

Ontario - Haiti connection brings hope to Haitian youth

“All non-essential travel is discouraged, but adventurous tourists do visit the troubled country,” read a recent warning regarding Canadians travelling in Haiti. “Foreigners have been kidnapped, and gang violence continues despite UN efforts.”

Many people associate the Caribbean with sparkling water and pristine beaches, but there are areas, islands and countries there that are struggling with poverty and environmental disaster, among other things. Haiti is one. The country of nine million citizens was the first “black” country in the Caribbean, the result of a rarely successful slave revolt over 200 years ago. Despite that notable history, Haiti is currently the poorest country in the western hemisphere, and has been for awhile.

Yet, people still go down to Haiti. They aren’t going for vacations, but, rather, to help Haitians. Suzanne White, a 31-year old Lutheran, is amongst those who are ignoring the warnings. White is a trilingual Orangeville, Ontario, lawyer, who attends Living Faith Lutheran Church. She does have a Caribbean connection herself; her parents are Jamaican.

“I was terrified to go,” White told the Orangeville Banner newspaper about her first trip to Haiti. “I hadn’t been following it—I was really worried about getting in the middle of a negative situation.”

To make matters worse, Haiti isn’t just beset by its poverty. Its environmental degradation – specifically, its deforestation, a symptom of that poverty – makes the country prone to devastating floods. In the last hurricane season, the country was hit by four hurricanes, and already in 2009, there have been four more vicious storms, which claimed hundreds of lives and made hundreds of thousands more Haitians homeless or desperate. The hurricanes of 2008 left the city of Gonaives, the home to Faith



Volunteer Suzanne White speaks to the youth about friendship.

Lutheran Church, under two metres of water.

White travelled to Haiti twice in 2008, both visits bookending the disastrous hurricane season. The second visit was to participate at a youth conference in Gonaives.

“After the storms, thousands of people were left homeless and penniless, having lost their homes and all of their possessions in the flooding that followed the hurricanes,” she wrote in a report about her visit. “It was a stark contrast to the Haiti I had witnessed when I was in Marmelade, Haiti, in July...to work with the youth... at their annual summer camp.”

There was still evidence of the stormy year when White arrived in December. “Gonaives still has water and rubble mixed with mud in some parts,” she wrote.

White was surprised to see 300 young people in attendance at the conference; she’d previously worked with only 30-40 at a time. There was a seminar entitled “How to be Successful in God’s Way,” as well as presentations on Christian friendship and marriage, sharing faith and even finances. The trip ended with a talent show of sorts, with performances of poetry, songs and dance.

But people don’t necessarily need to actually travel to Haiti to help out. Organizations such as *SEW on Fire* Ministries, a Burlington-based ministry which sends humanitarian aid across the world, and the Haitian Lutheran Mission Society, are working to make the lives of Haitians more comfortable. *SEW on Fire*, along with

a local aesthetics school, sent a bunch of supplies along with White for her last trip, including clothing, toiletries and gloves. While she was there, a shipment from the Haiti Lutheran Mission Society of Canada arrived, coincidentally. White also mentioned that there is a need for Lutheran reading material in French. (Haiti is, of course, the only primarily French nation in North America.)

One charitable initiative that’s recently caught fire is the creation of ‘milk bag mats,’ essentially collapsible, washable mattresses made up of crumpled plastic milk bags (an alternative to cartons), which keep Haitian children off the cold ground at night. (See bagsforbeds.com.)

White doesn’t have any immediate plans to travel to Haiti in 2009; she just opened a private law practice earlier this year. But if the response she’s received from her trips is any indication, there are certainly many people eager to help the cause of Haiti.

For more information on donating to Haitian causes, White’s e-mail is orangevilleforhaiti@gmail.com.

Jim Chliboyko

Two Christian women imprisoned in Iran for their faith

TEHRAN, Iran - Arrested March 5 because of their Christian faith, two newly converted young Iranian women, Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amairizadeh Esmailabad (photos left), remain in limbo in the detention wing of Tehran's notorious Evin prison. (The prison has been in the news recently in the case of U.S. journalist Roxana Saberi.)



Held in poor conditions in a cell with 27 other women, the two have been accused of anti-government activity but not formally charged. Farsi Christian News Network (FCNN) reports that officials have set bail at an unrealistic and intimidating US\$400,000, designed to make release impossible. The women's families have been told on several occasions that a judge is not available to discuss the case. Rustampoor, 27, and Esmailabad, 30, face the possibility of life imprisonment.

In September 2008 the Iranian parliament passed the initial stages of a bill that would make apostasy (leaving Islam for another religion) a criminal offence, punishable by life imprisonment for women and death for men. This bill is set to be reviewed and ratified later this year—with no obstacles in sight.

The women's arrest highlights a notable increase in government intimidation of Christians, especially those who practise their faith in the privacy of their homes. According to FCNN, plainclothes Iranian security forces entered and searched the women's shared apartment and confiscated their belongings. They were handcuffed and taken to a police station west of Tehran for interrogation. Later they were moved to a detention centre and Branch 2 of the National Security Section of the Revolutionary Court, where several

interrogation sessions took place. Finally, on March 18, the Revolutionary Court sent them to Evin.

Both women are allowed just a one-minute telephone call each day to their immediate families. Both are unwell and in need of urgent medical attention. During a call on March 28 Marzieh said that she was suffering from an infection and high fever.

Last year saw more than 50 known cases of arrests and imprisonment of Christians, including some cases of torture.

Apart from persecuting Christians, the proposed apostasy law also targets Muslims who become Baha'is, another faith the Iranian government has viciously persecuted.

Iranian Christian leaders from around the world call for the immediate and unconditional release of Rustampoor and Esmailabad. Please pray for the Lord to sustain them.

Christians in Canada can also contact the Minister of Foreign Affairs to protest Iran's apostasy law and to urge his Iranian counterpart against its passage.

Lutheran pro-life organization schedules convention for July

ST. LOUIS, Mo. - Under the theme "Celebrating the Abundant Life" (John 10:10), Lutherans For Life (LFL) will hold its 2009 national conference July 24-25 at the DoubleTree Westport Hotel, St. Louis.

Registration is by mail or online at www.lutheransforlife.org, where other details about this year's conference are posted.

Dr. James Lamb, LFL executive director, will conduct a pre-conference leaders workshop that will focus on "Renewal For Life," LFL's initiative to bring life-issue discussions and resources to a congregational level. Dr. Lamb is the essayist at LCC's East District Convention in May.



Cliff Pyle, president of Lutherans for Life-Canada encourages Canadians interested in life issues to attend the conference. Up to a dozen Canadians from across the country usually attend the LFL event.

Keynote speaker, Bobby Schindler, brother of Terri Schindler Schiavo, will give the keynote address, "Remembering Terri Schiavo: My Family's Battle to Save My Sister's Life."

Terri Schiavo, who had been severely brain-damaged since 1990, died March 31, 2005, after courts ruled for removal of her feeding tube. Her husband claimed she would have wanted the tube removed, while her

parents and other family members disagreed with him. The pro-life community supported and continues to support her parents' position.

Plenary speakers are Rev. Don Wagner, pastor of Christ and Zion Lutheran Churches in Elbow Lake and Hoffman, Minn., whose conference topic is "Celebrate the Abundant Life through a Living Hope," and John Eidsmoe, a retired Air Force Lt. Colonel and a pastor in the Association of Free Lutheran Churches, on "Being Pro-Life in the Obama Era."

Workshop topics include "Following the Shepherd by Defending Life," "The Good Shepherd and the Cure for the Incurable," and "Following the Shepherd at Life's End."

Women to “Shine like Stars” in Canada’s capital

OTTAWA- Lutheran Women’s Missionary League–Canada will hold its triennial convention July 9-12, 2009 at the Crowne Plaza hotel in downtown Ottawa.

Digging into the word is an important part of these conventions. Keynote speaker, Rev. Dr. David Ludwig, will explore Philippians 2:15-16 as he addresses the topic, “Shine like Stars – in a Culture of Abuse.” Inspirational speaker Elaine Bickel will focus on “God’s Shining Children.” LWML–Canada’s pastoral counsellors, Rev. Mark Hennig (Immanuel, Tomahawk, Alta.) and Rev. William Kramer (First St. John, Seebach’s Hill, Ont.) will each lead a study based on the theme.

Convention participants can choose four interest sessions from a variety of topics. Leading the sessions will be Dr. Ludwig (Shine like stars: healing past abuse); Kathy Ludwig (Parenting and grandparenting: a lot like growing healthy crops in fertile Canadian soil); Elaine Bickel (The joy of teenage years); Rev. Josh Hollman (Welcoming our intercultural neighbours); Oleg Schewtschenko (God at work in Ukraine); Rev. Mark Danielson (Bringing children to the worship service); Anne Bruce (Money matters); Allen Schellenberg (Wills, estates and gift planning); Mary Helen Miller (Reaching Muslim friends – woman to woman); Dr.



Ian Adnams and Marion Hollinger (Reaching an online mission field); Dr. Ralph and Linda Mayan (God’s blessings of growth in Nicaragua); several LWML–Canada members (Mission trip to Nicaragua); and Judy Grande (Q & A with the president).

Servant events will include rolling bandages for medical missions, preparing used stamps for the Canadian Bible Society, tying quilts, and sorting the Gifts of Love brought to the convention for distribution in Ottawa.

A “Walk for Missions,” initiated at the 2006 convention, proved an excellent addition to the agenda. This year’s walk will take place in the evening to serve as a witness to



Ottawa convention committee co-chair, Eloise Schaan, and LWMLC president, Judy Grande, check the convention agenda.

the community. Participants will wear t-shirts with the convention logo on the front and an invitation on the back to visit the website www.shinelikestars.ca, (currently under development). They will also have business card-sized handouts focusing on how Jesus makes us “stars” for those who ask what the group is about. Young women will spend time together at convention sessions and activities organized especially for them. Teens, seventeen and under (who do not pay registration if attending with an adult) also will have their own activities.

For more information about the convention and forms to register, visit www.lutheranwomen.ca.

Agenda for site visits

WINNIPEG - Following its second meeting, April 6 by conference call, the task force created to investigate cost-efficient seminary education has now scheduled visits to LCC’s three post-secondary institutions. The members will gather in Edmonton to meet with faculty and staff of Concordia Lutheran Seminary and Concordia University College, April 22-23. A similar site visit to Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines is scheduled for May 5-6.

Task force chairman, Rev. Nolan Astley says that “our intention heading into these important meetings is to hold full and frank discussions about the current environment in which our schools operate.”

The goal of the task force is to develop a sustainable model of seminary education that will serve the church in the years ahead.

In addition to the discussions with those who deliver seminary education, the task force seeks input from the church-at-large. Written submissions are welcome at bod@lutheranchurch.ca from pastors, deacons, and congregations. The deadline is June 1.

There is also an opportunity for open discussion at www.lutheranchurch.ca/forums. “The task force will host workshops to hear from district convention delegates who have an interest in this vital area of our work together,” Pastor Astley added.

The task force, will present a progress report to Synods’s Board of Directors, June 25.



Task force member Rev. Robert Krestick and chairman Rev. Nolan Astley confer during a coffee break.

Easter goes YouTube with a clear message

WINNIPEG – While national news reports announced that surveys by Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby show more teens are atheists, Lutheran Church–Canada figured the best place to tell the likely-unknown story of Easter was with a video on YouTube (www.youtube.com/whatyoubelieve). In an unconventional setting, the cemetery of Winnipeg’s St. Boniface Cathedral, Rev. Robert Bugbee, LCC’s president explained how the first Easter began in a graveyard.

“The news of the first Easter was intended to go public,” explained Rev. Bugbee. “Putting the message on line takes it public again.” The president’s engaging style breaks the stereotype of the bombastic or boring preacher. “God really took the cork off His good news at Easter,” he says as he walks down the path in front of the burned-out cathedral shell.

The video is part of an ongoing strategy to make stronger connections between the church and the online community. Rev. Bugbee noted that Martin Luther, who sparked the



President Robert Bugbee used the cemetery and building shell of St. Boniface Cathedral in Winnipeg to present an Easter message viewed around the world on YouTube.

Protestant Reformation in 1517, “translated the Bible into a language people understood. That’s what we’re trying to do online.”

LCC also operates www.whatyoubelieve.com where people are welcome to explore their beliefs and discover what the Christian

faith is all about.

Before Easter, an advertisement on Facebook invited people to “Discover faith, hope, love, the gifts of Easter.” Clicking on the ad opened an invitation to attend Good Friday and Easter services with links to LCC congregations across Canada.

High school independence takes next step

EDMONTON – Lutheran Church Canada’s Board of Directors’ task force, Concordia University College (CUCA) and Concordia High School (CHS) met in March to continue planning the next stage in separating high school operations from those of the university college as well as working on plans to secure the high school’s financial future.

In recent years, what was once one institution has been restructured to meet changes in provincial funding requirements. Both educational institutions now face funding challenges due to declining enrollments. CUCA has already made difficult decisions and the high school is now in the process of doing the same.



“It’s a unique situation,” explained Board of Directors’ chairman, Randy Stefan. “Concordia College started with a high school program only, then developed a university program under one institution.”

He said that as a result of that history, the two institutions became entwined at the financial level. “The new understanding separates the two institutions to the benefit of each. Lutherans can no longer think of Concordia as one institution.”

As of June 30, 2009 Concordia High School will no longer be administered through the university college’s business office. This requires CHS to establish its own financing. An updated business plan is being finalized for presentation to the task force in April. Any

new financing arrangements would require approvals from the CHS Board of Governors, synod’s Board of Directors and possibly the ABC District Board of Directors.

The high school faces a difficult challenge, not just in balancing the books, but also in providing enough class choices to attract sufficient students. It is also struggling to find local Lutherans to fill current and upcoming vacancies on the Board of Governors.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Concordia University College of Alberta

April 26

Give thanks to God for those who prepare LCC’s church workers and for those studying to serve God’s people.