

## CHURCHES

# Migrants create a religious boom in Geneva

The churches issue of the migration, particularly the evangelical churches, are flowering at the end of the lake. The Protestant Church of Geneva has allocated an African pastor to follow up on this phenomena, where faith lives through body and music.

By **Stéphane Herzog**, Protestinfo

About thirty blue spots are sprinkled on a map: [carte](#) developed by the Intercantonal Centre for information on religions (CIC). [Centre d'information intercantonale sur les croyances](#) (CIC). On it is shown evangelical churches set up in Geneva since 2000. This map, resulting from a census done between 2012 and 2014, gives an idea of the strength of the Christian revival brought into the canton by migrants from all parts of the planet. "It is the evangelical movement which is the strongest, with about a hundred religious communities, as opposed to 55 reformed protestant communities", indicated Brigitte Knobel, director of the CIC. With 53 languages spoken in the different services, Geneva seems to be like the Tower of Babel of Christianity. "The public who frequent these places represent the middle to lower class. They are often migrants without documents, who are domestic employees or work to help individuals. They come from Africa, Asia and from Latin America comments Roswitha Golder, a retired pastor. The staff of the international organisations more often attend the Anglican or Lutheran church, she added. The former responsible of this ecumenical group, 'Witnessing Together in Geneva', made up of some sixty migrant churches describes lively worship services, based on a call by the Holy Spirit, which are peppered by prophecies and sometimes speaking in tongues.

These churches need a designated pastor, because the Pentecostal type churches depend upon a leader who believes in himself – or is – invested by the power of the Holy Spirit. They know the Bible by heart and their interpretation is both liberal and legalistic, described the pastor of Bernese origin, who still preaches once a month in Spanish at the Evangelical Methodist Church of Onex. Numerous, and often derived from the historic churches of Geneva, the migrant churches have difficulty to find a place to gather. "It is as difficult as it is to find an apartment in Geneva", portrays Brigitte Knobel. The communities manage to find basements or rent space for their worship in protestant churches.

## 50 African congregations

Roswitha Golder cited jumbled-up Nigerian, Filipino, Brazilian, Chilean churches. She estimates the number of the African churches alone is around fifty. Other movements gather a more mixed public. This is the case of the International Christian Fellowship, an evangelical church which holds their service in the district of the Grottes. "Here Christian rock with drums instead of the organ can be heard. The singing is led by a praise group standing in front, just like a concert. Here it is not the pastor's message which is the most important: one sings and is inspired for the rest of the week" described the retired pastor (see also the framed box).

This lively liturgy which draws in thousands of believers each week, is it likely to interest or inspire the official churches? "The different communities enrich each other" comment the new pastor of Chêne, Gabriel Amisi. This man of faith, of African origin, is linked with the

migrant churches through his contract with the Protestant Church of Geneva who gave him a 20% part-time assignment for this. It enables him to network with these churches as responsible for the ecumenical movement “Witnessing Together in Geneva”.

What does he think about the work of the evangelical churches? “Certain reactivate old traditions, such as the laying on of hands. It is a return to biblical sources and that can incite us to review our hymnology. Furthermore, young people today may not necessarily relate to hymns and the organ. We must also adapt the message » summarizes the man born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In his native region, the service vibrated to the sound of the drum, he recalls. Txt

### **African prayers under a hotel in the Pâquis**

Hands joined, eyes closed, the pastor Carl A. Shipley, leaves his assistant and a small group of musicians time to warm up with a song for 45 minutes introductory assistance. In the muted basement of the Novotel, a comfortable hotel of the Pâquis district, members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God gather every Sunday. Les mains jointes, yeux clos, le pasteur Carl A.Shipley, laisse à son assistant et à un petit groupe de musiciens le temps de réchauffer l’assistance en chanson durant 45 minutes liminaires. Dans les sous-sols feutrés du Novotel, un confortable établissement du quartier des Pâquis, se réunissent chaque dimanche des membres de la Redeemed Christian Church of God. The public of this Pentecostal congregation is 100% African and mainly English-speaking, even if a young woman translates the sermon into French for the benefit of a few West Africans. Then Carl A Shipped, girded in an impeccable suit, joins the panel.

This former Catholic of Caribbean origin, missionary for 25 years in Namibia, is a professional of the faith. His preaching on the unconditional love of Christ hooks the congregation and rants with examples taken from everyday life. “Yesterday I had the start of flu, but today I am healed. My emotions pushed me to sickness, but my faith told me: you are healed” he told. “You are always with me?” Carl A. Shipley asks sporadically. Certain believers started their Sunday at 7.30 a.m. with bible studies, but the group always responds “Amen” vigorously. “We come to bring back Christ to Europe”, this man of faith confided with a big smile.

**Protestinfo** is a press agency specialised in news of the reformed Church in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. It communicates free and loyal information dealing with questions of ethic, society and spirituality. Thanks to its international partners, the editorial also offers **Protestinter**, an opening on international news of the churches.