

THE DAILY UNIVERSE

MAGAZINE

CHRISTMAS ON CAMPUS & AROUND THE WORLD



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The weather outside is frightful



But TWO is so delightful

THE DAILY UNIVERSE

MAGAZINE

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Dancers perform the Christmas Tree dance during the 2011 Christmas Around the World concert

BYU PHOTO

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Q&A on faith with REVEREND DR. ANDREW TEAL

Interviewed by Emma Gadeski

The Rev. Dr. Andrew Teal is a chaplain, fellow and lecturer at Pembroke College at Oxford University. He was a visiting scholar at the Maxwell Institute this semester and is good friends with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Teal gave a forum address on Oct. 26 focused on “sojourning” and seeing across boundaries between different faiths. Before heading back to England in November, he shared some Christmas memories and insights with The Daily Universe.

Q *What are some of your favorite Christmas traditions and memories?*

A Oh, it's funny. I mean, I suppose I've been a professional Christmas character as a minister

since 1988. And so Christmas is one of my busy periods. It's a great privilege to be part of a whole spectrum of people celebrating the unique impact of God on the world in the birth of Jesus Christ. We have in Oxford something called Nine Lessons and Carols, which is where I'm an Oxford chaplain — where Elder Holland came actually and he preached at one of them. And they're always immense services in terms of daring to hope in our mortal lives, which are often grubby and smeared and marked by ambition and failure, and then ambition again.

There is this wonderful value given to every human being through the birth of a child and I think that's ... whatever celebrates that, whatever reflects that. Be it Christmas carol singing in the streets of Yorkshire or midnight communion, which is always one of the most aesthetically beautiful things the Church

of England does, Nine Lessons and Carols. But I guess my most wonderful moment on Christmas Day is sleeping in the afternoon after a big Christmas lunch and having done all the services and to think well, yeah, even human recreation and collapse is part of what ... there's nothing alien to God in this Christ child. Nothing about our human experience, nothing at all, is now alien to Him so I can snooze away and recover.

Q *What does the birth of Christ mean to your faith specifically and to you?*

A There is nothing alien about any human experience to God because of the Incarnation, because of the coming in the flesh, in our mortality of the Son, of Jesus Christ. So I think there's that and the other thing that

I like about Christmas is that it seems to help us all to remember, however clever we become, how sophisticated our lives — there is something quite magical about going to a simple nativity, or a simple carol service. About enjoying the magic of Christmas with young kids and around the Christmas table, to have a whole spectrum of generations. I love that. And you do generations pretty well in Utah, and in the Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but I think that's one of the moments where even Catholics and Protestants, you know, in Europe where religion isn't as well attended and as vivid and as impactful as it is here in Utah. That's a moment when we can actually rediscover that wonder of being human by seeing, whether you're old or young or anything in between. It's okay to be amazed.

Q *What do you hope the BYU community takes away from Christmas this year and remembers?*

A Well, I say I hope this but I know ... I really believe you will do this, because what I've seen from students and staff here is that the dignity the birth of Christ gives to all human beings is something that nothing can wipe away. No accident of our mortal life can wipe away that eternal dignity. And when (Elder Holland) was at Oxford ... he was talking about his father dying around Christmas and he went into the hospital and thought, how can this be happening at Christmas time? And got quite upset and just went for a walk around the ward. And then heard, from the natal units, a newborn cry. That there is even in those moments of our dismay, there are always signs of hope.

And what I would hope people would take away from (this semester) is that whatever's happened, good or bad, joy or disappointment, we are all connected and that Christmas can really enable us to deeply value other people's journeys as part of our own. It's a time to reach out in support of those who have perhaps been hurt by life or relationships or whatever. But it's also a time to recognize

that wonderful connection that we do belong to each other, not just because you all support Cougars, but you do belong to each other on a much deeper level. So to take that away, is that there's that wonderful solidarity that you have been given and that Christmas reminds us of.

Shortly after Teal arrived in Utah, he suffered burn injuries on his feet after walking on patio tiles. He spent three and a half weeks at the University of Utah burn unit in intensive care and had skin grafts on both feet twice.

Q *Did your faith help you get through that or how did your faith affect you in that situation?*

A It was pretty pivotal. It was really important. You realize that being a Christian is being part of a community. That certainly came across. Phone calls and visits from a whole spectrum of people were amazingly renewing ... It's nice that people just come and sort of break up the tedium of the day. That was good.

Teal also has a prayer book he uses to write down names of people to keep in his prayers. Elder Holland and Sister Patricia Holland were on the list.



This was a way of connecting me to people back in Oxford. I felt quite a long way away from my wife and family in many ways, but in another way, I've never felt as close to them, despite being that distant and I think that's a way in which faith gave me that resource.

Q *What can the BYU community do to become more Christlike?*

Teal shared a story of when he was walking around campus and heard someone shout "Reverend Teal!" from a tree. This was someone he knew from when she served a mission in London.

A Don't stop reaching out as you're doing all these activity things as students — shout at people from a tree. Keep on making friendships because friendships are really, really, really important.

Don't weaponize truth. Don't make it a weapon to hurt somebody else. Truth is only ever truth when it is in love. And truth is always kind. And if you don't tell truth with a kind perspective, people know there's no tenderness beneath your honesty, and it's not going to work.

I would say the hardest thing to say to everybody is never lose hope in the mercy of God when you're feeling that you're failing, that you're inadequate or that you're not worthy. Accept the fact that despite everything, the foundation is that you are accepted. That God loves you. Now, there are lots of childlike songs that you could sing at this point like the famous one "I Am a Child of God" which is absolutely right.

But there comes a point where in life we think we're the only person that's ever done this, or ever felt this or thought this and that we're therefore unworthy. Those are not thoughts which will build us up. And they are not the truth.

Because however, whatever we've done, it's not as if we painted ourselves in the corner. We always have that possibility of joyful repentance. Accept the fact that you're accepted and that you've never gone beyond the Father's love. The depths of the infinite Atonement go way under the worst of our moments. So don't despair at yourselves.

The Rev. Dr. Andrew Teal and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland attend the BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies' 2021 International Advisory Council reception and dinner on Nov. 11, 2021. Teal was a visiting scholar for the Maxwell Institute this semester and has since returned home to England.

CHURCH NEWSROOM



BYU PHOTO

The cast photo for the 1978 Christmas Around the World concert.

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

60 years of culture and Christmas spirit

By Cassidy Wixom

BYU's annual Christmas Around the World concert has been bringing folk dance and Christmas spirit to campus since the first show in 1960. This year's concert on Dec. 3-4 in the Marriott Center focuses on hope, healing and humanity.

The artistic director of Christmas Around the World and the International Folk Dance Ensemble, Jeanette Geslison, said those three concepts were impressed upon her during the pandemic when she was first developing the script for this year's concert.

"COVID has taught us how important human interaction is because we haven't had it the

same way," Geslison said. "And of all the things with cultural dance, it's all about bringing humanity together."

The dances in the concert every year are folk dances, but they aren't specifically Christmas dances. This year, Geslison said she really wanted the music, dances and storyline of hope, healing, humanity and the Scandinavian Advent, to weave in the Christmas spirit and welcome in the Christmas season.

The show will portray the advent with cultural dances leading up to Christmas, lighting each candle of the advent and ending with the finale: everyone dancing around the Christmas

tree on Christmas Eve, a dance based off of a Danish tradition.

"Live dance traditions are in an effort to be together, not an effort to be by yourself," Geslison said. "Let's buoy each other up and strike a tune and dance together."

This year, more than 200 people will be involved in the performance between sets, costuming, stage technicians and performers. This also includes almost 150 dancers from the International Folk Dance Club. Guest performers include Ngoma Y'Africa, a group of 25 performers and drummers presenting cultures of Africa, and BYU performance group



BYU PHOTO

The cast bows at the end of the 1999 Christmas Around the World concert.

Living Legends, who will perform their Native American jingle dress dance and grass dance.

Christmas Around the World is normally a time where alumni gather, but for the 60th concert of Christmas Around the World, there will be a special alumni reception in the Hinckley Center between the Saturday performances. The reception will bring alumni and current performers together for presentations and recreational dancing. The program for the show will also include information on the history of the concert and the folk dance program at BYU.

BYU's folk-dance program and the Christmas Around the World concert were both started by Mary Bee Jensen. She founded the folk dance program in 1956 and put on Christmas concerts in the Smith Fieldhouse. In 1960, the first concert titled Christmas Around the World occurred because of her hard work and dedication, Geslison said.



BYU PHOTO

A dancer does a toe touch during the 2018 Christmas Around the World concert.

Geslison said Jensen had an incredibly large personality and loved folk dance with all her heart, might and mind. She started the shows by bringing in live trees and setting up the stage in the Smith Fieldhouse because the Marriott Center was not built yet. She organized everything herself and built an audience out of nothing. Without her, folk dance and Christmas Around the World would not be what it is today, Geslison said.

Working on Christmas Around the World, students undergo an educational experience where they learn to be more empathetic and understanding of others, Geslison said.

Geslison has been involved in Christmas Around the World since she was a student in 1987. Over the years, her involvement has changed in capacities from student, to adjunct faculty, to full-time faculty to artistic director in 2011.

For her, Christmas Around the World is a family tradition. She directs, her husband directs the Folk Music Ensemble that provides music for the show, and two of her children are in the concert this year. Last year, when the concert was canceled because of COVID-19, she said it was strange not having it in their Christmas season.

Tasha Keckley, president of the International Folk Dance Club, was also disappointed the concert was canceled last year.

"It is a staple. I was so devastated when COVID hit," she said. "There was something missing from Christmas."

BYU PHOTO

A dancer performs a folk dance during the Christmas Around the World concert in 2017.



BYU PHOTO

The cast of the Christmas Around the World concert in 2016 bows during the finale.

Christmas Around the World is a family affair for Keckley as well. She said the event “beautifully ushers in the Christmas spirit” and with this year’s focus on hope and healing, the concert includes motifs that help to reflect on the Savior.

This will be Keckley’s fourth year of Christmas Around the World and it is one of the concerts she looks forward to most.

“I have no words, it truly is indescribably amazing,” she said. The dances in the show are colorful and vibrant and are like a “visual feast” for the audience, Keckley said.

Keckley said as she has the opportunity to dance more and continually learn about other cultures, she sees more similarities rather than differences.

“We are all connected as brothers and sisters and the love Christ has for us, no matter what

country you live in, that feeling permeates (the show),” she said. “That feeling of connection and love and peace and all those beautiful things get felt from the stage to the audience.”

The International Folk Dance Club is made up of five teams, or ensembles, who usually perform separately. But all five teams, including International Folk Dance Ensemble which is the touring and most advanced team, perform in the Christmas Around the World concert. The week before the show is filled with dress rehearsals and is “not just a bonding time within the team you are on, but across the five teams and you bond as a club,” Keckley said.

“I’m so impressed with the sense of community the concert creates,” Geslison said. “I am always in such awe of what the students accomplish.”

Being in such a large production with so

many people helps students realize they are part of something bigger, a greater entity that needs every person’s efforts to make it succeed, Geslison said. Students learn that their contributions matter in making the overall experience better and Geslison compared that with how in the gospel Christ teaches that every person is deserving of effort and love.

“I think students really feel that, to feel lifted and inspired by coming together as a great whole to make this happen,” she said. “That’s the real magic of our concert, to see the students brighten up because they feel buoyed by working together.”

Because of continual COVID-19 restrictions, masks are required for audience members and for dancers backstage. When the performers are onstage they are exempt from wearing masks.

Light the World: The Giving Machines

By Kenzie Holbrook

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints launched the “Light the World” initiative in 2016 and has been doing it every year since. The initiative focuses on sharing the light of Christ during the Christmas season. The main idea is to make the holiday season a season of service, as Jesus Christ spent His life in service.

The idea of Light the World was developed by the Church Missionary Department to promote the light of Christ through service. Mike Grass, public relations director for Bonneville Communications, said after Light the World launched for the first time in 2016, it had such an amazing response that the Church has continued it every year with a different theme. Each theme revolves around the central theme of Light the World. This year’s theme is Light the World with Love.

The Light the World initiative has several parts and several ways people can participate. Each year after Thanksgiving, the Church releases a new Light the World video and an advent calendar with service ideas online. People can also sign up to get text

reminders with the service prompts to keep up with the challenge in December. Social media users who participate in Light the World are encouraged to use the hashtag #LightTheWorld.

The Giving Machine is a vending machine where people can buy an item for people in need. This launched in 2017, and has been around every year except for last year because of the pandemic. The Giving Machines provide an easy way to do a simple act of service.

The Light the World website describes them as “vending machines with a Christmas twist.” The purpose of the Giving Machines is to help others in need by swiping a credit card. Instead of getting something for themselves, people can buy something — a pair of shoes, a meal or something else — for someone in need. “The Giving Machines provide a way for people to quickly and easily help those in need and make the Christmas season a little more meaningful for themselves—and countless others,” the website says.

The vending machines will be back this year at 10 locations around the country; one

being at the University Place Mall in Orem.

Anyone can go to the Giving Machines and donate an item that will be distributed to a charity to help those in need. People go and choose which item they want to pay for to donate. They see a card with the name of the object fall down within the machine, but they don’t get anything.

Grass says the Giving Machines are a great way for parents to teach their children the importance of giving and not receiving in return. “It’s been hundreds and thousands of teaching opportunities in front of these machines,” Grass said. He really hopes that people will use the Giving Machines to learn that lesson this Christmas season.

Grass encouraged BYU students to get involved in the Light the World initiative this year by doing the service prompts found on the website or through text reminders and participating in the Giving Machines. “It’s as simple as getting a few friends, coming to the University Place, going and participating in the Giving Machines; go grab some ice cream and make a night of it,” he said.



CHURCH NEWSROOM

Residents in Gilbert, Arizona, gather to make their donations at a Giving Machine. Gilbert is one of 10 locations for the machines this year.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WON'T BE HAVING A BLUE CHRISTMAS

By Elena Castro



JOSLYN SOLARZANO
Journalism student Joslyn Solorzano takes in all the 2020 holiday joy.

Christmas is a time of family, holiday traditions, warmth and love. Perhaps more so for BYU's national student body, but what about the international students who may not have the luxury to go home for such a family-oriented time of year? What is Christmas time to them?

For journalism student and Ecuador native Joslyn Solorzano, Christmas has been a holiday for family, as well as one for friends. Having experienced the semester break both at home and on campus, Solorzano said being an international student can make Christmas unpredictable.

"You never know who you're going to end up spending your Christmas with. You never know where you're going to go or even what you're going to eat," she said.

Solorzano said that in going about her Christmas plans last year, she coordinated with friends only for it all to fall through. "We planned a whole Christmas gathering, but then a lot of them ended up going home last minute. I was able to find another event with some friends I didn't know very well, but they invited me anyway," she said.

Already preparing to host "Friendsmas," Solorzano is fleshing out the details of what this year will look like.

"A lot of us are Ecuadorian, so we're making a traditional Ecuadorian Christmas dinner. We're making turkey, aroz Navideño (Christmas rice), and a kind of stuffing called 'Relleno.' We're also planning on dancing and doing Secret Santa," she said.

This year, traveling home might be more accessible for some international students as COVID-19 caused a dip in flying costs.

Flights from Salt Lake City International Airport to Ecuador ranged anywhere from \$800-\$1000 or more pre-pandemic, making it difficult for Solorzano to make it home much during the school year. However, the lack of travel brought on by COVID-19 allowed for a drop in flight prices across the board. One round trip flight she found, Solorzano said, was \$350.

Being away from home for the holiday has had its silver linings. Solorzano said staying in Utah for the break allowed her to experience a white Christmas for the first time.

"We do get snow in Ecuador, but you have to be near the mountains. We have the Andes out there, but I'm from the coast, so 70s is as cold as it gets," she said. "I really didn't see snow until I got here. I always wanted to have a snowy Christmas like in the movies. Provo gives you that vibe."

Although she may not be saying, "I'll be home for Christmas," this year, Solorzano said she is excited to experience more of Utah's winter wonderland. "This year I want to go up to Heber and Park City at Christmastime when all the decorations are up and all the lights are on."

International law student Ostvald "Ozzy" Buhendwa spent last year in Provo and is planning on following suit this year as well. Originally from Kenya but raised in Toronto, Buhendwa is excited to spend another Christmas holiday with "the boys."

Growing up in Canada with African roots, Christmas was always a fancy affair. "On Christmas Day, everybody comes dressed up. You see people in suits and they just want to stay dressed up all day," he said.

Here in Utah though, Buhendwa said he is looking forward to a more dressed down kind of festivity. "My experience last year was insane. I met a group of guys, a lot of them from Kenya. They threw a party and we ate lamb and goat."

Buhendwa said the party was so reminiscent of his own traditions, it almost took him back to Kenya. This year, he hopes to add a pig to the protein line up, along with beans and South Asian chowpatty.

Food is an important piece to any holiday function, but for Buhendwa and his friends, the party doesn't start or finish until the dancing starts. "When a bunch of Africans from different regions come together, they start to dance. It's almost like a show of who has the better dances. The dances are long but insane," he said.

When thinking about the kind of Christmas climate he'd prefer, Buhendwa said he would much rather have a hot Kenyan Christmas than a white Christmas in Canada or Utah. "Take me to a hot desert in Africa, I'll spend my Christmas there."

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE DAILY UNIVERSE STAFF



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