



WORSHIP IN AFRICA

Often I am asked what the Divine Services are like in Africa. There are differences in them depending on where you are – just like in the US – yet there are some general observations one can fairly make, just as one can about worship here.

One significant difference is length. Services are longer “en Afrique” – often over two hours! Upon learning this, Americans tend to conclude that the reason is because of greater fervor, but that really isn’t the case. While certainly there is overall greater missional zeal in Africa, I’ve encountered similar ranges of engagement with the service both here and there. Mostly, the services are longer because they are usually bilingual: one hears readings and preaching in both French and in the local language. That adds about half an hour alone. Another 20 minutes or so comes with how the service starts organically. Singing usually starts “on time” but the liturgy doesn’t begin until most everyone has gathered. This sets the tone for a relaxed pace throughout, with more time for prayers and special music.

I’ll share other differences, as well as similarities, in future newsletters!



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BEACHHEADS



Teaching seminarians at the Dalwak Retreat Center in northern Togo.

When the Allies liberated Europe during WW II, they didn’t just parachute soldiers all over Europe. Instead, they located a strategic point upon which to establish a “beachhead.” From the beaches of Normandy, then, critical mass was assembled and the invasion proceeded. Similarly, I believe that the wisest ministry strategy is not to visit dozens of parishes for a few days at a time and somehow in such scattershot efforts be a cantorial catalyst for liturgical growth, but instead to focus on locations where talent can be more thoroughly developed. These strategic points then become both places from which pastors and musicians go forth to teach others and also places which local churches consider to be models and in turn send people to learn.

These footholds, then, are not so much invasions (as I am certainly welcomed everywhere I go), but beachheads in the sense that they are first achievements upon which further progress may be built. So while there is certainly a role for the occasional side-trip to develop new contacts or explore new opportunities, the focus of my work when I am deployed to the continent is on building up the seminaries and some key parishes.

Foremost in this mission strategy are the places where you’ve seen me spend the most time: the seminary in Dapaong, Togo, and two key parishes in the Republic of Congo: Paroisse Wittenberg in Pointe-Noire, and St Augustin in Brazzaville. The teaching then goes forth from these points, with Africans teaching their friends the beautiful and inspiring hymns that have captured their hearts – just as those same hymns have captured ours.

Each time I visit, I see examples of how this is indeed happening. Just the last visit, I was amazed one morning at Matins when the assembly sang Gerhardt’s “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” (LSB 334). They sang it beautifully, but it is a hymn I had never taught in Congo. So I asked how they had learned it, wondering if perhaps my efforts at increasing music literacy had somehow miraculously paid off. Rev. Albert Koutia replied, “I learned it from you in Togo when we were both there, and so I taught it to the churches here when I returned home.” That’s what keeps me going back!

I’m so looking forward to returning to Congo in August. Thanks for your support!



PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- *Our brothers and sisters at Paroisse Wittenberg in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, as they continue to work on repairing and expanding their church building.*
- *The seminaries in Togo, Congo, and Guinea, as classes resume this fall. Teachers and students are eager to make up for a lost year!*
- *The copyright permissions to be granted at a generous rate for those materials needed for the mission edition of the hymnal that are not in the public domain.*

GIVE THANKS FOR:

- *Your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who support this teaching ministry. Their partnership with you and with me makes all we are doing for and with these mission partners possible.*
- *The missional zeal of our African friends, who continue to see their efforts bear good fruit for the Gospel. Their faithful witness is bringing many to know Jesus. The Word of God is bringing many into His Kingdom.*
- *Two new workshops being prepared for me to teach in Congo in August!*

A Missional Edition of the French Hymnal

I'm pleased to share with you some truly exciting news. The editors of the French LSB, *Liturgies et Cantiques Luthériens* (LCL), Rev. David Somers and Rev. David Saar from Lutheran Church–Canada, are working with me on a missional edition of the hymnal. This is going to address two key challenges we have faced – and better supply the practical needs of the ministry.

One of the challenges this will potentially address is the cost of transporting books and other needed resources from the US. The cheapest way is for missionaries to pay the fees for an extra 50lb bag when flying over. That usually avoids customs fees and allows, for example, about 33 LCLs to go over. Since the books are accompanying a person en route to a congregation or seminary in this case, they then head on without additional costs. This works, but the payload is limited. So while it is preferred for stocking small libraries or special gifts, it is not a practical way to supply hymnals for a growing church body. A smaller and lighter “mission edition” will allow for about 100 books to go over in this way.

In addition to the cost of transportation, there is the cost of the hymnals themselves. Printing in North America is much more expensive than printing in Africa. So the Canadians have graciously agreed to have this edition printed in Africa so that we can provide this at a most affordable cost. This will allow many more to have personal copies of the hymnal.



Finally, there is a third, most important factor: the practical needs of the ministry. While the full edition of LCL is vital for pastors and church musicians, it is not essential for the laity. The abundance of its contents makes for a steep learning curve which can hinder its use, and there are many parts of the book with little practical use in Africa. So the mission edition will provide only what the assembly needs: about fifty hymns, one setting of the Divine Service, Matins, Vespers, and some psalm antiphons. The service settings will use the musical settings of the canticles that have proven most popular in Africa, and the hymns will have just the melody. This will make the music easier to read and make it easier for us to teach people how to read the tunes. The selection of hymns will emphasize the core hymns of the Lutheran faith, with several set to African tunes. I'm stoked about this!



I may only be entering my third year as a called LCMS missionary, but I've been going to Africa now for over ten years. Here's a picture from my first trip, visiting a young vicar in his home village on the outskirts of Brazzaville. I was pleased to see Daniel (right) again earlier this year. He is now a pastor and doing quite well. He's even gained a bit of weight – in a strong, healthy way. It was a joy to see him serve as liturgist at one of the services I attended. I've changed a bit, too: you may notice I was sporting a beard back in 2010! Though we all grow and change, we still recognize one another and rejoice in being together, for we are one in Christ. Soli Deo Gloria!



There are many opportunities to serve as short-term or GEO missionaries. Check out the current list and download an application at lcms.org/service. Click on "Service Opportunities."

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Thank you very much for your support!
SOLI DEO GLORIA.