the Quote: P. Pondy, School Director in Yaounde, Cameroon, Taken from <http://www.jesusmafa.com/anglais/accueil.htm> [now inactive website]

Vie de Jesus Mafa, <https://lentproject.wordpress.com/resources/visuals-video-painting-and-design/vie-de-jesus-mafa/>

The paintings are available at: The Art in the Christian Tradition (ACT) database of Vanderbilt University, at: <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-search.pl> (Search: Jesus Mafa)



The Wedding at Cana, Jesus Mafa



Memories from a walk in times of confinement, or The Grace of Nature. Helen Lom

*"Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!
And evening passed and morning came ... " (Genesis)*



The editor invites articles on things that are happening at Emmanuel, as well as poems, prayers, reflections, book reviews – anything you would like to share with our community.

With many thanks to all those who contributed to this edition.

Helena Mbele-Mbong, *Editor*. helena.mbele-mbong@orange.fr

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