

JUNE 2022 – THE JOY OF THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” Psalm 100:1-2 (NIV)

Dear Friends,

Firstly, I want to thank each of you who contributes so faithfully and generously to Advocates International! Sam Ericsson used to say that AI was funded by widows who gave \$20 a month. Every amount, big or small is equally valuable to us and enables us to do justice with compassion across the globe! We can never express enough appreciation for your generosity!

In my February newsletter I wrote to you about the plight of the Afghan believers who fled to neighboring countries and, were attempting to secure travel documents to the USA or other so-called “lily pad” countries or who were trying to avoid being deported back to Afghanistan. Thank you especially for your donations toward this cause! Although a lot of work is happening behind the scenes and being bureaucratic in nature, the process is unfortunately slow. We are currently working with our partners to reunite one Christian family. The father of the family as well as the one son are currently in the USA and have Humanitarian Parole Visas. The mom and the two other sons are still in Pakistan. The mom and the one son now have their visas but need the funds to apply for a visa for the other son. The cost of the visa is \$600 and the travel costs for the three family members to the USA is \$ 2 400. Could you please prayerfully consider contributing to these costs?

I told you previously about Deon and my travels in Eastern Europe in April. By the time we reached Vienna in Austria, our spirits had been enormously weighed down by observing and meeting the refugees from the Ukraine and visiting the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps near Krakow in Poland. We were struggling to come to terms with the pain, suffering and trauma humans are capable to inflict on other humans. Being the city of Strauss and Mozart, we decided to attend a concert of their music in the Kursalon in Vienna.

Until shortly before the start of the concert, the three rows of seats in front of us were empty until a group of around twenty visually impaired young people and their companions arrived. One of these, a young man in his twenties, was clearly completely blind as he had to be led to his seat. Once the music started, this young man became completely absorbed, waving his arms, and gesticulating wildly in tune with the music. At first, I could see from the faces of those around me that they, like me, were pitying him because he did not realize that he was embarrassing himself. Slowly but surely, it dawned on me that we were the ones who should be pitied. Because of our inhibitions, we were not able to give ourselves over to the pure beauty and joy which the music brought. By the time the Radetzky march was played at the end of the program and the audience had joined the musicians with the customary clapping of their hands, Deon and my spirits were soaring with joy!

Afterwards, I reflected on this experience and considered how often the joy of the Lord is referred to in Scriptures. Given that most of the heroes of faith we read of didn't have particularly easy circumstances, I realized that our faith is certainly not about the pursuit of happiness or about avoiding difficult situations, but rather about finding the joy of the Lord amidst these challenges.

When Jesus was born, the angels announced, "*good tidings of great joy*". In Luke 1:44 & 47 we read that Jesus brought joy even before He was born, as attested to by Mary's song and that John "*leapt for joy*" in his mother's womb as he heard Mary's voice. The early church was characterized by gladness and joy of the Lord. Considering the persecution they suffered, it is even more remarkable that Paul writes to the Galatians that joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

In Nehemiah 8 we find the account of the prophet Ezra reading the Book of the Law to the people. Having been convinced of how they have sinned, they mourn and weep. Nehemiah then says to the: "*Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*" What an awesome wonder: **Despite our circumstances, our sin and shame, the joy of the Lord remains our strength!**

Peacemaking and reconciliation have always been a key focus area of Advocates International. I recently had the wonderful privilege to reconnect with our long-time friends, Ken Sande, and Chip Zimmer. Ken is the CEO and President of Relational Wisdom 360 (RW360) and Chip, the Director of International Relations. With Dave Kelly, their Director of Learning and Development, we are looking to make training resources available to our advocates around the world. RW360's annual conference with the theme "*Sowing peace*" will take place from August 18-21, 2022, in Montana. More details of the conference are available on the website www.rw360.org.

Several of you have already indicated that you are planning to join us from Thursday, September 15 to Sunday, September 18 in Cambridge in the UK at the conference hosted by Faith and Law Around the Globe (FLAG), Lawyers Christian Fellowship, Christ und Jurist and Christ & Recht. The main conference venue is **The Cambridge Union | Defending Free Debate since 1815** (cus.org) The FLAG promotional video can be watched at <https://youtu.be/pOvpKtNeATk>. Registrations for the Conference have opened at <https://intre.org/index.php?558>. Judging from the conference website and the program, we can look forward to a marvelous time together – please join us if you are able to!

Warmly in Christ



Teresa Conradie

President and CEO, Advocates International



Donate using
this QR-Code

PS: Don't forget that Advocates accepts **gifts of stocks** through Fidelity Investments, DTC#: 0226; AI account #: Z44881848. All financial gifts are tax deductible and greatly appreciated.