

# Footprints in the World

Imprints of churches on the Way

Romans 10:14-17

[Footprints in the World No. 01/ January 2017]

Relay Trust is an international Christian charity organization cooperating with churches in challenged countries. Relay Trust is based on different church denominations and appealing to established churches in the global south.

Relay Trust aims at supporting the churches through training programmes for future church leaders on all levels. Thereby Relay Trust wants to contribute to the formation of future church leaders who are able to carry the baton of good news on to the next generation of Christians.

"Footprints in the world – imprints of churches on the Way" is Relay Trust's English newsletter, where we are sharing our experiences from the work in the global south. Everyone can receive the newsletter, which is published four times every year. You can **subscribe** by sending an email to: [abk@relaytrust.org](mailto:abk@relaytrust.org).

The next newsletter will be published in April.

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## Welcome to Relay Trust

By Mette and Alex Bjergbæk Klausen

Dear reader.

Happy New Year and welcome to the first edition of the newsletter "Footprints in the Word – imprints of churches on the Way". In these newsletters, we are going to share our experiences from the work of training church-leaders in Africa. In this first edition of the newsletter, we want to introduce Relay Trust and some of the thoughts behind the organization. In the future newsletters we are going to share glimpses from our journeys in Africa, and meetings with interesting people from all over the world. We hope the newsletters may serve as an inspiration and inspire more people to engage themselves actively in the mission among churches in the global south.



## Relay Trust is formed

On Friday the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, we marked the official opening of the trust fund together with the promoter and main-sponsor, Neil Smith. This event took place on a café in central London. The name of the new Christian organization was decided to be "Relay Trust". The purpose of Relay Trust is to pass on the baton of good news to the next generation of Christians.

During the past decades, there has been an exponential growth of Christians in the southern part of the globe. Scientists of religion and theologians have realized that the actual centre of Christianity is now situated in the global south. It is therefore important to train the future church leaders in the south, so they are prepared to receive the baton, able to take care of it and pass it on to the next generation. The whole purpose of Relay Trust is to contribute to this work in a positive way.



*The promoter and main sponsor of Relay Trust is Mr. Neil Smith, an Australian businessman, who is running bus companies in countries like Australia, Singapore, and England. The profit from these businesses is financing the work in Africa. But obviously we would like more people to assist – also financially.*

Many African churches are facing severe challenges. They are situated in countries with poor economy and a high degree of social inequality. Some countries are suffering from civil wars and internal political disputes, and in some parts of Africa, there are serious religious tensions between Christians and Muslims. On top of this, there is the challenge with poor or no access to proper education. Geographical distances or ethnical

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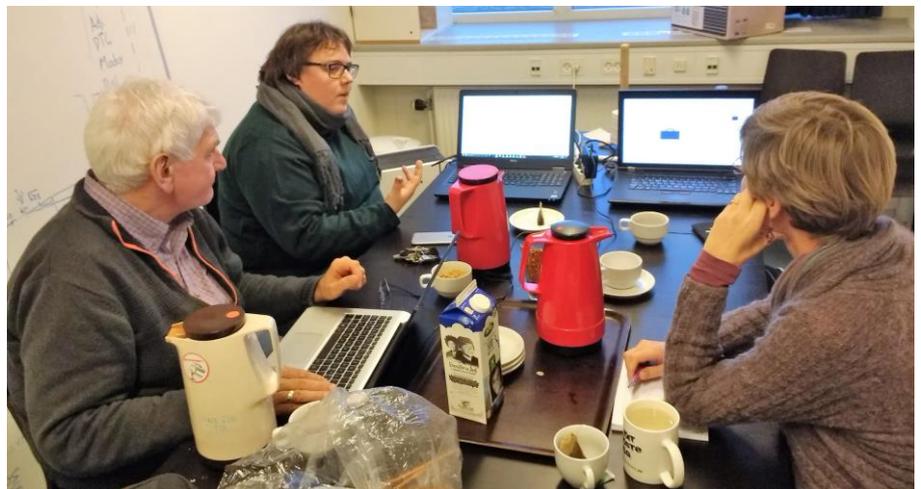
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challenges may hinder access to even basic education. In dysfunctional countries, the churches are sometimes the only existing network and they are carrying many social and societal tasks, such as running schools, farming projects, and health work. All these activities are all depending on a strong leadership that is able to navigate in the midst of all the challenges. Training and education is the alpha and omega if churches are to prevail and be able to give positive answers to the challenges they are facing.

Another challenge is coming from some of the new so-called churches that are growing rapidly around a single charismatic leader. They are preaching a twisted gospel, in which they are making a direct connection between personal faith and material wealth. This message is very attractive to people in impoverished countries. However, many get disappointed when they experience that God is not answering their prayers, no matter how much they have paid for an answer. Their lack of wealth is seen as a sign that they are not strong believers or that they are not praying in the right way. Consequently, people are often left in even greater poverty, both materially and spiritually, than they were before. These new so-called churches are using common Christian vocabulary, but they have added a new meaning to the words. Therefore, the established churches are often struggling to preach the true gospel without being misunderstood.

## Everyone can talk about God

Theology is about the ability to talk about God. Even though we are in different parts of the world and different places in life, we all have the ability to talk about God and reflect on our God-given life. Education may increase our vocabulary, but our ability to work effectively in our local communities does not necessarily correspond with actual education. Many African countries are struggling with high level of illiteracy. There villages with no nearby schools where the adult population have never been taught how to read and write. Their lack of education does not prevent them from active participation in the life and work of the church. During our years in Africa we have met evangelists who are enthusiastic about the gospel and able preach in an inspiring and personal way, even though they never had the opportunity to go to school. We have met people who are composing their own music and writing Christian hymns, which they sing while



*Meeting at DBI (Danish Bible Institute) with professor Nicolai Winther-Nielsen and programmer/PhD student Judith Gottschalk. We are discussing how to make use of modern technology in our educational programmes in the global south.*

they are working in their farms. All of this serves as a positive contribution to strengthen the church and spread the good news. However, everyone needs to be strengthened in his/her faith and add more biblical knowledge to continue as an effective evangelist. Relay Trust is working with different ways of teaching and training the future church leaders, so they can be more effective in their local communities. We are in the process of building a training system, which can reach people on all levels. The aim is also to assist the churches in higher education, so the churches will have skilled theological teachers, on the same level as theological teachers from other parts of the world.

Relay Trust wants to make use of modern technology in its work with Christian formation and theological education. During 2017 we expect to develop an app, which can be used for e-learning purposes and help us bring teaching materials and teachers from different parts of the world into a small local community in Africa. The app will be developed for an African context and the purpose is to make the teachings more inspiring for the students. We hope to complete the first prototype of the app during 2017 and to do field tests of the system in 2018.

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*Relay Trust wants to make use of modern technology in its work with Christian formation and theological education.*

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*Mr. Neil Smith in dialogue with the bishop of Guinea, Jacques Boston. The meeting took place in Sierra Leone in November and hopefully it will be the beginning of a fruitful cooperation between Relay Trust and the Anglican Diocese of Guinea, which covers both Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau.*

## West Africa as starting point

This year we intend to do preliminary studies in two different West African countries. We hope that everything will be successful, so we are able to begin a formal cooperation with the Anglican churches in Guinea Conakry and Freetown, Sierra Leone. We will continue our work through Mission Afrika in order to further develop the work in the south-eastern part of Sierra Leone through the Anglican Diocese of Bo. It makes a lot of sense to create a coordinated programme between the three dioceses, as they are part of the same province and already cooperating in other areas. The countries are facing different challenges and it requires a lot of preliminary work before we can

launch a project. But the overall idea is to develop decentralized training centres in the individual dioceses, which are able to attend to the interests (and challenges) of the local churches, but at the same time the training centres are interconnected, so the churches can benefit from being part of a larger network. The starting point is West Africa, but we are ready to expand our field of activity to more countries in Africa as we are gaining more experiences and knowledge from the pilot projects.



Mette in our office in Aalborg

## The more we are

It means a lot to be part of a large network if the work is supposed to be successful. There are many assignments waiting ahead of us and we will need help to carry them out. We want to encourage all of you to remember Relay Trust in prayer, in particular as we

are about to begin our work in new partner-churches.

Relay Trust is mainly financed by Mr. Neil Smith through his engagement in the Tower Transit/Transit Systems. The organization finances salaries, expenses for travelling and administration and, as far as possible, the concrete projects in Africa. But we do need more supporters, if we are to be able to do more. Every single penny donated to Relay Trust will be spent on training church leaders in Africa, without any deductions made. If you want to help Relay Trust, please contact us for more information on how to donate.

From our office in Aalborg, we send all our best New Year greetings and look forward to share many of our experiences with you in the years to come.

God Bless!



## About us

We are Mette and Alex Bjergbæk Klausen. We are both masters of theology and ordained pastors connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. We have worked in West Africa for the Danish mission organization, Mission Afrika, since 2009. At first we were posted in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and from 2012 we have been working in Sierra Leone. Our work has been centered on training of church leaders on all levels, from lay-people to bachelors of theology.

Since October 2016, we have been employed by Relay Trust to develop a strategy for theological education in the global south.

