



Greetings in the name of Christ, to you, our Global Mission partners and sponsors.

Friends, this will be our final newsletter as your ELCA Missionaries to Senegal. There is much to share about the present reality, as well as the future. But first, let me bring you Advent greetings. Advent, not only because it is the season in which we find ourselves, but Advent is the posture which all Christians should keep everyday as they await to see God's coming.

Advent is the season of three-fold time when we remember the waiting. First, we remember the waiting of the Prophets and people of Israel as they yearned for the Divine response to their generational yearning, "How long, O Lord?" Second we remember the waiting of Mary and Joseph for the coming of the Messiah in our time, and the way in which Mary prepared room even in her physical being for the incarnation of God's will-to-Love in the Christ child. And third, we await God's coming, perhaps in the Paradisaic restoration of creation, or in the daily coming into our lives by the gentle leading of the Holy Spirit. But this waiting is an active one. It is not the emptiness of waiting in line or waiting on a reply. Rather, it is a pregnant waiting, where we are in constant progression and growth, even if we don't see yet where we are going. We wait in expectant longing, how long, O Lord, knowing only that God is faithful, and someday, at some time, we will see.

Well, that is where the Rimmer family finds ourselves this Advent. After returning to the US last June for our Home Assignment, we went to Duke University Hospital for Natalie's regular scans and discovered that the cancer had returned. This time it metastasized to her lungs and her heart. She immediately began a course of chemotherapy that continues today. We made plans to be in NC indefinitely. The reality is that while our hearts are in Senegal, there is no specialized Sarcoma care, so we can't be there. We entered a period of deep conversation and seeking between ELCA Global Mission and other Churchwide staff about the possibilities of reshaping our call to continue serving in Senegal in some capacity. Unfortunately, the realities and constraints make it such that there is just no way forward for us in this role. We have to seek healing, and we can't do it in Senegal.

And so we grieve, as a fact of our human condition brings to an end to our call to Global Mission that has spanned 15 years. Natalie and I began our Global Horizon internship in Copenhagen in 2001. We have been blessed by our ministry with the International Church of Copenhagen, our involvement with the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation, our life among the Episcopal Church of Scotland, our language learning in France and most recently our call to serve, live, teach and love alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ of the Lutheran Church of Senegal. We thank God for this call and pray that along the way we have reflected even a portion of the Light, Life and Love that we have received. We have seen the Advent of God's Spirit in so many profound ways, and through the lives and languages of so many of our friends around the world. Now we enter with them into a time of gratitude for that faithful coming in the past, and we await for what is to come in the future. This goes for the Lutheran Church of Senegal as well as our family.

In what concerns the ministry in Senegal, we leave knowing that while we will hopefully be missed, the Church and her ministries continue. I will miss teaching our students at the Lutheran Institute of Theology in Senegal (ILTS). They are in mid-course, and we pray for their continuation until the goal – the end of their coursework and ordination. But this program continues in the capable hands

of Rev. Dib Ndong, the Director of the Department for Theology and Formation, and the ELS President, Rev. Thomas Diouf. We also will miss our friends throughout the ELS, particularly in the Dakar and Linguere parishes where we shared life and laughter with our friends, and at home with our beloved Néné and Babacar. But the laughter and service of ELCA missionaries continues as Pastor Kristin Engstrom and our Young Adults in Global Mission serve the Church and among the development projects of the SLDS. We only grieve that we will not relate to them in the same way.

And we grieve that we will not relate to you as your missionaries in Senegal. However, we want to encourage you to maintain your accompaniment and sponsorship of the ministries in Senegal through the ELCA Global Church. They will be in contact with our sponsors in the coming weeks to help you consider options at the close of our call. I cannot tell you how much we have appreciated your prayers and support of every kind throughout our ministry in Senegal, and I cannot tell you how much it is appreciated by your friends of the ELS. For that reason we make one last request of you. That is to generally continue your involvement in the ELCA Global Church Sponsorship, and particularly to consider continuing your support of our mission personnel and programs in Senegal. Nothing would make our hearts happier than to know that even though our service must come to an end, your relationship with and support of everything we have done together will continue.

As for us, we will no longer be your missionaries. But despite the loss of that special relationship, we invite you to personally stay in touch through our email and social media. We are, after all, friends and sisters and brothers along the way and we have come this far by faith. It will be our joy to keep you up to date on Natalie's healing and what calling comes next for us. What will be, will certainly be beautiful as we go out knowing that even while we have many unknowns, God is faithful and the Loving Hand leads us. While we wait as the Prophets for the answer to our longing, we are bold to wait with expectation...for healing, for calls, for new beginnings and as always, to see the light of God's grace shine in the midst of grief. That is the heart of Luther's Theology of the Cross, and it is the heart of the Arabic blessing, Alhumdulilah, "Thanks be to God," that serves as a refrain in Senegal for every one of life's turns. In life and in death, Alhumdulilah. In blessing and in disappointment, Alhumdulilah. In rejoicing and in grief, Thanks be to God. Because ours is an Advent waiting where we pray boldly, Come Lord Jesus. And like the Prophets, we don't know how long. But we invite you to wait with us in the sure and certain hope of our faith that, *Maranatha*, the Lord has come, and *Maranatha*, the Lord is coming. And surely all manner of things shall be well.

We pray that this Advent is a blessed preparation for the Spirit's coming in your being, that Christmas will be an incarnation of God's Love in your life, and that Epiphany will reveal the Light of Christ to illumine your path. Friends, we love you.

Et que la Paix du Christ soit avec vous pour toujours,
Pastor Chad, Natalie, Paul Michael and Luke Rimmer

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or through our blogs on our family's website,
www.therimmers.squarespace.com

