

In The Way

with the St-Onges

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Transitions

The St-Onges are once again in an "in-between" place, living with one foot in one world and one foot in another. I am still serving as Area Facilitator for the Caribbean in Latin America while Synod completes the process that will enable me to serve in Québec. Since the home we were renting in Ohio was sold in June, we needed to move anyway, and it seemed best to allow the girls to acclimatize to their new environment while the paperwork is finished.

We are living in Deux-Montagnes, a "north shore" (rive-nord) suburb of Montréal, the third largest French-speaking (francophone) city in the world. While it is possible to get by in Montréal without speaking any French, it would be similar to getting by in a city like Philadelphia speaking only Spanish. Most stores have someone who can speak a little English, and most government offices do as well. There are English radio stations, and the English newspaper The Gazette. But to really understand the place and function well here, you need to speak French.

Lutherans have not made a lot of impact in most French-speaking areas of the world, partly because we've been a "cultural" church as opposed to a counter- or cross-cultural one (see "Mission Moment"). The Lutheran congregations in Québec have all been historically tied to a particular ethnic group. They served the Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Swedish, Slovak and, yes, German communities. In recent years two Chinese congregations have been added (one LCMS, one not). When these congregations transitioned away from their "home" languages, they transitioned not to French but to English. The Québécois have therefore tended to see Lutherans, if they know about them at all, as a particular ethnic expression of Christianity distinct from mainstream society. They have not seen "Lutheran" as a unique confession of the Christian faith.

I believe firmly that the Bible is the Word of God, revealed by the Spirit to the prophets, apostles and evangelists. It is the only guide we have to understand God's will for us, his salvation in Christ, and his desire for our lives in this world. The Bible reveals that God gives his people undeserved gifts under the normal created things of this world: water, bread and wine. To believe these things in their purest form, without adding to them, is impossible as a Roman Catholic or general Protestant. So history has labelled me a "Lutheran." It is what I am, not because of my earthly culture but because of the culture Christ has caused me to be born in to, his Church.

Mission Moment

Cultural or counter-cultural religion: which is Christianity? Andrew Brown, a writer for the Guardian newspaper, argued in April that the Church of England is dying because it is a cultural institution, and the only religions that are growing in the UK are counter-cultural ones.

As the US culture continues to vere more and more from biblical morality, the Church's teachings will continue to be increasingly counter-cultural. Yet many congregations want to continue to be cultural institutions: places for baptisms, marriages and burials, societies that require no different behavior from their members than the world does.

Lutheran congregations have often tended to be cultural institutions – "I'm a German, so I'm Lutheran!" Christ calls us to change that thinking, and remember that we are Lutherans because we want to be faithful to Christ, no matter what the world may be preaching or doing at any given time.



Left: Guest preaching at Ascension, Montreal;
Top: Discussing mission work;
Center: Olivia, Charles and Sophia with our new Québec license plate;
Bottom Right: Speaking with members at Ascension.



Thoughts from Deborah

“What language should I study?” As a sixth grader, I had a hard time deciding between French and German. I wondered if I was betraying my heritage by not choosing German. I felt guilty and besides, a lot of my friends were taking it. For some reason I was also drawn to French. In the end, I decided to take French because there were a set of albums in my basement that I felt would “give me the edge” should I need a little extra help. “Teach Yourself French”.

Although I loved learning the language and culture, was active in our high school French Club, and had an opportunity to use the language while traveling, nothing much really came of it after high school. Sixteen years later, however, I got married. My German last name became my middle name and I began spelling my last name with a hyphen. The “French-Canadian” way.

Even at that, my use of the language was limited to very basic conversations with first cousins once removed. Yay! I remembered how to ask your name and tell you “good job”! And now, thirty years later, I am immersed in a culture where everything is in French. God’s timing really is for the long term. Recently, I asked my mother about those albums - something I had never done. It seemed an “out of character” purchase for her. She told me she thought it would be cool to learn French when she was younger. She never became proficient, but God used her to plant a seed that now will hopefully bear much fruit.

Prayer Concerns

- For Synod staff in St. Louis, as they strive with fewer resources to place more and more missionaries in the world,
- For Abasifreke Ite, wife of Pastor Ite in Jamaica, who is suffering from fibroids and will have surgery in the fall,
- For the Schullers and Rueschs, as they labor in Puerto Rico, and the Hasskarls, for their work in the Cayman Islands,
- For Olivia and Sophia, as they begin learning French, and for Deborah and the girls, as their residency is processed.

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