Joy – diverse sources, one foundation

"Joy in Christ" is not a question of the circumstances. It is not something that is found only there where we are happy and content anyway. This is how District Apostle Barnes in Cape Town in South Africa experienced it. Following is his contribution on our 2015 motto.

I recently read something interesting about the composer Joseph Haydn (1732–1809). When asked why his wonderful compositions always sounded so cheerful, he replied, "I cannot make it otherwise; I write according to the thoughts I feel. When I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap, as it were, from my pen; and since God has given me a cheerful heart, it will be pardoned me that I serve Him with a cheerful spirit."

This reminded me about some beautiful incidents, happenings, and experiences connected with the "Joy in Christ".

The word "joy"

The word "joy" is associated with laughter, pleasure, happy thoughts and joyous events. Yet, upon reflection, joy springs forth out of divergent sources, which sometimes seem irreconcilable with prevailing circumstances.

Being able to praise and worship the Lord in safety and comfort is a reason for joy. Not all our brothers and sisters, however, have this privilege. In certain congregations around the Cape Peninsula the members worship and serve the Lord under life-threatening conditions. From time to time the townships in which they live are afflicted with violent crime, gang wars, and drug abuse. Gang members shoot at one another in the streets and innocent people are caught in the cross-fire. Many have been wounded and even killed by stray bullets, some while they are in their own homes. Yet life goes on. People go to work and children go to school.

Divine services and activities

Divine services and activities such as choir practices continue with much prayers and caution. Amazingly, I recently discovered how courageously our young brothers overcame such obstacles. Neatly dressed in black and white (their "choir uniform") they pick the members up at their homes and walk with them to the church, even for choir practices. Because of their dress they are "allowed" by the gangsters to walk to church.

Their joy in the work does not diminish, not even in the face of such danger. As a token of my appreciation I provided these brothers with a black tie, which they gladly wear. On the attached photo they radiate joy! These societal miscreants even suspend their hostilities during this time!

Driven by the motto “Joy in Christ”, the youth in an adjacent bishop area arranged a mission trip under the banner: *Moving with the joy in Christ*. This described their desire to bring witness of their faith beyond the confines of their working area. They engaged in fundraising activities to cover the costs of a one-day mission trip. The result was that more than 300 youth were able to participate in a mission trip to Robertson, approximately 160 km from Cape Town.

“Moving with the joy in Christ”

The slogan “Moving with the joy in Christ” was now personified in their lives. The group, accompanied by their youth leaders, split up and attended five separate congregations for the Sunday morning service. After the divine service new friendships were established as the youth interacted with local youth in fellowship. Thereafter, together with the town’s youth, they walked the streets, going door to door to invite guests to the afternoon’s concert that was presented by the visiting youth. This labour of love yielded over 600 participants, who filled the local school hall to enjoy the performance.

Despite the circumstances in their community they found their joy in sharing their faith.

Recently a young mother approached her Bishop to assist her in sharing some sad news with her 6-year-old daughter. The mother had been diagnosed with cancer and did not have long to live. She found it difficult to break this news to her daughter.

The Bishop met with the child and her father. After greeting him, the little girl excitedly shared the news that she had just passed grade 1 at school. She told the bishop: “Now I am waiting for Mommy to come home from hospital so that we could all enjoy a blessed Christmas.”

With great care he had to break the news to her: “Mommy will not be coming home, Jesus is coming to fetch her.” She bravely tried to fight back the tears, but did not succeed. Then, while sobbing, she made a wonderful, unforgettable statement: “Even if Jesus is coming to fetch Mommy, I will still love Him.”

This young girl had found a joy in sorrow.

“I’ve found a joy in sorrow”

This reminded me of the hymn “I’ve found a joy in sorrow” (Hymnal 192). The words of the last verse profess:

- “My Saviour, You possessing,
  I have the joy, the balm;
  the healing and the blessing,
  the sunshine and the calm.”

And so we understand that while our joy may come from divergent sources it has one solid foundation: **Joy in Christ!**

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