



(Note that a trick of the camera and the slope of the ground make Joshua look tall; Hannahgail is still the tallest, though Zerachiah has almost caught her.)

## ***Expanding Christ's Kingdom in Kenya ... and beyond***

3 December 2024

Happy Advent!

We hope that you all had a Happy Thanksgiving. On this Giving Tuesday, we are writing to report what our supporters have been giving to the Kingdom through their support of our ministry.

### **ACTEA**

One of the ways ACTEA fulfills its role of supporting theological education in Sub-Saharan Africa is through participating in or hosting conferences for those in theological education. Joshua attends many of these conferences (not all, as they are held all over the continent). Since our last newsletter, those have been the Yale-Edinburgh World Christianity & Mission Conference (June, Nairobi), two conferences for the TransAtlantic Writing project (which focuses on mentoring theological educators; Cape Coast, Ghana in July and Kingston, Jamaica in August), and three of ACTEA's six most recent conferences: TheoGlobal and Next Future (both in July, Nairobi) and a Francophone Theological Consultation (October and November, Brazzaville, Congo). I (Ruth) was privileged to attend on the final day of the Next Future conference which looked at the future of theological education, including an examination of what is working well and what needs to be addressed.

One of the speakers had a fascinating perspective. He pointed to the reality that often we see theological education as the domain only of those who intend to work in fulltime ministry, and he urged the theological educators to broaden their scope. He challenged us to consider cross-disciplinary work. What theological education do we offer to equip lawyers or business leaders or doctors, for example, to better fulfill their roles?

Another speaker talked of how often educators focus only on academics and neglect their students' spiritual and emotional well-being. She advocated educators building stronger connections with their students and challenged them to become people their students turn to with their life struggles and not just academic questions.

Finally, someone addressed the issue of cults. Kenya was rocked last year by the news of a cult which left over 400 confirmed deaths with over 600 people missing, many of whom were children and youths starved or otherwise killed by their parents. The cult leader predicted the imminent return of Christ and called his followers to fast to death in order to meet Jesus sooner. This is a serious issue for theological educators. How do we better equip churches to address the danger of cults? This last is of great concern to me, because cults and abuse strongly overlap, and Joshua and I have submitted an abstract on the topic for next year's ASET (African Society for Evangelical Theology) conference.

ACTEA's most recent conference was the Francophone Theological Consultation in Congo-Brazzaville. Though I, Ruth, did not attend the conference, I, being a very experienced packer 😊, volunteered my services to pack the six and a half bags of materials ACTEA was taking to give to the participants. These included ACTEA bling such as bags and hoodies, conference materials, and theological books to better equip the educators. As we drove home after packing, Joshua and I discussed how healing it has been for us both to be part of a genuinely healthy organization.

Another important part of ACTEA's work is continuing education through publication. Though Joshua is an important contributor to ACTEA's work through conferences, Joshua's main roles have been to

mentor theological educators in writing and publishing and to found ACTEA's academic journal, *African Christian Theology* (ACT). Accessibility is important, and so the journal is open access (free online). You can visit it [here](#). This has been a huge task, and he has done an amazing job building the journal team. The journal team met their goal, and the first volume consisting of two issues came out this year, one in March and one in September. I was excited to have my first academic publication be in the second issue of this volume, "[The Rain Reveals the Leaks: How the Vulnerability of the 'Least of These' Reveals the Vulnerabilities in our Own Hearts and Systems.](#)" The ACT team is on track for volume two, with issue one (March 2025) being a general issue and issue two (September 2025) being a themed issue, "Nicaea at 1700: Roots and Branches in African Christianity" (read more [here](#); the title refers to the Council of Nicaea in 325, a watershed event in Christian history).

Joshua and I were also solicited to contribute an article to another publication. We submitted a paper examining how the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ can effectively address abuse without a denominational structure. That was our second co-written paper we have submitted for publication this year. I, Ruth, am currently working on a co-written piece with a different scholar, Alfred Sebahene, who is dean of the theological school at St John's University in Dodoma, Tanzania.

Through the course of my work, I have seen a need for better networking for those addressing the issue of abuse in the church. I watched as Joshua and his friend Wakakuholesanga developed a network in 2020 to facilitate dialogue among African theological scholars. That group met a deep need and grew rapidly. It has been very formative and effective and led to his invitation to join ACTEA and found the ACT journal. I have begun visioning and planning a similar network to support scholars addressing abuse in the church and have an appointment with an online coach this week to help me move my plan into action. I also have a meeting in mid-December here in Kenya with a consultant who provides mentoring and support for organizations like the network I am envisioning. I would appreciate prayer as I embark on this task.

This year, my words for the year have been *Healing* and *Resurrection*. *Healing* was my word to guide my choices. I would make choices which would lead me and the family toward healing. *Resurrection* was my word for meditation. I would meditate on what resurrection looks like after abuse. Like the cross, abuse is not the end; there is resurrection after abuse. Unfortunately, this is an area the church hasn't adequately addressed in the lives of many, many victims, and too many victims I have spoken with feel as though the church has failed to meet their needs and has even added to their harm, inhibiting their movement from suffering to resurrection. These words have truly been lived out in our family this year. It has been an incredibly healing year for us all, and I feel that I understand Christ's resurrection more deeply and have more to offer other victims and those ministering to them.

In addition to his other roles, Joshua has been focusing on his PhD work. He has finished all of his classes and is preparing for the comprehensive examinations. He has also been working on a proposal for what is called *dissertation by publication*. If this proposal is accepted, instead of writing a separate dissertation for the school which may or may not be read by those outside the school, he would instead take seven of his already published articles plus one unpublished PhD seminar paper and shape those into a dissertation. (Since 2019, he has had 10 articles and two book chapters published, in addition to some forthcoming items, some co-written pieces, and a number of review essays.) Going the dissertation by publication route would streamline the process and lighten Joshua's workload. **This route is being used more and more.** We would appreciate prayer that his proposal will be accepted. Joshua says he would like to actually have his PhD because other scholars keep addressing him as Dr Barron, and he has to keep correcting them 😊. His boss at ACTEA has also urged him to complete the PhD as soon as possible because having a PhD is important to his role at ACTEA since his role includes mentoring people with PhDs.

The children are doing well. While we were writing this, our children were busy making and painting paper snowflakes. (Living in Kenya, Ahaviah's dog is the only other 'Snow' they get to see.) Joshua has been reading the Narnia series with the Smalls, i.e., the younger three (one of whom is now taller than most of the Talls), so we have constructed a wardrobe out of a refrigerator box and have hung our raincoats inside. Every day, the advent calendar has an Advent or Christmas themed activity for them to pass through the wardrobe and embark upon. For example, one of the activities will be a "snowball fight" with water balloons. Don't tell the Smalls, but tomorrow, we will have an adventure through Narnia which includes me shooting at them with a water gun. I hope they remember to put on the raincoats. Hannahgail has been designing the most amazing masks for the Talls and the Parents so that we can be Narnia-esque characters.

Recently, one of our teens said she wanted a homegroup to meet in our house again. Some of you may remember that in an earlier season we had hosted a homegroup for a couple of terms. That has become a plan for an online homegroup with other expat friends and their families who are in ministry in various parts of the world. We hope to get this started by the beginning of the year. Alitzah is an amazing administrator, as well as a writer. For my birthday yesterday, she gave me a hymnal of worship songs she has rewritten to include lament, an important part of worship that churches often neglect. (She re-wrote four hymns and composed three new ones.) The kids have a game they call the League of Unique Superheroes. They have fun coming up with useless superhero talents and finding ways to make them useful. They keep us laughing. Eliana and her father have been bonding over the trumpet (Joshua) and cornet (Eliana). Zerachiah has an online group of friends from several countries that he has bonded with over Minecraft. Ahaviah and Shalviah enjoy art and baking.

Financially, this year has been particularly difficult. Jesus teaches us that workers are worthy of their hire (Luke 10:7; see also 1 Timothy 5:18). We dislike engaging in “foolish boasting,” but our ministry continues to be effective and our Kingdom impact has grown beyond measure. Yet our level of financial support has dropped. To be sustainable, we need to grow our support base. Today is Giving Tuesday. If you are not a financial partner — or if you used to be — please consider supporting our ministry with a one-time or sustaining gift. For those of you who are already our financial partners, we thank God for you and thank you for your faithfulness. Your gift has been very fruitful.

We would also like to ask for your prayers. As you pray, please pray :

- For our finances;
- For our health;
- For ACTEA’s staff and ministries, including the new journal;
- For our family and opportunities for our children.
- For Joshua’s PhD
- For the new network Ruth is developing
- For the homegroup we are working on forming

*grace and peace and thanks to you in our Lord Jesus,*

*Ruth + Joshua*

*ruth & joshua*

*with alitzah, hannahgail, eliana, zerachiah, ahaviah, & shalviah*

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(Zelle and SendWave have apps for both Android and iOS platforms. If your bank is enrolled with Zelle, you can use an internet browser on your computer. The two apps, however, should work with any banks.)

(Scroll down for pictures.)

## Snapshots ...



In September, Joshua paid a courtesy visit to ACTEA-accredited school Moffat Bible College in Kijabe, Kenya, meeting with Dr Tom Obengo, Vice-Principal for Academic Affairs. Tom is also one of the editors of *African Christian Theology*.

## ACTEA Accreditation trip:



In October, ACTEA staff made an accreditation assessment visit to Lutheran School of Theology in Kimuka, Kenya (the other side of the mountain range from Matasia, the village where we live).

### Pictured:

(back) David Tarus (ACTEA Exec. Dir.), Gregory P. Schulz (LST Principal), Joshua, James May (LST Academic Dean); (front) Esther Gitau (ACTEA), Lucy Koisaba (LST Registrar), Faith Tanui (ACTEA)

## Religion, Faith, and Development in Ghana and Jamaica: Connecting Transatlantic Voices and Enhancing Leadership through Academic Writing Workshops

Joshua in July, in Cape Coast, Ghana, with an Anglican bishop of Nigeria, Emmanuel Egbunu. He was too busy to take any pictures. Seeing the full name of the project, you can see why they abbreviate it as “TransAtlantic Writing Project.” (The leadership is church leadership and leadership in theological education.)



## The Next Future: Navigating Theological Education in Africa July, Nairobi, Kenya



## ACTEA's First Francophone Theological Consultation Brazzaville, Congo

Pictured are four missionaries (two from the USA, one from Germany, and one from South Korea) and ACTEA's director (from Kenya), all of whom are appropriately lost in the crowd of delegates from theological schools in francophone Africa.



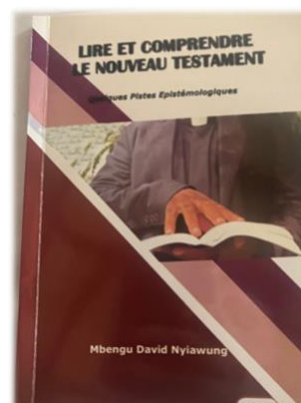
I (Ruth) packed up about half of these books at the ACTEA office in Nairobi; the others were shipped from a publisher in Cameroon.

Joshua carried all of them up eight flights of steps, about 60–65 lbs per load for four trips and then about 45 lbs per load for several more. He then sorted them all into stacks for each participant.

Below Joshua is giving a presentation.



Joshua exercised restraint at the book-sale tables, and only came home with two books.



### Winter Wonderland?

Our family loves winter. But while, in June–August, the temperature might plummet to 46°F (7.78 °C) — *inside the house, mind you* — for some reason, we just don't see a lot of snow. But THIS year, we have a fine snowman.

