

Family Gatherings 2020

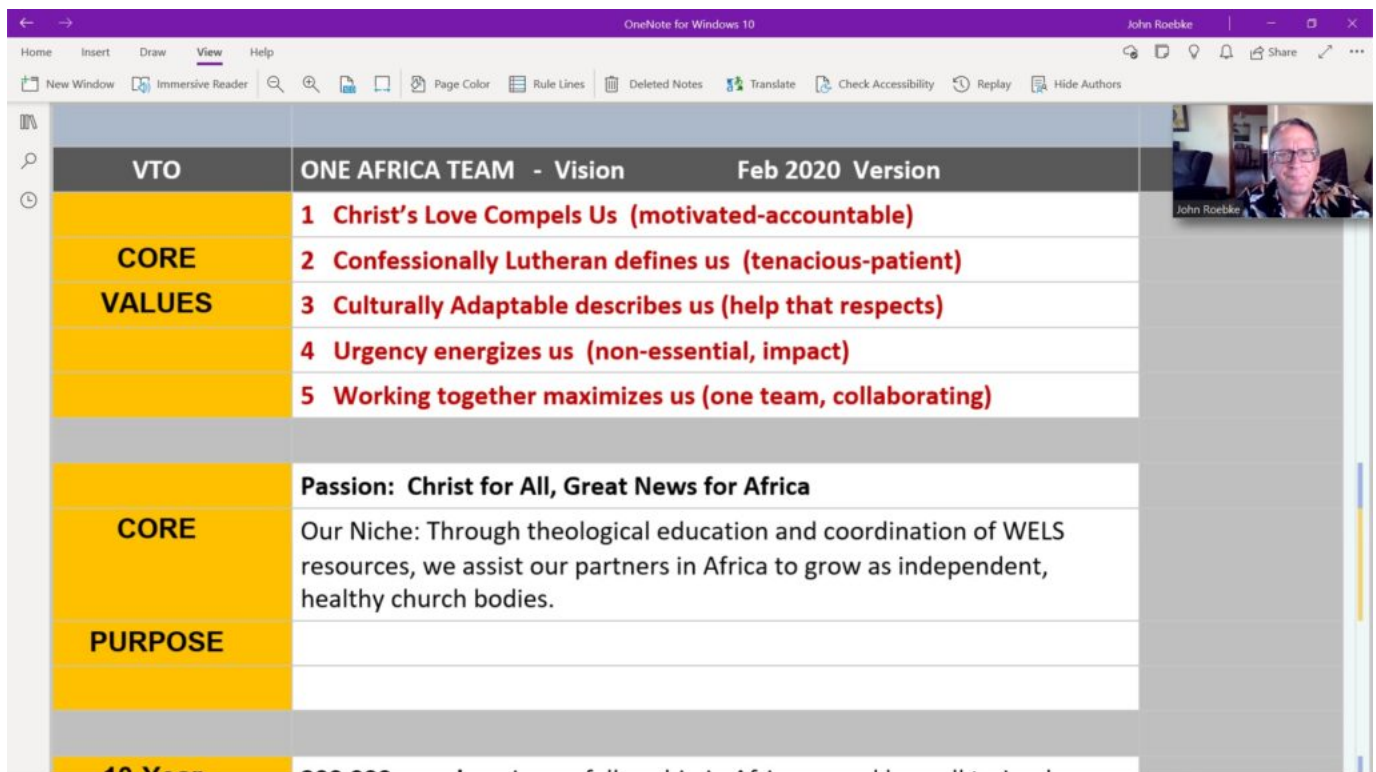


The members of the Roebke family live in Milwaukee, Madison (WI) and Lilongwe. The last time I celebrated Christmas with my parents and siblings was 2003, when I had a 3 month gap between calls in the public ministry. Pastors are busy leading worship services at their congregations during the holidays. For a few years in the mid-2000's we lived close enough to our relatives to spend a few days after Christmas with relatives, but for the rest of our married years it's been too great a distance for my wife and I to travel "home for the holidays."

This year is no exception as we prepare to greet our Savior's birth in the balmy tropics with one of our daughters, who will spend two months with us. Thanks to COVID she's doing all of her schooling this semester remotely, so it doesn't matter if she's logging in from her apartment in Milwaukee or from our home in Africa. Our other daughter lives 8,000 miles away in Wisconsin and is getting her first taste of

winter driving. It's also the first time we will be apart for the Christmas holidays.

Due to the pandemic, this will be a very different Christmas for many of you too. You may make a reservation to attend one of your church's worship services, or you may celebrate the Savior's birth online at home. You may get together with your immediate family, but you'll avoid the larger gatherings with your extended relatives. You may call your loved ones over the phone or schedule a video conference call over the internet.



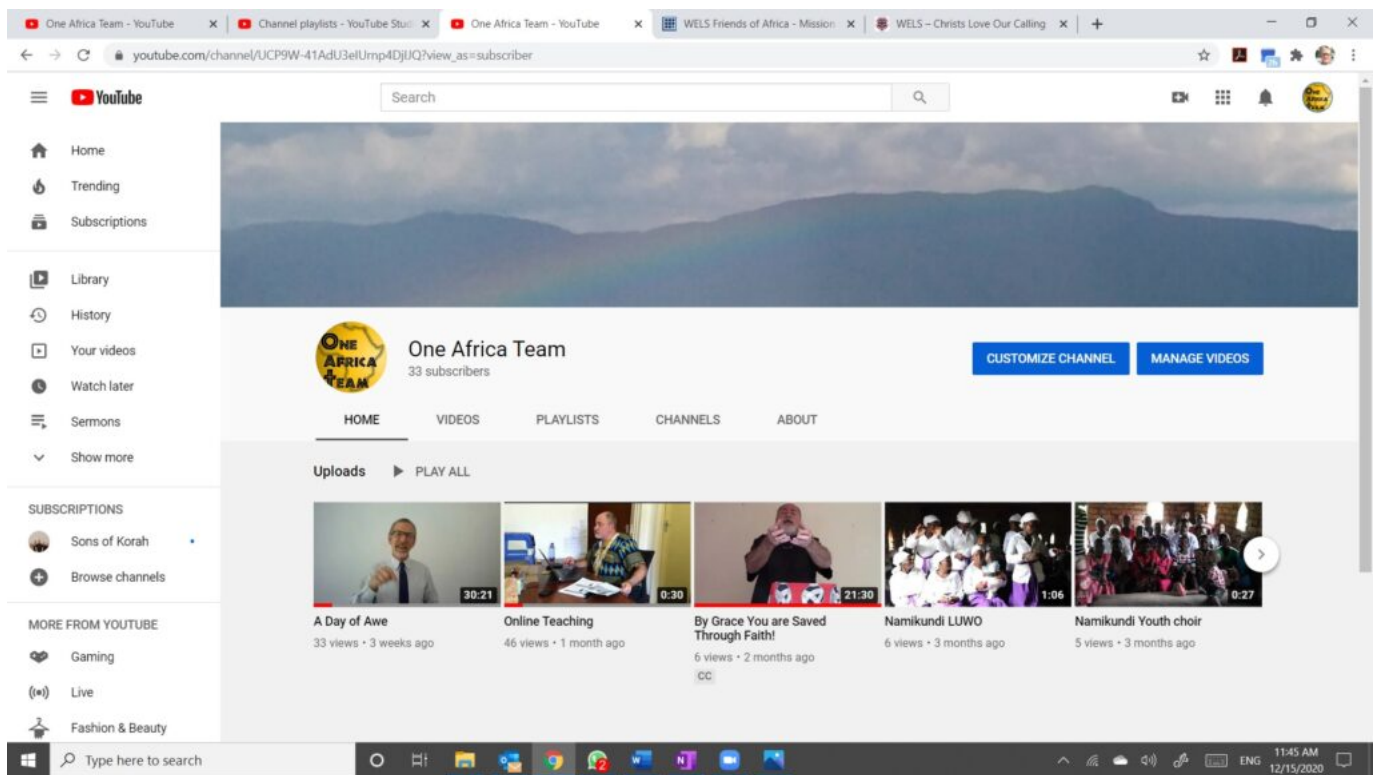
VTO	ONE AFRICA TEAM - Vision	Feb 2020 Version
CORE VALUES	1	Christ's Love Compels Us (motivated-accountable)
	2	Confessionally Lutheran defines us (tenacious-patient)
	3	Culturally Adaptable describes us (help that respects)
	4	Urgency energizes us (non-essential, impact)
	5	Working together maximizes us (one team, collaborating)
CORE PURPOSE	Passion: Christ for All, Great News for Africa	
	Our Niche: Through theological education and coordination of WELS resources, we assist our partners in Africa to grow as independent, healthy church bodies.	

OneNote and Zoom are the backbone of OAT's online meetings

For several years, One Africa Team has been using Zoom for live interfacing because our team members are scattered across the world. Our Team Leader, Rev. Howard Mohlke is currently living in Stanton, NE waiting for work permit that will allow him to move to Africa. The members of our Mission Board live in WI, OH and FL. We have missionaries stationed in both Zambia and Malawi, as well as our Operations Director who is currently based in the USA. Our "family" is spread out geographically, but our weekly conference calls have allowed us to stay closely connected to each other and to our mission of bringing "Christ for All, Good News

for Africa.”

Staying in touch with our many partners across Africa has been more challenging. International borders are open for travelers who can prove they are COVID free, but the WELS is currently permitting missionaries to travel only between their host country and the USA. In spite of limitations of internet connectivity, our missionaries are able to remain in regular contact with our African counterparts via Skype, Facebook Messenger and What’sApp. One of our teammates is conducting a Bachelor’s-level degree program via What’sApp. Other missionaries use What’sApp to introduce Lutheran teaching to new outreach groups in Liberia and Uganda. One Africa Team has also started posting sermons by missionaries on YouTube to show other prospective groups what makes Lutheran preaching distinctive. You can view the sermons at <https://tinyurl.com/ycoazeax>



One Africa Team’s YouTube channel hosts videos of cultural and historic significance to WELS mission work in Africa

Being separated from the people you love isn’t unique to 2020. The Apostle Paul started churches in cities throughout the Mediterranean basin, and he the members of those churches around with him in his thoughts and prayers wherever he went. He wrote to Thessalonians, *“When we were orphaned by being separated from you*

for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy” (1 The 2:17-20).

In the same way, our Savior carries our needs and prayers to his Heavenly Father. *“Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Ro 8:34).* We are never far away from our God, who knows our deepest needs and keeps watch over us day and night. He doesn’t need Facebook to stay informed about our status.

Following the government approval of the COVID vaccine and the delivery of the first doses to those who need it the most, we will need a little more patience as we wait our turn to be inoculated and for our society to reopen. We all look forward to joyful reunions with loved ones at family gatherings, graduation celebrations, weddings and the like. Next Christmas will be much different from this year - and there are only 374 days left! In 2021 OAT hopes to resume in-person visits to conduct teaching, conferences, strengthening and encouraging our brothers and sisters across the continent of Africa.

And with even greater longing we await reunion with the one who was born in Bethlehem, lived in Nazareth and died outside Jerusalem so that we can gather with our brothers and sisters from “every tribe, nation and people” before God’s throne (Rev. 7:9).

Missionary John Roebke lives in Malawi

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people’s hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>