



**For the salutary grace of God has appeared which offers salvation to all people,
disciplining us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires,
we should live chaste, upright and godly lives
in this present world. (Titus 2:11, 12)**



The great, the glorious, the ever-adorable grace of God that Christmas brings us is, first of all, redeeming grace; for it brings us redemption from all the enemies of our soul and reunites us in blessed communion with our God and Creator. Then, secondly, this adorable grace is universal grace, including all people. If but one single person were excluded from it, then Christmas would not prove the universal joyous festival it is now. Who, then, would know that he or she is not the unhappy person forever debarred from God's saving grace, forever doomed to perish in sin? How happy we ought to be that it is not true, that it has no foundation in God's sure Word what some teach, namely, that God from eternity has decreed to pass by with His saving grace the greater part of mankind!—But, in the third place, the grace of Christmas is also sanctifying grace; for it teaches and exhorts us to live soberly, that is, to lead a personally clean, moral, holy life; then to live righteously over against our neighbor, to love, help, and befriend him, as God's holy Law demands; and finally, to live godly, in true godliness before our Father in heaven, loving, serving, and obeying Him according to His divine Word. For this purpose Christ came, and "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14) But to lead such a holy life is beyond our own power. Only when the redeeming, universal, and sanctifying grace of Christmas lives in us by faith shall we strive to lead such a life. Friedrich W. Herzberger. CPH, 1922.

Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heaven's employ,
Adorned with prayer, and love, and joy;
So shall your Sovereign enter in,
And new and nobler life begin.
To Thee, O God, be praise
For word, and deed, and grace!

*May the redeeming, universal, and sanctifying grace of Christmas
live in you by faith to fill your heart with great joy
at this Christmas season and
throughout the new year!*

Stewards of Truth

by Rev. Thomas Soltis

Fake News

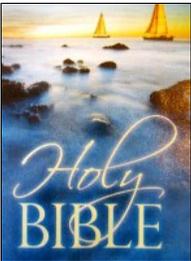
Ted Koppel, whose trusted reporting of the news began in 1963, remarked at the age of 76: "Today, people can choose the news that mirrors their views ... the convenient truths of the left and right bear little resemblance to the facts." What's the truth? That seems the big question for our times on both sides of the fence.

Fake Religious Views

In the conflicting realm of religion it's found that some people choose the views which satisfy their opinionated fancy. Fake news in the world is oftentimes tagged "propaganda". False views in the church are labeled "heresies". Churches reflecting different theologies condemn each other as heretics. But who's the heretic? . Who has the truth? Just what is truth? Pontius Pilate posed the question (probably sarcastically) after Jesus told him: "... for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (John 18:37-38) In John 14:6 Jesus insisted: "I am the way and the truth and the life." To know what's true among the many religious views believe what the Savior said.

The Standard for Truth

Everything in life benefits from regulating standards - from baking recipes, to traffic laws, to the U.S. Constitution. Truth needs a standard and God, the Holy Spirit, has already provided it. The Bible is the regulatory standard for truth. Historically, in Latin, the Scriptures have been designated the "Auctoritas Absoluta" (Absolute Authority) for truth.



Biblical Illiteracy

The scandalous problem of Biblical illiteracy today exists within churches as well as the world. A Barna religious poll once revealed that at least 12% of adult church members believed that Joan of Arc was the wife of Noah. Atheists reject the Bible's claim that God is the Creator, claiming they will believe only what can be proved scientifically. Yet they cling to the premise that matter and life arose by evolutionary processes which have proven to be unprovable by empirical science. Atheism is a faith system, in a sense, a religion. Many atheists, Biblically illiterate, become Christians when exposed to the power of the Holy Spirit through His inspired words in the Scriptures.

The Current Culture

"Postmodernism" is the catchword for our current culture. It invaded colleges and universities in the sixties, the decade of rebellion which renounced existing societal norms. "Neomodernism" has arisen to challenge Postmodernism. Kenda Creasy Dean summarized the tenets of Neomodernism in her book, "Almost Christian":

- ▶ A god exists who created and preserves the world.
 - ▶ God wants people to be good to each other as taught in the Bible and other religions.
 - ▶ The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself.
 - ▶ People obtain eternal life by doing good deeds.
- The tenets of Neomodernism, embraced by many millenials, almost sound Christian. But they contain half-truths and the glaring falsehood of self-salvation through good works, the antithesis of Christ-salvation as a gift. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Trendy Theology

Advertisizing vigorously moves us to be trendy. But trends come and go. Truth can be shaved to be trendy. Trendy theology today, instead of shaping society with Biblical truth, is shaped by societal trends. But heresies are not new. C.S. Lewis in his book, "Mere Christianity", writes: "Ideas about God, which are trotted out as novelties today, are simply the ones which true theologians judged centuries ago and rejected." St. Paul predicts falsehood in 2 Tim. 4:3-4: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." The majority of Protestant denominations today have accepted the trendy theology of "Historical Criticism", which claims the Bible contains "religious myths" and is not fully historically true. In his world of falsehood, St. Paul encouraged Timothy: "But you, keep your head in all situations." (2 Tim. 4:5) Good advice for us today!

Be a good steward (caretaker/manager) of truth.

RELATED RESOURCE

www.selc.lcms.org - Stewardship
Pastoral Helps: "Stewards of the Scriptures"



Prayer Requests

We mourn with the **family of Rev. Charles St-Onge** at the death of his father, Denis. After a battle with cancer, Denis fell asleep in Jesus on December 12th.

Service of Christian Burial was held on December 12th. Interment will wait for the spring, and be at Grace Lutheran Church cemetery, Rankin, Ontario.

†††

Pastor Joseph Leech (St. John LC in Hazelton) requests your prayers for these members of his congregation: **Lisa S and Pastor Ron Smith and his wife, Barbara.**

†††

On December 6th, **Pastor Mueller** sent an update on his health. We ask for your continued prayers for God's care and healing for Pastor Mueller.

†††

Honduras Mission Trip "Operation Barefoot"

Steve Wolf and Paul Best traveled to Honduras with St Luke's Church in Oviedo in December on a mission trip. They are distributing the shoes collected in October. You can follow their trip on a blog found on the St. Luke's web page. Or just click on <http://childrenoflove.stlukes-oviedo.org/>

This is your newsletter ...

The Lutheran Beacon

Send your articles and photos to:

gailpete37@yahoo.com

Photos must be submitted as separate attachments [NOT as part of your article--JPEG format preferred.] You may send multiple photos in one email. Gail Peterson, Ed.

**DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY ISSUE
IS JANUARY 12TH**



A SPECIAL INVITATION TO VISIT WITH **Rev. Bill Wrede, Director of Admissions** CONCORDIA SEMINARY ST. LOUIS

Maryland and Pennsylvania Itinerary

January 6-10, 2020

You are invited to meet with Rev. Bill Wrede, Director of Admissions at Concordia Seminary, to discuss seminary education and the path to becoming a pastor or deaconess. Please contact Rev. Wrede at 314.505.7221 or wredew@csl.edu to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are also welcome.

Monday, January 6

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church
31 Rowe Blvd.
Annapolis, MD 21401
410.268.2400—4:00 to 8:00 pm

Tuesday, January 7

Pastor Wrede is available for Individual appointments in Northern Maryland. Contact him to arrange a meeting.
Concordia Lutheran Church
17906 Garden Lane
Hagerstown, MD 21740
301.797.5955—3:00 to 7:00 pm

Wednesday, January 8

Pastor Wrede is available for individual appointments in Northern Maryland and Southern Pennsylvania. Contact him to arrange a meeting.

Saint John Lutheran Church
2580 Mount Rose Ave.
York, PA 17402
717.840.0382—3:00 to 7:00 pm

Thursday, January 9

Lutheran Church of Saint Andrew
1530 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20905
301.384.4394—4:00 to 8:00 pm

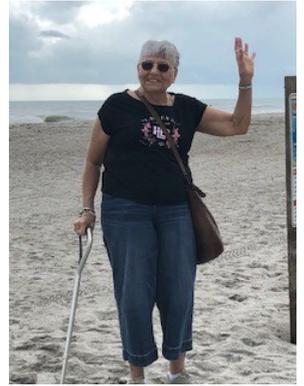
Friday, January 10

Pastor Wrede is available for individual appointments inside the Beltway. Contact him to arrange a meeting.

What's Happening at the Haven! 1

by Diane Leining

The day was a bit dreary and the threat of rain was all around us, but a group of Haven residents went to Cocoa Beach in the middle of November!! As we got closer to the beach, the skies got brighter and we ventured out to the ocean. A few got their toes wet and one got a little too up close and personal with the Atlantic – oops!



We then went to the World Famous Ron Jon's Surf Shop to explore and shop. Lunch was at a great seafood restaurant and the ride home was quiet!!



What's Happening at the Haven! 2

by Diane Leining

A group of ladies have been meeting once a week to learn line dancing and they had their first performance for the residents. Dressed in orange and black, the girls gave us a lively show and even encouraged members of the audience to dance with them. A fun afternoon for everyone. Dancing has no age limit!



Every year the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra and the Messiah Choral Society gives the community the gift of a free performance of Handel's Messiah. Two buses of Haven residents went again this year and were treated to a marvelous and professional concert. Our residents stood and sang the Hallelujah Chorus loud and proud!! We are very fortunate to be able to attend this gift!

There is a town near Oviedo, Florida where the Haven is located called Christmas! We visited there last week with a group of residents to get their Christmas cards postmarked from Christmas. There is also a fort there, which we will visit in the spring. We went to lunch – just a small short outing, but sometimes those little things are necessary.



Our Music Ministry here at the Haven has a long tradition of providing wonderful musical events. This week, they once again graced us all with a Christmas Concert entitled "Love Joy Peace". It was a lovely performance by our Haven Choir, under the direction of Dr. Paul Foelber and our Golden Bell Ringers, led by Kathie Zastrow. Rev. Wally Arp from St. Luke's was the narrator with the readings. Cookies, punch and eggnog were served to the largest resident-attended event. We are blessed to have so many very talented people in our midst here at Lutheran Haven!

As Christmas approaches, we are all very aware of the Reason for the Season –

the birth of Our Savior, Jesus Christ!!

On behalf of the residents and staff, we wish you all a most joyous and blessed Christmas Season

Obedience (Christ's and Ours) in a New Year of Grace

by Pastor Ken Ballas, EM

Christian cartoonist, Charles Schulz, described his beloved beagle dog Snoopy's indisputably flawed job interview application as follows:

Place of Birth: Daisy Hill Puppy Farm

Education: Obedience school drop-out

Although this article for January in the Year of Lord AD 2020 isn't primarily intended as another seasonal piece on New Year's resolutions, the old maxim, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" comes to mind. The longer one is permitted to live in this transitory world, however, it makes better sense to reflect on a thought like, "As God's beloved children, we are never too old to learn" – including patient obedience to God's will even during periods of suffering.

The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that even our Lord Jesus as God's incarnate Son "learned obedience through His sufferings" (Heb. 4:15; 5:7-8). What this means in terms of Christ's redemptive earthly mission necessarily entails what our Brother-Savior also had to do regarding God's holy Ten Commandments, something with which we all struggle!

Despite the sobering fact that we have all fallen tragically short of God's glorious intention in living lives of perfect obedience (see Rom. 3:23), where we failed, the Son of God and Mary's Son, though severely tempted, did not fail to achieve the required perfect obedience our just and holy God still has every right to expect of any human being who ever lived.

Pastors, teachers and heads of families can scarcely overemphasize the importance of thorough catechetical instruction of God's precious blood-bought children (and adults!) also with regard to Christ's so-called "active obedience," the biblical teaching that Jesus had to live for us before also willingly dying for us becoming "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Strange as it may seem also to us long-time believers (one hesitates to say "life-long" believers as none of us was born Christian!), Christ did not "simply" die for us and rise again. Although only Jesus' perfectly sinless death could benefit others, it is also true that anyone can die on a cross! Again, what makes Christ's death uniquely special is that He alone first had to be totally without sin for our just and merciful God to accept as sufficient payment for the sins of a rebellious fallen world in order to appropriate to each of us the redemptive merits of His only Son as the necessarily spotless sacrificial Lamb of God. All this our just and merciful Triune God resolved to do (and thankfully did do!) for us all as these are the ways of God for us all.

Since his death in 2000, the creator of "Peanuts" remains with us visually especially through his lovable Scripture-quoting (biblically named!) "stand-in," Linus van Pelt (2 Tim. 4:21). Thankfully, over the years we have been privileged to know scores of like-minded "real people" who with us have been led to believe how and why our Brother-Savior and living Lord Jesus who (again) though severely tempted (think Gethsemane and the repeated diabolical taunts of false teachers at the Cross!) was anything but a "drop-out" from His (and our) Heavenly Father's school of obedience.

Given our incarnate Christ's "flawless resume" of an absolutely perfect ever coalescing active and passive obedience, we are now doubly "freed up" a). to abandon the ridiculous notion of our ever being in a position legalistically of doing God the favor of "hiring Jesus" as our personal Savior; and b). positively, to thank and praise, serve and obey Him by loving one another! Because Scripture ever remains its own best interpreter, check out for yourself: Is. 53:9; Matt. 3:15; 5:17; Lk. 23:41; John 1:17, 29; 3:16-17; 8:45f.; Acts 10:38; Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 5:21; 10:5; Gal. 4:4ff.; Heb. 2:8ff.; 9:22b; 10:5-10, 18; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5 et al.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

by the Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, Emeritus Executive Director Lutherans For Life

submitted by Ziggy Rein

God blessed Abram —“**I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you**”—to be a blessing,“**I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing**” (Genesis 12:2). Blessed to be a blessing we use this pleasant sounding phrase in a variety of settings. Recently a couple of children helped me understand its meaning a little more deeply.

Rob Bandy helped me. Rob is now with Jesus, but his mother talked about him at a plenary session during our national conference in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Rob came into this world with a rare genetic disorder that resulted in a multitude of severe mental and physical problems.

Jamie Lamb helped me. I listened to Roberta with granddaughter Jamie asleep in my arms. She looked so beautiful. I remember thinking what a blessing it was that she wasn't born with all the problems Rob had to deal with. But then Roberta talked about what a blessing Rob was because he had all those problems! God taught me some things through Rob and Jamie.

Blessings come from God. I guess we all understand that. Through Rob and Jamie, God made clearer to me that He also defines blessings. God decides what blessings are. We associate blessings with good things — the blessings of good health or a good marriage or a good job. But God doesn't think that way. The great preacher, C. H. Spurgeon, once said, The greatest earthly blessing that God can give to us is our health, with the exception of sickness. Sometimes something bad happens, but God uses it as a blessing. I remember getting sick once when I was very, very busy. I thought, God, I don't need this now. But the sickness made me slow down and rest which turned out to be a real blessing! God blessed Abram. He blessed him with specific blessings and for a specific purpose. Through His lineage, Jesus, the Savior of the world, would come.

God blessed Rob and Jamie with their unique blessings for their unique purposes. Rob was blessed to allow people to serve their Savior as they served him. Now his purpose according to God's plan is fulfilled. He abides in Heaven. Jamie's purpose still unfolds as the Spirit of Jesus given in her baptism continues to bless. God's blessings upon these children have nothing to do with good or bad. His blessing has to do with what was and what is best for His plan for their lives. God is the one Who blesses and Who decides what blessings are.

Being a blessing also comes from God. Abram was a blessing because of what God did through him as part of His plan of salvation. You may recall that God often had to work in spite of Abram! But it doesn't matter how well we get it or how we look or how smart we are or whether we can talk or walk. God makes us a blessing to others. That's why Rob was a blessing. God was at work in Rob's life through his smiles and hugs and even in all the bad things that happened. His life is a witness to the power of God in Christ. God works in Jamie's life and makes her a blessing. She is a blessing to my wife and me. She is a blessing to the thousands across the country whom I have forced to view her pictures in my PowerPoint™ presentations! The future will be full of opportunities in which God will be at work using Jamie as one of His many blessing dispensers.

A society that forgets God and the love He reveals in Christ loses this perspective entirely. They do not see blessings; they see products of conception. They see burdens” and mistakes” and no quality of life. God does not look at things this way. God does not see a perfect child or an imperfect child. God sees someone to bless and through whom He can be a blessing. Whom do you see?

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Handling the Word of Truth

Supporting Theological Education in Togo and West Africa

Missionary Rev. Jacob W. Gaugert

Nov.-Dec. 2019

Vol.7 Issue 2

Prayer

- Thanksgiving for the ordination of Pr. DJEKOAB

- That the Lokpano parish would be motivated to share their first-fruits in good stewardship to support the Ministry of their parish and pastor in their community

- For guidance for the Lutheran Church of Togo (ELT) as they plan for more ordinations in the near future

- For commitment and good preparation for two pastors of the ELT who will serve as part-time faculty at CLET this upcoming academic trimester

- For healing for Director SOUK of the CLET who is recovering from a motorcycle accident



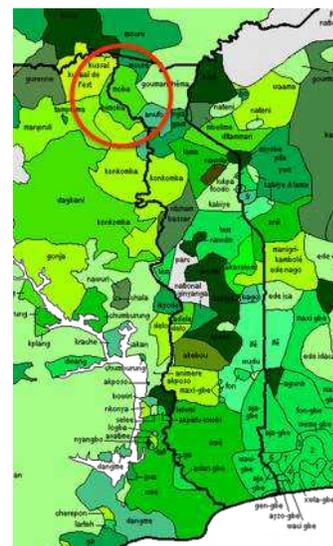
Pronouncing a blessing over the candidate during the rite of Holy Ordination.

Ordination in Lokpano

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

On a very hot Saturday morning in November the people of the village of Lokpano, Togo began to make their way to the local school to attend a special church service that marks an important day in the history of the Lutheran church in this community.

In 1980 the late Rev. Walt DeMoss, crossed from Ghana into Togo to share the gospel and offer pastoral care and mercy to Bi-Moba refugees fleeing from a tribal conflict that they lost with the neighboring Konkomba. When one looks at a modern map today, one could say that Rev. DeMoss switched mission fields; but actually, he stayed with the same people group. The Bi-Moba have lived in the same general northern area of modern day Ghana and Togo for generations - since well before colonial borders cut through the middle of their lands. Rev. DeMoss trained evangelists, initiated agricultural projects, established a school and a clinic, and served as the supervisor and spiritual father for numerous Bi-Moba who are still in the Lutheran church today. The geo-geographical center of this work was in the village of Lokpano. From here missionaries were sent out to plant other Lutheran parishes and mentor local evangelists in the northern part of Togo.

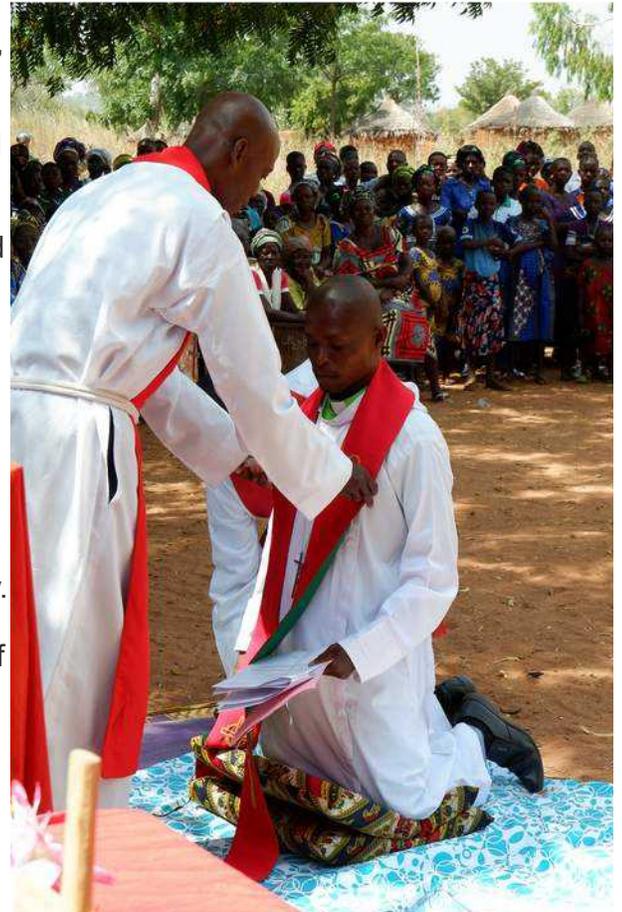


A map of the local languages in Ghana and Togo. The area of the Bi-Moba is shown in the red circle.



After the departure of Rev. DeMoss and the sizable team of LCMS World Mission American missionaries in the early 2000's, the task of pastoral care and evangelism was left to the Togolese. The CLET was formed to help prepare local pastors for this task. Although new parishes continued to be established and more pastors were trained and ordained for this Ministry, the village of Lokpano was left without a full-time, called pastor. The little Lokpano flock was served by evangelists and ordained pastors from other villages who came on intermittent visits. But on November 16th of this year, the prayers of the Lutherans in Lokpano and the missionaries who served here for many years were finally answered: the Lokpano parish was getting their first ordained pastor!

As the sun began to heat up the morning air, village chiefs and elders, local authorities, church choirs, and pastors from the Lutheran parishes and pastors from other protestant congregations, began to assemble and take their seats. The Togolese authorities also sent armed soldiers to ensure security. The music began and more and more people came to experience this important day. The service of the Word and the rite of ordination lasted for more than three hours. Rev. President Lambon LARÉ of the Lutheran Church of Togo conducted the rite of ordination. Alongside scripture readings, preaching, and prayers, were also dances, offerings of gifts for the parish and for the new pastor and his family, and official greetings from local authorities and pastors. A special greeting was shared by the pastor and church leaders from the sister Lutheran congregation from just across the border in Bunkpurugu, Ghana. This was a wonderful sign of direct, inter-Africa church support from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana toward their



Receiving a stole in the rite of Holy Ordination – a symbol of the yoke of Christ's Ministry



The various choirs begin their dances during the offering. The pastors and other local leaders are seated under the tarp while members of the parish and the community crowd into the shade of the nim trees.

Ministry Information:



Rev. Jacob W. Gaugert
CLET
B.P. 53
Dapaong
TOGO

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To give online:
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If you would like to acquire several sheets of fabric from the Togo church and would be willing to organize pick up in Madison, WI or shipping, please contact Rev. Ryan McDermott 608-473-3473 ryan.mcdermott@lcms.org

brethren in the Lutheran Church of Togo. After the service, guests were invited to share a meal of rice, fufu (pounded sweet potato), green sauce, pork, and chokpah (the local millet beer).

Vicar DJEKOAB Yantchénaen and his wife Aïcha had left Lokpano back in 2012 to begin studies at CLET. I had the privilege to teach DJEKOAB in some of the first classes I taught just after arriving in the mission field. He successfully completed the three years of study at CLET in June of 2015 and then worked faithfully to complete his vicarage by June of 2017. It had taken over two years for the local parish and the national church to plan the ordination. By Western standards that may seem a bit strange. Why the delay? In Africa there are many dynamics in play with status, resources, and decision-making processes. Generally speaking, the manner in which you pursue a goal with others, how you speak with and work with others in their relation to you and other authorities, is even more important than the goal itself. We are thankful that the ordination was planned and that it was done in a way that had all pastors and levels of authority of the national church and local parish involved. It was a true joy to be present for this day with the ELT pastors and members, along with fellow missionaries Rev. Micah Wildauer and Valerie Stonebreaker.

Although this special day and celebration have passed, we rejoice that now the Lokpano parish has their pastor and can continue to celebrate the blessing we all have in faith in Jesus Christ that prepares us for the celebration and feast before the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. We pray that the Lord guard and keep Pastor DJEKOAB in his Ministry in Lokpano for many years to come.

In Christ,



A gift of communion ware and hosts – given by a donor through Rev. Micah Wildauer to encourage dignified and frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.



In Africa people like to have shirts or fabric printed to commemorate a special celebrations or to identify with a particular group. It encourages community identity and solidarity. Here are two examples of such fabric. To the left is one of the visitors from Ghana that attended the ordination. She is wearing the fabric that the Lutheran Church of Ghana printed for their recent 60th anniversary celebrations. To the right is a Togolese woman and her children wearing the fabric for the Lutheran Church of Togo.

