

Nachrichten aus Wittenberg

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MISSIONARY REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI



Seasonal notes: Tourist season in Wittenberg starts to wind down in September but hits a remarkable peak on Reformation Day (10/31). The very next day (11/1) is notably different: the town is almost completely empty and quiet. November 1st marks the "off-season" for Wittenberg, which is a time to prepare for the cold, dark winter. The Christmas market in the center of town opens at the end of November on the first day in Advent.

DINNER FOR DEMOCRACY

September 2025

On September 12th, 2025 local volunteers organized a community event called "Dinner for Democracy." The idea was to have a potluck dinner in the market square where everyone brought something to share. I volunteered to help organize and run the event with the group pictured below. We had about 80 people register for the event and over 100 people came! The purpose of the event was to bring neighbors together in conversation about democracy and to show solidarity that Wittenberg strives to be a welcoming place for all people. Wittenberg is located in the German state Saxony-Anhalt, which has state-wide elections coming up in September 2026. The largest growing political party in Saxony-Anhalt is the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), which has been classified as a "right-wing extremist organization" by Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), declaring that the AfD is working against Germany's free democratic order. The AfD are anti-immigration, anti-European Union, anti-Islam, and anti-LGBTQIA+.



The BfV says, "The AfD's prevailing ethnic and descent-based understanding of the people is not compatible with the free democratic basic order. It aims to exclude certain population groups from equal participation in society, to expose them to unequal treatment that does not conform to the constitution and thus to assign them a legally devalued status." There is a lot of fear in Wittenberg that the AfD will win the elections in 2026, which will threaten democracy and local inclusion initiatives and organizations.

The Dinner for Democracy in Wittenberg was a resounding success, bringing people of all backgrounds together. The community was so excited that such an event occurred, that many asked to be involved in future pro-democracy actions and initiatives. As a result, we planned more events leading up to the September elections. This Friday, January 30th, we will have a "Hot Drinks for Democracy" event in the market square, where we will provide hot chocolate and mulled wine to passersby. We will engage the public with conversations about democracy and inclusion and provide a space for people to get to know each other better. On May 23rd and August 28th, we will again have "Dinner for Democracy" in the market square.



WITTENBERG WEBINAR SERIES

September/October 2025

For the 500th wedding anniversary of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora, we held a webinar series under the title **"Blessed to Be: Exploring Gender, Companionship, and Sexuality."** We had five dynamic speakers present over the course of three 1-hour sessions: Dr. Mary Streufert, Rev. Dr. Themba Mkhabela, Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans, Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt, and Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazarski. The series was offered in English and Spanish and is uploaded on our Vimeo page: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7758240>. If you weren't able to join the sessions live, then please watch the recordings. Over the course of the three sessions, we had a total of 270 participants from 29 countries/territories!

This was the first webinar *series* that I have put on while in this position, and I expect we'll do it again in 2026. It was great to collaborate with Dr. Mary Streufert, Director of the ELCA's Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment team, for this webinar, as well as the ELCA Companion Synod team and the ELCA Latin America Caribbean Desk. In the graphic below, you can see where participants joined in from!



The ELCA Wittenberg Center presents
a 2025 Webinar Series :

BLESSED TO BE: EXPLORING GENDER, COMPANIONSHIP, AND SEXUALITY

Celebrating the Luthers' 500th Wedding Anniversary

Topics :

- 📅 9/30 Blessed to Be Bold: The Reformation, Power, and Women
- 📅 10/1 Blessed to Break the Mold: Marriage, Tradition, and Divine Disruption
- 📅 10/2 Blessed to Delight: Sexuality, Faith, and God's Good Creation
- 🕒 12-1 p.m. Central time for each of the three dates above
- 📍 Online via Zoom
- 🔊 English with live Spanish translations

Speakers :



speaking on 9/30

Dr. Mary Streufert

ELCA Director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment



speaking on 10/1

Rev. Dr. Themba Lancelot Mkhabela

ELCA Regional Representative, Southern Africa



speaking on 10/1

Rev. Dr. Kathryn "Kit" Kleinhans

Dean Emerita, Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio



speaking on 10/2

Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt

Global Gender Justice Program Manager at ACT Alliance



speaking on 10/2

Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazarski

Adjunct Faculty in Theology and Honors at Dominican University

In case you missed it, to the left is the webinar series poster, which outlines the five speakers and their positions. In the first session, Dr. Mary Streufert spoke on the theme "Blessed to Be Bold: The Reformation, Power, and Women." In the second session, The Rev. Dr. Themba Lancelot Mkhabela and the Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans spoke on the theme "Blessed to Break the Mold: Marriage, Tradition, and Divine Disruption." In the third session, the Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt and Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazarski spoke on the topic "Blessed to Delight: Sexuality, Faith, and God's Good Creation." Each speaker presented on their own context or specific area of study, which included global perspectives and engaging examples. As a learning center of the ELCA, the Wittenberg Center seeks to connect Reformation anniversary themes with our modern context.

ELCA WITTENBERG CENTER'S FIRST DIRECTOR

October 2025

At the end of October, the Rev. Dean Bard (left) visited for his 80th birthday! Rev. Bard was the first director of the ELCA Wittenberg Center from 1999-2000. Frau Renate Skirl (right), local Wittenberger and ELCA Wittenberg Center secretary from 1999-2010, accompanied him. It was great to show him the Center today and look at some old documents and photos. Rev. Bard served as pastor of the ELCA-affiliated American Church in Berlin for several years in the 90s, which helped him envision the numerous opportunities for engagement in Wittenberg. We enjoyed a typical German afternoon tradition of coffee and cake together.



AUGSBURG

November / December 2025

One of my roles in Germany is attending some meetings on behalf of the ELCA. The German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (GNC/LWF) is a committee that represents the 11 German member church of the LWF. The main roles of the GNC/LWF include to "support LWF programs and projects in areas such as theological education, health, livelihood initiatives, climate change adaptation, empowerment of women and young people, and to accompany and support the theological work and ecumenical dialogs of the LWF." The ELCA is a partner church that is invited to attend the bi-annual meetings of the GNC/LWF as a permanent guest. Since the meetings take place in Germany and *auf Deutsch* (in German), I am often asked to be the ELCA representative at these meetings.

The last meeting was held from December 1st to 3rd in Augsburg, Germany, where about 50 participants engaged with the topic: "Looking to 2030: the 500th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession." The next General Assembly of the LWF will take place in Augsburg in 2030, to which the German churches are already planning and preparing. Over the three days, we got a glimpse into what Augsburg has to offer and hear international perspectives regarding the importance of the Augsburg Confession for Lutherans and ecumenical partners today. The last LWF General Assembly took place in 2023 in Krakow, Poland. As such, Bishop Jerzy Samiec (pictured at the podium), the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, formally handed over the guidebook of LWF General Assemblies to Bishop Christian Kopp (pictured on the far right), the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria.



As an ELCA missionary, it is important to remember my role as an ELCA pastor and representative in accompanying partner churches, keeping in mind that I am a guest in a foreign land. It is an honor to be part of the conversations going on in our German and international church partners. There is a lot we can learn from each other and learn together as we live out our common call to be the church in the world. Perhaps the most exciting and meaningful part of our time together in Augsburg was hearing from participants from Ethiopia, Togo, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore about the meaning of the Augsburg Confession in their home churches.

ELCA VISITORS!

I was able to welcome several ELCA visitors to Wittenberg. It is always great to talk about the ministry and work of the ELCA Wittenberg Center with colleagues and friends, both old and new, while hearing about the ministries visitors are involved with back at home. Make sure to email me if you plan to visit Wittenberg. I would love to welcome you!



Visitors from Texas and Washington



*Rev. Becky Swanson and Gary Anderson
(Garrison, MN)*



*Carmen and Rev. Haydeé Colon-Hernandez
(New Jersey / Puerto Rico)*



*Bishop Mike Rinehart and visitors from
Texas and Minnesota*



*Rev. Dr. James Peterson
(Virginia)*



*Bishop Jen Nagel
(Minneapolis Area Synod)*



*Rev. Levi Powers (NJ), Rev. Dr. Mary Jane Haemig (MN),
Rev. Aneta Saroop (Canada), & Rev. David Drebes (VA)*

THANK YOU

Thank you again for your prayers and financial support. You are always welcome to Wittenberg and experience the spirit of the Reformation! Keep an eye out for the next newsletter, follow us on Facebook and Instagram @ELCAWittenbergCenter, visit our webpage www.elca.org/wittenberg, and look out for our upcoming seminars and webinars!

Do you know a church or an individual who would like to support my ministry? Please have them contact me at bridget.gautieri@elca.org.



Thank you especially to the following congregations and individuals who are sponsoring my ministry:

- Calvary Lutheran Church, Cranford, NJ
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Parkville, MD
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Evansville, WI
- Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Omaha, NE
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Ocean City, NJ
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Manhattan Beach, CA
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Robeson, PA
- Faith Lutheran Church, New Providence, NJ
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
- St Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Baldwinsville, NY
- Kimberly & Daniel Gautieri
- Alyssa & Quan Dan
- Rev. Dr. Carol Lindsay & Jeanne Elmuccio

You can give online! The link is in the email I sent with this newsletter. Alternatively, you can go to www.ELCA.org → Our Work → Global Mission → Global Service → Support Missionaries → Missionaries "Give now" → Select "Bridget Gautieri" from the drop down.