

# Redeemer Lutheran Church

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Dear Trustees:

It is the desire of the Redeemer Lutheran Church, East Fall's Congregational Council to report to Synod the highlights of church activities and business over the past month, as set forth below. As you know, aside from the letter from Bishop Burkat on November 11, 2007, our Council and church leaders have heard nothing from Synod or the trustees charged with the synodical administration since our meeting on November 1, 2007. This inaction of Synod is in contrast with our timely and full compliance last month with the Bishop's specified requests for detailed church material, our submission of a comprehensive plan for Redeemer's ministry, and a continuing, earnest desire on the part of Council to call Pastor Festo Mutashobya.

## Christmas Cantata and Worship

The Christmas season at Redeemer has been busy and productive.

On December 2, our Swahili Choir traveled to Holy Trinity, Queens, New York City, to sing for Pastor Butiku's Church. Pastor Butiku helped us to start our Swahili ministry three years ago. Our group met Bishop Stephen Bouman of the Metropolitan New York Synod. A photo of our choir appeared in a local newspaper.

On December 22, we hosted a multi-cultural Christmas concert. The sanctuary was filled for the three-hour concert. An hour long fellowship followed. We enjoyed a 30-minute cantata, special music and congregational singing, dance, readings, prayer and fellowship, all under joint leadership and participation of both the English and Swahili members. We are truly one church, working and worshipping together as one in the body of Christ.

It was a night of many "firsts": the first event Abigail Bomani and Selina Mbowe organized as a major event for the whole church; the first time Nathaniel Leach led a children's choir; the first time we combined the choral talents of both English and Swahili communities; the first time 11-year-old Kevin Meena played piano and led a congregational hymn; the first time 9-year-old Alec Meena stood before the entire congregation and spoke with eloquence beyond his years; the first time we made an effort to advertise the event to a broad community, and the first time our English members had a chance to meet Pastor Festo in a worship leadership setting.

In all, about 70 congregants were present. Importantly, we attracted several new people through this concert, who not only attended but also came to rehearsals and performed. Pastor Festo will follow up with visits. The success of this concert is truly inspiring, and all who participated are now equipped and eagerly awaiting the opportunity to plan and stage this type of worship program again in our church.

We held an All-Church Christmas Eve service, which we planned with the entire congregation's participation. As expected, we had many community visitors, and therefore the service was presented primarily in English, with a few special numbers in Swahili. We closed with Silent Night, sung in both English and Swahili. Both Pastor Jenkins and Pastor Festo gave meditations at various points throughout the service. Additionally, the Swahili community held a service on Christmas morning which featured a family choir and visitors from Princeton, New Jersey, and Amherst, Massachusetts.

## **Congregational Activities and Worship**

In preparation for the Advent and Christmas season, we had an All-Church clean-up day. Members spent about four hours cleaning and removing clutter and items left by Epiphany and other groups who have used our building over the years. We enjoyed a light lunch together before rescheduling a second clean up. Church council members worked hard to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas, restoring the lighting. We had a third work day, in which members worked to add exterior lighting and decorations to the sanctuary, all in the spirit of Christ our Lord. We truly presented a God-pleasing sanctuary for this holy season.

A mid-week Bible study has been meeting for the last six weeks and is growing in numbers. An important component of the Bible study is group prayer. The group discusses topics of prayer at length, and develops a detailed list of prayer concerns, followed by extemporaneous prayer on these topics by those present at the meetings.

A monthly All Church Praise and Worship Prayer Service has been organized and meets on the last Saturday of the month at 4 p.m. We have English, French and Swahili prayers lifted up to the Lord. To date, two prayer services have been held, with strong, growing interest.

During the Advent season, we introduced and learned several new Advent hymns and learned a challenging anthem as a congregational hymn, even adding some of our own verses.

We regularly put together food baskets for needy families. In addition, this year we are planning to put together gift baskets for some young single parent families who visited with us during the holiday season.

Finally, the Swahili community has expressed an interest in doing more All-Church activities and worship expression, so we will be exploring this as we enter the new year. A special service is being planned for New Year's. After that planning for Lent and Easter will begin in earnest.

## **Review of Redeemer's Intent to Call Pastor Festo Mutashobya**

Redeemer's music, prayer and worship activities during this Christmas season, as well as throughout the full ecumenical calendar, although they cross a multi-cultural divide, really are no different than the Christ-centered worship taking place in hundreds of churches in our area, including our Lutheran brethren. Redeemer leaders, and all congregants, have worked together to unite diverse people in service and worship to our Lord. Redeemer is carrying out all of the functions of a church through our distinct congregation and leadership: worship, service, education, outreach, witness and fellowship. All of this is happening, by God's grace, without the benefit of an officially called pastor.

Although this is our second consecutive Christmas without a pastor, our member-pastor, Pastor Festo Mutashobya, is doing an inspired and excellent job of reaching into both the local and Swahili communities to bring an effective ministry through the offering of his gifts and talents, to all who worship and pray at Redeemer, as one Body. His efforts are restrained however, inasmuch as he is waiting, along with our congregants, for Synod to recognize his position and his work.

We remind you that on November 1 we presented a resolution for your consideration, requesting that Synod formalize our relationship with Pastor Festo, and complete his call. We have heard nothing in response. Council on its December 15 meeting reviewed the resolution and the status of our call to Pastor Festo and resolved again to approach the synod about his call.

Pastor Jenkins, who has been supplying the English service for the past 14 months, has given notice that he wishes to continue only as a visitation pastor after January 1. He cited his age as making weekly worship leadership too demanding for him.

We have no desire to return to a succession of supply pastors, as Pastor Festo has been involved and working with us for quite some time, on a limited basis. Beginning January 1, Pastor Festo will begin supplying for both services and helping us in additional ways as needs arise. This arrangement is no different than the many arrangements we have had with other supply pastors over the past ten years, including Pastor Jenkins.

It is the desire of our congregation, and this council, to call Pastor Festo to full service in ministry at Redeemer. We again request that you give our resolution your undivided consideration, and support our request to call Pastor Festo. Overall, based on the current status and position of Redeemer as articulated above, given our continuing full compliance with Synod's constitution, it appears the synodical administration is in label only. Unfortunately, this label is hindering under the guise of uncertainty two key areas for Redeemer: stewardship/giving and Pastor Festo's call.

Redeemer is unified both in spirit and worship, although diverse in its body. It is the desire and expectation of Redeemer to continue to be treated as one congregation worshipping under the pastoral leadership of Pastor Festo, who is qualified and inspired to continue to serve. Accordingly, Redeemer wants the synodical roadblocks to our efforts to call Pastor Festo to be removed immediately.

Yours in Christ,

Redeemer Congregational Council

Stanley Meena, President

Judith Gotwald, Vice President

Selina Mbowe

Abigail Bomani

Freda Gowling

Kevin Siropaides

Nathaniel Leach

Prisca Mutashobya

Primus Muganyizi

Emmanuel Bandawe

Dr. Festo Mutashobya, Congregation Member and Supply Pastor

cc: Rev. Claire S. Burkat  
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