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HOLIDAY SEASON 2018

ACP Candlelight Christmas Concerts: Saturday 8 December, at 17h and 20h
Children’s Lessons and Carols: 16 December, 11h service
Christmas Eve Services: Monday 24 December
  16h Family Service
  19h30 Candlelight Service (Prelude music begins at 19h)
  22h Candlelight Service (Prelude music begins at 21h30)

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Thoughts from
The Rev. Dr. Scott Herr
Senior Pastor

Dear Members and Friends of the ACP,

It all sounds so common with so many refugees of today. According to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, there are currently 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Of that number 40 million are internally displaced people, and the remaining 28.5 million have had to flee their home countries to seek safety in another country*. That is a staggering number of people. If you had to hold your breath for one second for each of the 68.5 million refugees in the world today, you would be able to breathe again only in 2.17 years. Think about that... I grieve for the way my country's foreign policy has contributed to this crisis.

In September I received a phone call from Helsinki from a colleague I had met at one of our Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East (AICEME) conferences. He said that some Christian refugees were coming to Paris and asked if I might help find shelter for them. I called a friend I knew working with refugees here in Paris and asked about getting them a place to sleep. She said bluntly and without hesitation, "Scott, I'm so sorry, but there are hundreds who are having to sleep on the street already. There is no room for them." I was so sorry to have to tell my friend there was no room for them. That brought those big numbers of refugees into focus in a very personal way for me.

So I am very thankful for the ACP Council voting to approve going forward with 100 Nights of Welcome to provide a safe place to shower and sleep for refugees, from 9 December through 20 March. We are coordinating with the Jesuit Refugee Service with whom we have been in relationship for over a year, and all guests will be recommended to us by JRS. We welcome donations of sheets, blankets, pillows, pillowcases, and towels, and need volunteers to help with hospitality while our guests are here in the gym (22h00 – 7h00), and to ensure that the linens are cleaned regularly. If you are able to volunteer, please email Daniel Tostado at danieltostado1@gmail.com. We definitely would appreciate your prayers!

I encourage you to join us for the Candlelight Christmas concert on 8 December, and for the service of remembrance on 14 December, the 6th anniversary of the Newtown massacre. Following the service, the Australian Ambassador will speak and video messages from Gabby Gifford will be shared with a panel discussion on gun safety. In this season of Advent I also am excited about Julia Metcalf's Icon Collage Project.

Finally, we welcome all to our Christmas Eve services when, surrounded by candlelight, we will bring all our hopes and fears of all the years to the One who welcomes us, full of grace and truth. May God give us all the gifts of faith, hope and much love as we move through these poignant holidays, hopefully making room for and welcoming the stranger, just as God has made room for and welcomed us!

In Christ,

Scott

* 26 Nov, 2018: https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html
Bible readings for December

2 December 1st Sunday of Advent
Jeremiah 33:14-16;
Psalm 25:1-10
I Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 25-36

9 December 2nd Sunday of Advent
Malachi 3:1-14
Luke 1:68-79
Philippians 1:3-11
Luke 3:1-16

16 December 3rd Sunday of Advent
Zephaniah 3:14-20;
Isaiah 12:2-6
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:7-18

23 December 4th Sunday of Advent
Micah 5:2-5a;
Psalm 80:1-7
Hebrews 10:5-10

24 December, Christmas Eve
Nativity of the Lord - Proper I
Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

Nativity of the Lord - Proper II
Isaiah 62:6-12
Psalm 97
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

Nativity of the Lord - Proper III
Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12)
John 1:1-14

thurber

lecture series

Wednesday | 5 December
Who is Normal?
Disability and the Image of God
Dr. Medi Ann Volpe

The American Church in Paris
Dinner, lecture and conversation | 19h00 - 21h15
I’ve probably mentioned this moment multiple times before, but it was the day after Thanksgiving, three years ago, that I received a phone call. The caller ID said “The American Church in Paris.” A rush of energy and anxiety filled my chest as I answered. When I heard that the committee had voted to call me as the next Associate Pastor of ACP, I was speechless. I was filled with so much excitement and thankfulness and surprise that I didn’t know what to say or how to say it.

On this side of that phone call, I remain thankful but now my voice has recovered a little bit. Looking back, I was thankful that day because I was a tired pastor who was energized by what I saw Jesus doing here. On that day I was thankful because I was a person struggling with how divided the church in the United States seemed to be, but here I caught a glimpse of a diverse community united in Christ. I was thankful that day because I was a person whose experience of church too often felt more like conforming rather than belonging and I had a hard time reconciling that with the unconditional love and welcome of Jesus.

For all of that and much more I am genuinely thankful. Now, of course, three years into life together we have all likely discovered that this is not a perfect church and that I am not a perfect pastor and that life in general is not perfect. But what I’m learning along the way is that maybe grace and gratitude and the goodness of God are not chained to perfection.

Dale and Juanita Ryan write, “Sometimes we try to force gratitude on ourselves. Sometimes other people try to force it on us. But it cannot be coerced. It will not come from pretending. It will not come from telling ourselves that some people are worse off than we are. But it does come. And when it comes, it breaks through our pain and surprises us with joy” (from Rooted in God’s Love).

This is the beauty of grace. It is not forced. It is not a demand. It is free, and it sets us free from our frantic striving for perfection. I, therefore, remain especially thankful for this imperfect church filled with imperfect people and at least one imperfect pastor. So as we move from the holiday of Thanksgiving toward Christmas, may you know that you are already loved and that you already belong. And if gratitude happens to come along may you welcome it with joy.

Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise God’s holy name. – Psalm 103:1

Note: Dale Ryan was one of my professors at Fuller Theological Seminary who taught classes on recovery. These classes had (continue to have) a profound impact on my life in a number of healing ways. It all started with realizing that recovery is not just for people who struggle with addiction, but for anyone and everyone who has ever been wounded and/or wounded others.
Are you willing to host a Welcome Dinner as we prepare for the birth of Jesus?

**Breaking barriers by breaking bread**

by Rev. Odette Lockwood-Stewart
Visiting Pastor

**Welcome Dinners** were launched by the ACP’s Refugee Task Force. The project was created as a way to help us “break barriers by breaking bread with refugees.” We aim to have 12 dinners (96 participants) blessed by this ministry project in the first year. The hope is for members of the American Church in Paris to get to know one another better, and to meet and get to know refugees. In one evening, you can experience the blessing of extending hospitality, meeting Christ in the stranger, and forming new relationships in the breaking of bread.

This is a wonderful and simple way to make room for Christ in our hearts, especially during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Volunteers are asked to host a meal for three other ACP members that you invite, and four refugees or asylum seekers who are invited through the Jesuit Refugee Service and other NGOs. The dinner would take place in your home, or possibly at the church.

Hosting a dinner is not an act of charity, but a spiritual practice in community. Some of our congregation have been surprised by the length of time the guests have been seeking refuge, and by the resources that these resilient brothers and sisters have developed as they seek a permanent home and status.

Christ tears down the dividing walls and sometimes this means tearing down the images we carry about one another. Expect illumination. At one Welcome Dinner, each of the eight guests was from a different country: the US, Germany, France, Madagascar, Anatolia, Senegal, Afghanistan, and Côte d’Ivoire.

Four dinners have taken place and three more are scheduled. While many people support the project, few of these are able to host a dinner. If you are willing to host a dinner either soon or in the new year, please contact Ursula at ursulaperrier@gmail.com. She can provide guidelines and tips for hosting, and a list of ACP members who would like to attend a dinner. And of course, further advice can be provided by those who have already hosted.

We hope you will pray about this and accept to host a Welcome Dinner.

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**100 Nights of Welcome**

Help us to provide a safe place for refugees to shower and sleep here at the ACP, from 9 December through 20 March. All guests will be recommended to us by the Jesuit Refugee Service. Please consider donating double sheets, blankets, pillows, pillowcases, and towels. We also need male volunteers to help with hospitality while our guests are here in the gym, from 22h00 to 7h00, and to ensure that the linens are cleaned regularly.

Donations can be dropped off at the reception desk until 9 December.

If you are able to volunteer, please email Daniel Tostado at danieltostado1@gmail.com.

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The **Refugee Task Force** makes recommendations to the Mission Outreach Committee on ways to motivate members of our congregation to help alleviate the refugee crisis in Paris. The task force is looking for new members. If you would like to join or see what we do, please contact Ursula Perrier at ursulaperrier@gmail.com.
Welcoming refugees

By Vanessa Watson,
ACP Refugee Ministry

The Jesuit Refugee Service, a Christian organization that screens refugees and places them in host families for 6-week periods, presented their program to ACP in the spring of 2018. Though many church members attended the session and were moved and inspired by the organization’s work, no one, not a single person signed up to host a refugee. Oh la la! Maybe this was too big a first step. Maybe the ACP community needed a middle ground between hearing about refugees on the news and having one in their homes. Like getting to know a new friend, potential romantic partner or coworker, maybe sharing a meal is a good place to start.

This is exactly the idea behind ACP’s new program, the Welcome Dinner. The aim is to invite church members to host dinners in their homes in order to bring together refugees living in and around Paris and fellow ACP-goers in a warm, casual setting. Dinners typically include eight people: the host plus three local people, and four refugees under the auspices of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

The invited refugees are single males, generally in their 20s and 30s, who are in different stages of the immigration process – seeking asylum or refugee status, having arrived in France recently or several years ago, working or unemployed. The program seeks to encourage getting to know “the refugee,” giving him a name, a face, a place at the dinner table, and a chance to interact with courteous and open-minded people who may personally know what it is like to navigate being an outsider in France.

I recently attended the third of four Welcome Dinners that have taken place since the program was launched in September. Paula Taquet and her husband, Jean, already involved in the Refugee Ministry at ACP, graciously hosted the meal in their home. I was the first guest to arrive and had never met Paula, but enjoyed getting to know her as we set the table and prepped the first course. We were joined by another young woman from ACP and Jean, and soon welcomed the four refugees, all from Afghanistan.

I’m not sure who was more nervous. The timid but sincere-looking young men introduced themselves and we sat down to a plate of raw vegetables and drinks. The program guidelines indicate that one should not be too intrusive by asking specific questions about their journey to France or what made them leave their home countries. Instead, we began to talk about their impressions of France and French people, what sports they liked, what music they listened to (to which the young man next to me replied “I like anything, as long as it’s loud!”).

As Paula served several delicious courses, I felt that getting to know the refugees was much like talking to other expats I had met. Their circumstances may be vastly different, but there were many commonalities like navigating a new language, getting used to a different cuisine, experiencing small victories and setbacks each day. It struck me that, as many of us are foreigners ourselves, we are uniquely positioned to relate to the refugee community and find empathy and solidarity in our shared experience of finding our way in Paris.

As the dinner wound down, I wondered what the coming weeks and months would hold for the four young men we had met. I wondered when they were last in touch with their families and if they would ever return home. While I didn’t know the answers to these questions, I did know that we had helped to show warmth to people whom politicians and the media often stigmatize, making many individuals fear and distrust them. The act of welcoming these four previously unknown men, eating alongside them and showing genuine interest in them as people, would not change their situations. It would, however, show that there are four more decent people in the world who wished them well.

If you are interested in hosting a meal or participating in the Welcome Dinner program, please contact Ursula Perrier at ursulaperrier@gmail.com.
About 20 people arrived for the Hymn Sing in Pastor Scott’s apartment in November, and we had a joyful evening singing together. But it could have been called a prayer meeting too, because Scott reminded us that singing hymns is praying twice, once with the music and once with the words.

About halfway through, I observed that we hadn’t sung any spirituals, and that the composer and lyricist most represented in our hymnal is not Charles Wesley or Isaac Watts, but a man called “Anonymous Afro-American Spiritual.” Felicia Henderson suggested one that is seldom sung but dearly loved by many of us, generally known as “Let’s go down to the river to pray.” It’s not in the hymnal (apparently because someone managed to own the copyright, despite the fact that the piece is at least 200 years old), and the only lyrics I could find on the web are ones that people don’t sing anymore, so we did our own variation:

As I went down to the river to pray,
Studying about that good old way,
When you shall wear de starry crown,
Good Lord, show me the way.

O mourner, let’s go down,
Let’s go down, let’s go down,
O mourner, let’s go down,
Down to the river to pray.

We were pleased to balance out the evening with at least one spiritual.

It should be pointed out that the southern white community in the US was developing its own repertoire in the same period, and I passed around my copy of The Sacred Harp hymnal as an example. These hymns, unlike any that came from the Protestant traditions in Europe, are mostly pentatonic, sticking strictly to the black note scale, and we sang an example from The Sacred Harp that goes like this:

Brethren we have met to worship,
And adore the Lord our God
Will you pray with all your power,
While we try to preach the word?

All is vain unless the Spirit
Of the Holy One comes down;
Brethren, pray and holy manna
Will be showered all around.

That’s not in our hymnal, but “Amazing Grace” and “How Firm a Foundation” are pentatonic, and they are in all the hymnals. In the 19th century, southern blacks rarely sang the southern white repertoire, and vice versa, but today we all sing both categories. Praise God.

We will be organizing our next Hymn Sing for January, so look for the date in the Bulletin.
James Baldwin and Advent
A letter to the Young Adults:
The White God and White Christianity

by Victor Andre Greene
Associate Pastor, Youth & Young Adults

Obvious to me and perhaps obvious to many of you who have attended our Tuesday night gatherings, is the fact that we have yet to discuss “race” as a subject by itself, despite race/racism being the haunting muse for James Baldwin’s writings. More specifically, the single talking point we have glossed over and what is prominently featured is the subject of the “Black Christ” vs the “White Christ.” To say it in the form of a question: What is the impact the two Christ’s have had on Christianity and the historical and contemporary Western situation? Extending this question further, in what ways has race marked the differences between Christianity and Islam (particularly and contextually the Nation of Islam as a movement among Black communities and in response to Christianity and white supremacy.)

As James Baldwin himself reflects and offers a critical analysis in response to these questions, he does so by centering race – that is, his experience as a black man – inside the workings of Christianity and the Christian life. By making race and Christianity exchangeable ideas and borderline synonymous terms, he presents race/Christianity as though they were a married couple who became one, swore a covenantal vow at the altar of colonialism, and whose lovemaking, world-discovering honeymoon, is the womb marking his childhood, giving birth to the American condition, and epitomized in the creation of the globally so-called “nigger.”

For Baldwin, the problem of race, racism, and the evils persistent in the laws, lands, and love in Western societies (especially America), is a historical phenomenon caused by the worship of the White God constructed inside White Christianity and whose dwelling place lives inside the White Church. Moreover, Baldwin sees the “nigger” caused precisely by the Christian call to love God and to love neighbor, but whose divine command led those in savage darkness into a bright-white-light and whose discipleship was a fatal death.

We could and should at some point talk about these matters more, since the categories of race – especially “Black” and “White” – are not confined to the American story or Christianity. Aligned with Baldwin, “White” is a socially-politically charged term. “White” means to become “civil,” “reasoned,” “intellectual,” “cultural,” and so on. As a theologically charged term, “White” means to be “saved” and “pure.” Baldwin sees “White” as the engine for the European story and its European reach into the rest of the globe because it influences how we understand ourselves, our homes, our histories, and our deepest, unrealized convictions. Nowhere more is this evident than by the Algerian, the American Negro, and those whose lives are engraved as the colonized: sufferers under the weapons of “Whiteness” and the “White God.”

At the risk of oversimplification (or worse, moving too broadly around the subject of race), we might hear Baldwin’s comments and critiques raising the important themes we reflect on in a season of waiting in darkness and what we call Advent: love, joy, peace, hope. Or tangentially, identity, belonging, justice, and reconciliation. We might hear in James Baldwin both a refusal to be consumed by anger, hatred, or denial, just as he is inviting us to ask important questions:

Do I have to turn against myself and turn into someone else in order to be loved?
Do I have to convert into someone else in order to receive justice?
Do I have to kill myself in order for God to save me?

This is why – in part – when Baldwin suggests that whoever God is must “make us larger, freer, and more loving . . . [and] . . . if God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him,” he is challenging us to look closer at who we think God is; who we have made God to be in our minds, in our places of worships, through our creeds and confessions; who God has been and who God can or even should be. He is challenging us to be courageous; to look continued, next page.../...
closely long enough to face the haunting truth that we may have been worshipping “the devil” all along.

As we wrap up our time praying with James Baldwin and we move toward a time of reflecting on the season of Advent, we pray with Baldwin that we might be open to see the Messiah Made Flesh without the masks we use to cover God’s face in order to see our own. We pray to feel Christ inside the dark and not the light. We pray to experience Christ inside the longing and not the contented certainty. We pray to see Christ inside the love James Baldwin describes that “takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. . . [a love that is] a state of grace . . . [a] quest and daring and growth.”

Amen.

Note: I make reference to two books by James Baldwin: The Fire Next Time, and The Devil Finds Work.
ACP Men’s Retreat
by Dominique Grelet

Calling all ACP men – join us for our Men’s Retreat, 25-26 January. It will be led by Pastor Tim Vance, exploring how we can, as men, be engaged witnesses and contributors in our world today. This will be a special 24 hours of sharing, praying, laughing, and celebrating what God is doing in our lives as friends, mentors, sons, fathers, grandfathers, and husbands. Every man is invited to be part of this special time together. This is a fantastic opportunity to connect while learning, worshipping, and relaxing together.

Location
The retreat will take place at the Orsay Clarté Dieu retreat center in Orsay (91), a 30-minute RER ride from Gare Saint Michel Notre Dame to the Orsay-ville station.

Schedule
Participants will be greeted at the station on Friday evening and taken to the Clarté Dieu by shuttle starting at 18h where we will have a potluck welcome apéritif. After dinner, we will have a time of teaching, followed by an evening of fellowship, music, and songs around a bonfire, or games depending on the weather.

Saturday morning we’ll begin the day with an open-prayer time, before a hearty breakfast and launching into a morning of teaching and small groups.

After lunch, there will be time for games (including our much-acclaimed pétanque contest) and walking in the nearby forest. This is also a time to simply rest, meditate, and relax in the park of Clarté Dieu or in its cloister. We will then join for further teaching and reflection time, before we close our retreat in worship together.

Shuttles will be available from 18h to transport participants from the Centre to the Orsay-ville station.

Cost
The retreat costs €75 for each participant. This price includes all meals, one night’s accommodation in a single room, sheets, and shuttle from the Orsay-ville station. Please do not let money keep you from joining us for this retreat. Scholarships are available; please contact the ACP pastoral staff for further information.

What to bring
A Bible, pen and paper; a bath towel and your toothbrush! Participants are also invited to bring extra beverages and food for the potluck fellowship times and bonfire, if they wish.

Register
Visit the ACP website (www.acparis.org/retreats) for online registration. For more information about the weekend, please contact mensbiblestudy@acparis.org.
Concerts de Noël
by MaryClaire King

What’s Christmas without festive music? While our own ACP Christmas Concert is magnificent, it may only whet your appetite for more. Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities. Here’s a selection.

Saturday, 8 December, 20h. If you waited too long to buy your ticket for the ACP event, try la Madeleine for a concert of traditional Christmas songs, presented in partnership with the Slovak & Czech embassies, the Slovak Institute of Paris, the Catholic Slovak mission in France, and the Czech Center of Paris. Eglise de la Madeline, Place de la Madeline, 75008 Paris. First-come seating, offerings accepted.


Eglise St. Germain des Prés offers a number of festive concerts at 3 place St. Germain des Prés, 75006 Paris. Full list here https://www.eglise-saintgermaindespres.fr/l_eglise/concerts


Christmas Day, 25 December, 15h30. Micro Consort presents a concert de Noël, with Augustin Lusson, violon; Yuka Saitô and Matthieu Lusson, viola, Anne-Marie Blondel, harpsicord. Works by Vivaldi and Dandrieu. Information: 01.55.42.81.18.

ACP Café
4 January, 19h30 in the Theater
Come celebrate the New Year with music featuring Daniel Herr, Chris Herr, and other members of Still Point and friends. Drinks and dinner for purchase, free entry.
What’s up in Paris
December event listings
by Karen Albrecht

Creature features
Bundle up when night falls and head to the Jardin des Plantes, where you will be in for some scintillating company. “Espèces en voie d’illumination” features brightly lit animal figures, from soaring sea turtles to a roaring tiger, from brightly plumed parrots perched in trees to blindingly white polar bears perched on an iceberg. The display adds sparkle to the long winter nights, while shedding some much-needed light on the plight of endangered species.

The old song and dance
The “Comédies musicales” exhibit at La Philharmonie pays tribute to Hollywood musicals, saluting the madcap creative energy behind “Singing in the Rain” and the technical wizardry underlying Fred Astaire’s gravity-defying on-screen magic. The show also traces adaptations of the genre in other countries (France’s Jacques Demy and Bollywood are prime examples), and in other eras, including “West Side Story” and 2016 hit film “La La Land.”
Until 27 January, philharmoniedeparis.fr

Leading ladies
The 30th edition of the pioneering Africolor music festival is showcasing some of the continent’s most noteworthy female artists, in venues across Paris and Seine-St-Denis. Outspoken Malian singer and film star Fatoumata Diawara will perform in Clichy-sous-Bois, while Algerian renegade Hasna El Becharia and her guembri (an instrument usually played only by men) share the stage with Mali’s female “griotte” Nainy Diabaté. Sisters Mélissa and Ophélie Hié represent the younger generation, with an electro-tinged take on the balafon and djembé of their father’s native Burkina Faso.
Until 22 December, www.africolor.com

Miró, Miró on the wall
Catalan artist Joan Miró (1893-1983), a contemporary of Picasso, Matisse, and the Surrealists, invented a highly poetic personal style, mixing bright colors with abstract symbols often rendered in black ink. The retrospective at the Grand Palais features seminal canvases from throughout his long career, including the vibrant and hypnotic 1961 triptych “Bleu I,” “Bleu II,” “Bleu III,” displayed together for the first time and to great effect, as well as fanciful sculptures in ceramic and bronze.

Instant grata-lication
Is there hope for mankind’s legacy of hospitality, in an era of increasing hostility? “Persona grata,” meaning, literally, “welcome person,” at the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (with a sister exhibit at MAC VAL in Vitry-sur-Seine) uses the lens of contemporary art to rediscover a sense of human worth and welcome in a world hemmed in by closed borders and closed minds. Installations, photos, and videos explore the paradoxes of immigration, perhaps best exemplified by the glowing neon sign announcing “eldorado” but which in reality adorns an impenetrable black wall.

Latin Quarters
The Fondation Cartier’s refreshingly offbeat “Southern Geometries, from Mexico to Patagonia” showcases the ebullient art and architecture bubbling up across Latin America, giving new voice to the region’s richly varied cultural roots. Most striking, the whimsical, “neo-Andean” urban palaces of Bolivia’s Freddy Mamani are celebrated in a multicolored ballroom specially constructed in his signature style. Pre-Columbian art and elaborate indigenous designs provide context for the contemporary creations.
Until 24 February, www.fondationcartier.com

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Until 24 February, www.fondationcartier.com
Please help keep our children healthy

Because we want to keep the ACP nursery and toddler rooms safe and hygienic places to play and rest, children who are sick will not be admitted to the nursery and toddler rooms. This is to protect all of our children from communicable illnesses. We also assume that a child who is unwell will prefer to be at home with their parent(s) or caregiver(s) rather than at Sunday nursery. Thank you for your consideration and cooperation. If you have any questions, please email Allison Wheeler at childrensworship@acparis.org.

ACP Christmas market
THANK YOU!

The ACP Marche de Noel was a fun and festive way to welcome in this year’s holiday season. It featured over 30 artisan vendors, several Mission Outreach groups, and the Paris SOS (Survivors of Suicide) organization who stepped in at the 11th hour to maintain our renowned Used Book Sale.

Participants discovered a diverse and rich sampling of beautiful handmade artisan goods including jewelry, ceramic pottery, wreaths, Christmas decorations, children’s toys and clothes, alpaca wool knitwear from Peru and specialty food items from around the world. As always, the Filipino Fellowship hosted another amazingly delicious luncheon, which was a sellout hit.

The ambience was made even more festive thanks to our beloved Fred Gramann, who went over and above this year with musical minstrels. They serenaded us with the bell ringers in the morning and the Christmas carolers in the afternoon.

A huge thanks to all participants, supporters and especially to the many, many volunteers who gave their time and talents to ensure that all went smoothly for this very special ACP event. The proceeds made from this successful event will go to support our many local and global mission ministries. A HUGE MERCI a TOUS!
All-church Advent project

by Christine Noumba Um

How do you usually celebrate Advent, the season that anticipates Christ’s first coming? One popular activity is to open the windows of the Advent calendars or light the Advent candles each Sunday. How can we as the wider church family move into Lent?

With four Sundays until Christmas, we are called to reflect on what Advent symbolizes as God’s people: eager not only to celebrate Christ’s birth but his return on Earth that will glorify His Kingdom. As we read passages from Scripture relating to Christ’s first and second coming, we are called to hope on Him, prepare for His arrival, love Him and our neighbors, and spread joy in our surroundings. That is what makes this festive season so special.

It is also a time of “expectant waiting,” as we wait for Jesus to bring healing and mercy into this world. But this year, the Young Adults wanted to bring a focus in our hearts and minds, to actively reach out to God and spend time in his presence. We are launching a creative project to be held during the coffee fellowship hour after each service (from 10h-11, 12h-13h30, and 14h30). This project involves creating three icons that are 5' x 6' collages made out of magazine clippings brought by church members, that will then be cut and glued onto 11 x 13 paper.

The start date of the project is 2 December. The aim is to create the three icons on the three Sundays (2nd, 9th and 16th). At the end, they will be hung by the east wall in the Sanctuary - giving a pop of color to the walls this season!

We encourage every member of the congregation to participate in this activity even if it is just for a few minutes, as the goal is to visually represent our Advent journey together as a connected church. The empty space in the Sanctuary, representing our start to Advent, will be filled with new icons week by week, symbolizing our expectant joy as Christmas nears!

Children’s Lessons and Carols

Sunday 16 December, 11h service

Our children will be leading us through the story of the birth of Jesus in story and song. All children are welcome and encouraged to participate. A rehearsal will take place on the prior Sunday, 9 December, during the 11h service. If your child is 9 or 10 years old, they are welcome to do a portion of the narration; to secure a role, please contact Allison Wheeler at childrensworship@acparis.org.

Remember, you can order a Poinsettia plant to decorate the Sanctuary, and take it home after the Christmas Eve services (20 euros).

Sunday Worship at the ACP

09h00: Traditional Service, with weekly communion

11h00: Traditional Service, with choirs, children’s worship service; communion first Sunday of the month

13h30: Contemporary Service, with children’s worship service, and live band accompanying sung worship
Thanksgiving is a time to count your blessings, not your calories. But you may find the numbers from our recent Thanksgiving feast fun to digest.

This year in addition to the 200 seated guests, the ACP Thanksgiving Team also served all 52 of its volunteers a full meal and was still able to serve **115 complete meals to the homeless** with the food left over. The boxed meals were distributed, while still warm, that evening by the group “Giving in Paris.” This is the third time we have partnered with them, allowing us to feed over 100 people on the street each year.

Shopping for the meal is no small task. Four volunteers filled three LARGE carts full of supplies. That included 50 kilos of potatoes, 25 kilos of green beans, 20 kilos of sweet potatoes, 20 loaves of bread for the stuffing, and 10 kilos of fresh cranberries.

We ordered a total of 27 turkeys from a Parisian butcher, and he was able to deliver them ON TIME, despite the Gilets Jaunes manifestation taking place that day. We washed all that food down with 50 bottles of wine and 18 liters of juice and devoured 13 pumpkin pies and 11 cheesecakes.

It’s almost impossible to count all the volunteer hours that make this event happen. A kitchen crew of 6 members began prepping the food on Friday, a set-up crew of 5 started setting up the tables in the theatre on Saturday morning as the kitchen came back to life with more volunteers, the decorating team arrived around 14h and transformed the theatre into a welcoming setting for our guests, and by 17h we had a dozen people doing last-minute details and 20 servers trained and ready to tackle the two flights of stairs (the elevator was out of service on the day of the event!!). The final members of the clean-up crew went home after 11pm after washing hundreds of plates, wine glasses and silverware.

In the unmeasured category is our gratitude. We are thankful for every single volunteer and guest who showed up, even though many had to walk because of the disruptions to bus and metro services. We are thankful for our church family for hosting this event and providing the space for us to practice hospitality as a faith community. And above all else, “Thanks be to God!”

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**Meals served:**
- 200 seated guests
- 52 volunteers
- 115 homeless

**Groceries:**
- 50kg potatoes
- 25kg green beans
- 20kg sweet potatoes
- 20 loaves of bread (stuffing)
- 10kg fresh cranberries

**Dined on:**
- 27 turkeys
- 13 pumpkin pies
- 11 cheesecakes
- 50 bottles of wine
- 18 liters of juice

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**Weekly Tuesday Morning Women’s Bible Study**

**10h30–12h30, Catacombs**

- **4 December:** Continuing the study on spiritual gifts, Your Divine Design.
- **11 December:** Prayer followed by a potluck lunch
- **18 December:** Brunch before taking a break for the Christmas Holidays

All women are welcome to attend. If you are in need of childcare, please email women@acparis.org at least a week in advance.
Reflections on the AICEME youth conference

by Natalie Ziyi Scherer
English-Speaking United Methodist Church of Vienna

The following reflection was shared during worship at the English-Speaking United Methodist Church of Vienna on Sunday, 11 November 2018.

Last weekend four youths from our church were fortunate enough to attend this year’s AICEME Youth Conference in Paris. The theme this year was “Unite”. On the first evening we heard a talk from Pastor Victor from the American Church in Paris. He reminded us that God calls us to pay attention and to open our eyes to see the people in need all around us. Every morning we packed an extra sandwich which we gave to a person in need while we were out doing various activities. Another day we learned how difficult it is being a refugee and applying for asylum. We played a game designed by refugees where we were forced to go back when we landed on certain tasks. The whole weekend was very rewarding and we got to meet many young Christians from around Europe.

What resonated with me the most during the conference was the talk we heard on serving God. We heard the passage from Matthew 20:20-28.

The point of the talk was to tell us that we should be asking ourselves “what can I do to serve God”. We should sacrifice everything and serve, just as Jesus did when he came to serve and to give his life as a sacrifice for us. The question “what can I do to serve God?” has stuck with me ever since I first heard it. After pondering on this statement for a while, it reminded me of something else I learnt a while back. I learnt that all of our relationships are centered around what these relationships can do for us. But we should love everyone equally and not just because of what we can benefit from them. We are always searching for a way that others can help us. Instead, we should be helping others. The statement “what can I do to serve God?” serves as reminder that we should make our decisions in life based on how they can help us serving others and not on how others can serve us. As we experienced last weekend it is not difficult helping others.

And the end of the conference everyone had the opportunity to share their testimonies and reflections on the weekend. Many spoke about how rewarding just handing out a sandwich to someone in need was and that all it took was one extra minute in the morning preparing a second meal. I always thought that helping those in need was a big thing that was super difficult and took a lot of time and energy. In reality, it is really simple.

I am very grateful for the opportunity we had in Paris. We learnt so much about God and how we can become better Christians. We met other like-minded young people from around the world and came together to worship. It was very rewarding and has strengthened my faith. I am thankful for ESUMC enabling us to take part in this year’s conference. I hope those taking part in the coming years will find it as rewarding as I did.

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

AICEME is the Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East. ESUMC is an AICEME-member church, located at Sechshauser Strasse 56, 1150 Vienna.
6TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEWTOWN TRAGEDY REMEMBRANCE SERVICE AND TOWN HALL DISCUSSION

JOIN US TO REMEMBER AND SAVE LIVES

Remembrance Service in the Sanctuary of the American Church in Paris, followed by:

“Town Hall: Public Safety and Firearms”

Featuring:
HE Brendan Berne, Australian Ambassador to France
Gabby Giffords and Mark Kelly, Giffords Org (by video)
Chris Murphy, US Senator from Connecticut (by video)

14 DECEMBER 2018: 19H-21H

AMERICAN CHURCH IN PARIS
65 QUAI D’ORSAY, 75007 PARIS
WWW.ACPARIS.ORG  TEL: 01 40 62 05 00

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RSVP EMAIL: KAY.ROLLAND@GMAIL.COM
A MiniMissionary in Africa: Why not you?

by Patti Lafage,
ACP Missionary in Uganda

Kathy Boyett, an attorney, and her husband David, a business consultant from Dallas, Texas, spent two weeks as MiniMissionaries at Rafiki recently. Their “day job” assignment while there was to help out at RICE, Rafiki Institute of Classical Education. Since 2014, Rafiki Foundation has built the RICE teacher-training program to maximize the impact of our Christian Classical educational methodology. Each RICE graduate will be teaching scores then hundreds of Uganda children to love God, to love to learn, and to love to think.

Since it was midterm exam week, Kathy and David proctored exams, then graded them using the answer keys. Material ranged from simple arithmetic and grammar to discussion of the five vectors of disease communication, reading instruction and assessment, early church history…. Kathy gave spelling tests, David discussed current world affairs, and both worked with individual teacher trainees on specific areas where help or encouragement was needed. The Boyetts clearly modeled Rafiki Classical Education’s goal to create lifelong learners – people who know how to “learn just about anything.”

Both participated in the celebration of the end of midterm exams, which included lively games of dodgeball, special “eats” (pictured) and a ululating contest.

Kathy took on a special project of collecting testimonies from the students on the impact of RICE in their lives.

Here are a few examples of what they have to say:

“I didn’t know about classical education because in our village we only went to school to study and pass exams – that’s all, but RICE has really taught me different classical contexts which are interesting even to share to others.” – Shalom, third term student

“I am grateful because we are provided with many things – computers, music and art classes, and Bible study every morning which has strengthened my faith in God.” – Shanitah, first term student

“The benefits I have experienced here at RICE are both physically and spiritually immense, hence I have confidence and freedom to face the future.” – Splendor Jane, third term student

David, who doesn’t mind getting dirty, also helped the Rafiki groundskeepers swap a motor from a broken lawnmower to repair another one. He spent time with the older boys, who so appreciate a chance to discuss anything from Christian doctrine to sports, career goals, and “girls.”

Particular skills, knowledge, or experience are not really what it’s about to be part of the Rafiki MiniMissionaries. Come with love and a desire to share yourself (1Thessalonians 2:8). The rewards are amazing.

Rafiki will offer an all-day MiniMissionary information/training session at the beginning of 2020 at the American Church in Paris, to enable you to understand how you can serve with them, and whether this is a good opportunity for you.

If you’re interested in joining us, please contact Patti Lafage at plafage@gmail.com.

For more information on Rafiki and their work in Africa: www.rafikifoundation.org.
What’s going on?
Tune in to ACP Today radio

Have you ever listened to ACP Today, the American Church in Paris’ radio show? Join us on Mondays at 20h45 – this month on 3 and 17 December.
The 45-minute program is an exciting and inspiring mix of music, interviews, sermon highlights, and discussion on hot topics.

We’re at 100.7 FM, Radio Fréquence Protestante, and we broadcast especially for friends who may be house-bound or who would simply like more devotional time on a Monday evening. Don’t like the radio? Listen online at http://frequenceprotestante.com or tune in at your leisure via the ACP website, at www.acparis.org/ACPtoday, or the ACP mobile app.

Friends and visitors, what better way to keep in touch with the ACP family and learn about the latest ACP news? All our shows are available on our website, at www.acparis.org/acptoday. Faith Talk from Paris – it’s a kind of souvenir that never gets old.

If you have any questions, comments, ideas or would like to contribute to the show, be sure to contact us at acptoday@acparis.org.

Prayer Chain Team

Do you have a prayer request for our Prayer Team?
If so, please forward your prayer by email to prayerrequests@acparis.org. Your prayer request will remain strictly private and confidential.
Prayer is powerful. We are here for you.

If you would like someone to pray with you after services, a Prayer Team member is available. Meet in the chapel next to the theater after each service.

The Movie Discussion Group

19h30, Thursday, 13 December
Salle G2

This month’s movies to see beforehand:
Mauvaises Herbes
Sauver ou Périr
Widows
A Bread Factory

Contact: movies@acparis.org

Did you know you can follow the American Church in Paris on social media?
@AmChurchParis /AmericanChurchParis
Czech artist Alphonse Mucha believed that mysterious forces played a guiding role in everyone’s life. His success story is certainly proof that being in the right place at the right time can change everything. Alphonse Mucha, the current exhibit at the Musée du Luxembourg, puts forth a retrospective on the career of this artist whose work is familiar and yet whose career is relatively unknown.

Young and barely scraping a living in a Paris print shop producing illustrations, Mucha’s big break came when actress Sarah Bernhardt reputedly entered the shop on Christmas Eve to commission a poster for her play. Mucha seized the opportunity, created the famous image of Gismonda, and the rest is history. He worked exclusively for the Divine Sarah for six years creating posters, costumes, and set design. This work brought him great notoriety and in fact, his signature “Mucha style” became synonymous with Art Nouveau. Characterized by sylph-like beautiful women in elongated poses, crowned by flowers or surrounded by nature, all portrayed in pastel shades, his work is recognized on many consumer goods advertising campaigns, including Moet Chandon Champagne and LU biscuits.

Mucha went on to create the “Documents Décoratifs,” a reference work for decorating, which included 72 unique designs. In 1900 he began work on several projects for the Exposition Universelle de Paris, one of which was to decorate the pavilion for Bosnia-Herzegovina. While doing so, he developed a strong sense of patriotism for his own country, Czechoslovakia. He came up with the idea of creating a monumental project entitled The Slavic Epic, a series of 20 large-scale paintings depicting key events in Slavic history. Sadly, the paintings are not in this exhibit but there is an immersive video which gives the scale and feel for these masterpieces.

This exhibit is an opportunity to dig deeper into the career of a multi-talented artist. It is a chance to see beyond the beautiful Art Nouveau posters and design elements, and to discover the passions that inspired the artist towards greater accomplishments.


©Musée du Luxembourg

Alphonse Mucha by Karen Marin
### Special Events and Monthly Meetings and Concerts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact Person</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women's monthly Bible Study</strong>&lt;br&gt;This study on the Lord's Prayer meets once monthly. All women welcome! Free childcare is provided.</td>
<td>Sunday 2 Dec</td>
<td>12h15-13h15 F2 (first floor).</td>
<td>Teri Lee Valluy&lt;br&gt;sundaywomensbible&lt;br&gt;@acparis.org</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kids' monthly Bible Study</strong>&lt;br&gt;Children's Worship leads Bible study on the first Sunday of each month for children ages 7-12. The course is taught in both English and French.</td>
<td>Sunday 2 Dec</td>
<td>12h15-13h15 Catacombs and G2.</td>
<td>Allison Wheeler&lt;br&gt;childrensworship&lt;br&gt;@acparis.org</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACP Today: Faith Talk in Paris radio show</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tune in for inspiring music and interviews.</td>
<td>Monday 3 Dec</td>
<td>20h45-21h30</td>
<td>100.7 FM, Radio Fréquence Protestante</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ensemble Lumina Choral Concert</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ensemble Lumina, directed by Caroline Drury, invites you to a casual concert to get a taste of what the ACP chamber choir has to offer. The group will perform 30 minutes of music from its latest repertoire. Free admission.</td>
<td>Tuesday 4 Dec</td>
<td>20h Sanctuary</td>
<td>Visit ensemblelumina.fr for more information about Ensemble Lumina.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thurber Lecture - Dr. Medi Ann Volpe will be speaking on “Who is Normal?: Disability &amp; the Image of God.”</strong> Dr. Volpe teaches theology and ethics at Durham University (UK). Her research draws contemporary themes in Christian formation, theological anthropology, spirituality and ethics into conversation with voices from the classical Christian tradition, and is particularly attentive to the gifts those with intellectual disabilities bring to the Church.</td>
<td>Wednesday 5 Dec</td>
<td>19h meal; 19h45 program Thurber Room</td>
<td>Tim Vance&lt;br&gt;associatepastor&lt;br&gt;@acparis.org</td>
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<td><strong>Adult Fellowship</strong>&lt;br&gt;Singles and pairs, join us for fellowship every first Friday of the month in a lounge café setting, sharing testimonies, talking about the highs and lows of your life with brothers and sisters in Christ.</td>
<td>Friday 7 Dec</td>
<td>From 20h email contact for location</td>
<td>Daphne&lt;br&gt;30plusfellowship&lt;br&gt;@acparis.org</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writer’s Group</strong>&lt;br&gt;The ACP writer’s group meets monthly to sharpen each other’s writing tool kits and support fellow members’ writing projects.</td>
<td>Saturday 8 Dec</td>
<td>14h30 - 16h30 Room G2</td>
<td>Tendayi Chirawu&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:writers@acparis.org">writers@acparis.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Candlelight Christmas Concerts</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participating choirs include the ACP Choir, ACP Bronze Ringers, Ensemble Lumina, and Sotto Voce Children’s Choir. Tickets available at reception. Proceeds support the missions of this church.</td>
<td>Saturday 8 Dec</td>
<td>17h &amp; 20h Sanctuary</td>
<td>Fred Gramann&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:music@acparis.org">music@acparis.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Women’s Fellowship</strong>&lt;br&gt;All women are invited to join as we gather in Kim Herr’s apartment (located in the ACP Church House) to celebrate the Christmas season. Please bring a sweet or savory treat to share. Childcare is provided in G1.</td>
<td>Sunday 9 Dec</td>
<td>12h15-13h30 Herr apartment</td>
<td>Kim Herr&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:women@acparis.org">women@acparis.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deadline for turning in Love in a Box donations</strong>&lt;br&gt;Make a Love in a Box gift for children who would not otherwise receive a Christmas present this year. Instructions on what and how to pack your special gift box can be found at the Love in a Box table in the Theater or at reception.</td>
<td>Sunday 9 Dec</td>
<td>Love in the Box table Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACP MOPS (mothers of children ages newborn-18)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Free childcare available.</td>
<td>Friday 14 Dec</td>
<td>10h-12h</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mops@acparis.org">mops@acparis.org</a></td>
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## Special Events and Monthly Meetings and Concerts

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friday Mission Lunch (volunteers needed)</strong></td>
<td>Friday 14 Dec</td>
<td>10h-14h</td>
<td>The American Cathedral</td>
<td>If you are interested, please first contact: Kristie Worrel fridaymissionlunch @acparis.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Friday a hot, nutritious meal is prepared for the homeless and needy. ACP is responsible for the meal on the second Friday of each month, but we are grateful for help with cooking, serving, and cleaning up every Friday.</td>
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<td><strong>Remembrance Service for the 6th anniversary of Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy</strong></td>
<td>Friday 14 Dec</td>
<td>18h</td>
<td>Sanctuary</td>
<td>Contact and RSVP: Kay Rolland at <a href="mailto:kay.rolland@gmail.com">kay.rolland@gmail.com</a>.</td>
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<td>Forum: “Public Safety and Firearms”</td>
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<td>19h</td>
<td>Theater</td>
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<td>Featuring HE Brendan Berne, Australian Ambassador to France; Gabby Giffords and Mark Kelly, Giffords Org (by video); and Chris Murphy, US Senator from Connecticut (by video).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons and carols led by Children’s Worship</strong></td>
<td>Sunday 16 Dec</td>
<td>11h service</td>
<td></td>
<td>Allison Wheeler childrensworship @acparis.org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our children will lead us through the story of the birth of Jesus in story and song. All children are welcome and encouraged to participate. A rehearsal will take place on Sunday, 9 December, during the 11h service. If your child is 9 or 10 years old, they are welcome to do a portion of the narration; to secure a role, please contact Allison Wheeler.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACP Today: Faith Talk in Paris radio show</strong></td>
<td>Monday 17 Dec</td>
<td>20h45-21h30</td>
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<td>100.7 FM, Radio Fréquence Protestante</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tune in for inspiring music and interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Christmas Eve Worship Services</strong></td>
<td>Mon, 24 Dec</td>
<td>16h</td>
<td></td>
<td>To help us better welcome the many guests and tourists, please consider attending the 16h service or the 22h service as the 19h30 service is always very full.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Service</td>
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<td>19h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical Prelude</td>
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<td>19h30</td>
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<td>Candlelight Service</td>
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<td>21h30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical Prelude</td>
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<td>22h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candlelight Service</td>
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<td>23h</td>
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<td>Cookie Reception</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Christmas Holidays</strong></td>
<td>Monday 25 Dec — Saturday 29 Dec</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church offices closed.</td>
<td>Monday 31 Dec — Tuesday 1 Jan</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACP Café</strong></td>
<td>Friday 4 Jan</td>
<td>19h30-21h30</td>
<td>Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>Come celebrate the New Year with music featuring Daniel Herr, Chris Herr, and other members of Still Point and friends. Drinks and dinner for purchase, Open to all. Free entry. Invite your friends!</td>
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## French language classes

French classes are held on Tuesdays at ACP, from 18h30-20h, taught by Francois Pierre and Yasmina Rezkallah. The class is intended for beginners who are committed to learning French. Attendance is limited to 20. The annual fee is €80, and a book purchase is necessary. There is no age or nationality restriction, and no pre-requirements.

Remember, learning a new language requires significant work. There is no such thing as “French made easy.” Therefore, weekly attendance is a requirement and ongoing progress is expected. If you are interested, please come along to a Tuesday night class for a sample class.
The beautifully decorated American Church in Paris you walk into during Advent is the handiwork of 16 volunteers whose two-day labor of love prepared the sanctuary and narthex for the season.

From the angels’ choir tableau in the narthex to the swags and wreaths on the pews in the sanctuary, from the greenery on the balcony to the garlands on the pillars and swags and candles in the choir loft, plus the incredible 15-foot Nordmann fir adorned with ornaments and more than 1,000 lights, the decorating took an estimated 135 man- and woman-hours to complete.

The volunteers came in the weekend before the first Sunday in Advent under the direction of Gigi Oyog, who has coordinated the project for nearly two decades. She relies mostly on friends in the Filipino Fellowship to carry out the many tasks. “I know that they want to help prepare the Lord’s house for His coming,” Gigi said. And that’s why you might hear mostly Tagalog when the volunteers communicate as they buzz around.

The work is extensive enough that she designates section leaders: Venie Marron (balcony), Glosefina Francisco (pews), Delia Esteban (columns and choir loft) and Lisa Quirona (tree). Gigi estimated that Lisa’s team spent at least seven hours just on decorating the sapin.

The other volunteers who can stand up and take a “bough” include Lita Pacle, Eloisa Nulud, Grace Laxa, Rita Atao, Rose Enriquez, Sonia Marron, Ben Punzalan, Nene Cajaljal, Myrna Guial, and Jun Polinar, plus Mary Hovind Gay, the only non-Filipino among the helpers.

Two weeks before the decorating begins, boxes of decorations are brought down from the church attic so that Gigi can check all the lights and start fluffing out ornaments that have been squashed in storage. The many doves on the tree have to have their feathers fluffed. Gigi also uses this two-week calm before the two-day storm to finish decorations in the narthex with figurines.

This year that narthex display recreates an angels’ choir. “Second to it being for the glory of God, I came to look at it as a tribute to the excellent musicians in our church,” Gigi explained. “In particular, Fred Gramann’s music, and his choirs, are what have accompanied me during my journey at the ACP.”

The 450-centimeter tree is a special part of the Christmas decorations, both to Gigi and the congregants who marvel at it. Before she took over as decorating coordinator about 20 years ago, the tree had been adorned with ornaments in holiday colors. “When I became in charge,” she said, “there were two things that I knew. I knew that I wanted the Christmas tree to be decked in white, and I knew that there had to be doves. White, because it is the liturgical color of Christmas. Doves, to symbolize the Holy Spirit and peace.”

The white is a symbol of purity, she said, “the pureness of God’s love that He sent His only son to be born to us, among us, and who will eventually die for us.”

All this behind-the-scenes work by so many volunteers makes for a delightful Christmas present to the congregation.

Photos thanks to Kim and Scott Herr