

FROM THE BISHOP



Is It 10:00 a.m. in Adamawa Nigeria?

The dawn of Christianity began in Nigeria early in the last century. Now, it seems to be about 10:00 a.m. in the morning.

I was privileged to begin this past Advent season in the state of

Adamawa, Nigeria, which is the center of the work of proclamation of the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN). It was so apparent that the light of Christ is burning bright in the LCCN. I met stunningly strong young leaders in this church that articulately voiced our common Lutheran emphasis on the grace of God emanating from the cross. It seemed to be 10:00 a.m. because there was a lingering enthusiasm coming from the dawn of the Gospel in their country. They had a high ecclesiology with a foundation that held a deep sense that all of the people, lay leaders, youth, and men and women, bishops and Archbishop Baba were in the process of building a church body together; they believed that the building of their church was intimately connected to the health and development of their country which they love. Particularly this work focuses on caring for the sick and empowering women.

This summer I had a conversation with Pastor Jim Knutson, a retired pastor on our roster in Minneapolis who had been a powerful force in the ALC's mission to Africa. In the 1950s and 1960s he remembers there being about 100,000 members of the nascent LCCN during that time. Today they are 1.1 million members. That is astonishing growth.

I perceive that the growth is due to the Holy Spirit utilizing a very strong leadership and partnership between lay and clergy determined to build a church of Jesus Christ cruci-



Archbishop Baba and Bishop Johnson

fied and resurrected proclaiming God's great love for all people.

However they are not unchallenged. The Nigerians told us that the great poverty of their members makes it very difficult to raise the capital to finish their amazing plans of ministry to the sick, the widows, and the orphans. Other challenges are the incursion of denominations presenting a theology of glory and success that robs their pews of young persons and the juggernaut of Muslim evangelism utilizing economic incentives. But let me make it clear that the LCCN is able to overcome these challenges. They continue to grow and to build and to empower by proclaiming the grace of God and a theology of the cross. The people are wonderfully friendly and humor-filled; they are deeply faithful and committed to Jesus Christ and the work of their Church. It's about 10:00 a.m. in the LCCN in Nigeria, and I think 10:00 a.m. may be a good place for any missional church to be. The people of the LCCN will not fail, for God is deeply involved in their work.

Combat Can Raise Faith Questions

Many of us use the occasion of the new year to make resolutions to be a better person. Most of us find room for improvement in our relationships with God and each other. For some veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, moral and spiritual issues can be particularly troubling.

The killing required in war can cause a moral and spiritual maelstrom for the veteran. Combat survivors often have questions about God. Many wonder why God would permit certain things or how God will judge their own behavior. Human beings make meaning and judgments about what they have done that are often not rational.

"Survivor guilt," for instance, is feeling guilty because bad things happened to your buddy but not to you. Sufferers of survivor guilt feel existentially responsible for the harm to their buddy who, for instance, was killed after switching seats in a vehicle.

Psychological therapy can do only so much for people who suffer the deep moral pain of having crossed the line of their own moral code. Humans are built with a universal human code: do not kill your own kind; protect children, women, and the elderly; and show respect for the dead. Violation of these essential codes leaves tracks.

The army discovered that in WWII, most soldiers actually avoided killing, even while being shot at. US Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall and his team of researchers studied thousands of average soldiers before concluding that only fifteen to twenty percent of those on the line of fire had actually fired their weapons. The

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during this trip have capital campaigns like we do; they identify needs and set up plans to meet those needs like we do; the contexts of the congregations, districts, and diocese of the LCCN are very diverse just like the congregations, conferences, and synods of the ELCA; the seminaries are working to develop gifted and skilled leaders to meet the growing needs of the LCCN. The companion synod relationship focuses on accompanying each other in the ecclesial work of advancing God's mission in the world through our mutual sharing of each other's gifts and resources so each can find Christ in the other. Through mutual understanding both can advance the Kingdom of God both here on earth and the Kingdom yet to come through Word, Sacrament, and serving the needs of the people of God.

Toward the end of the companion synod journey the Archbishop of the LCCN invited the participants to "go and tell" about what they had come to see and experience. Over the next several months there will be articles and photos in *Interacts* of the many stories that emerged from the companion synod trip to Nigeria. If you are interested in reading more about the trip visit the blog website at <http://nigeria06.blogspot.com>.



Terri Endres, Diaconal Minister and member of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Excelsior, receives a chicken as a gift from the Pokakti village in a remote area of the Bali region. Terri is the first white person this village has ever seen. Cathedral of Jimeta and Mount Calvary have been partnering for 16 years to bring health care, clean water, education, and the gospel message to remote villages of the Bali region of Nigeria.

Bishop Johnson and Kris Perry, Companion Synod coordinator, with Pastor Bayo and Mary Beth Oyebade.



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researchers found that soldiers resist killing. Evidence from other wars suggests the same. For its first thousand years, the Christian church recognized that killing, even when conducted by soldiers, seriously impacted the Christian. Soldiers who had killed in combat were assigned tasks of penance over a three year recovery period before they could return to taking communion.

Because of Marshall's research, the armed forces now are more sophisticated at training soldiers to overcome their resistance to killing by trying to objectify and dehumanize the "targets." Some soldiers recognize that they actually enjoy killing, having stoked the sadist lurking in each of us. Some admit that "playing God" and using the powerful instruments of war can be satisfying or even fun. Yet, the soldiers know that armaments destroy homes, livelihoods, and lives.

Instead of protecting children, women, and the elderly, the conditions of the widespread hostilities in Iraq require viewing everyone as a potential threat. Soldiers are instructed to kill such people if they are suspected of being a conveyor of strategic information or carrying a bomb. Soldiers know that many completely innocent people are killed—so-called collateral damage—by their own military actions as well as by those of their enemy.

Soldiers know that their armaments sometimes wound and kill their own troops (friendly fire.) Some soldiers do participate in atrocities or witness their buddies doing so. Taking trophies, abusing prisoners, or driving prisoners mad can seem appropriate when others are doing it and when one is immersed in death. Taking your anger out on the battlefield, going berserk, mercy killing, or being in a panicked rage of killing anything that moves—also occur. The soldier turned civilian has to deal later with the memories.

How will we the church respond? Shall we resolve to make our best effort?

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