

# Nachrichten aus Wittenberg

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MISSIONARY REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI



A lot has been going on in Wittenberg this Spring! In this newsletter, you will read about the LUTHER 1517 Panorama, the ELCA Wittenberg Center's March seminar, Palm Sunday at the Castle Church, an interview with Deutsche Welle, and the many ELCA visitors who have come to Wittenberg. As always, thank you for your continued support, prayers, and partnership!

## LUTHER 1517 ASISI PANORAMA

February 2025

Lutherstadt Wittenberg has many museums and historical sites to boast about, including the Lutherhaus, Melancthonhaus, Cranachhaus, and Klosterkirche. One of the most immersive Reformation experiences in Wittenberg is the LUTHER 1517 Panorama. The panorama depicts scenes spanning 30 years of the Reformation history in Wittenberg. Opened in 2016 and originally planned to close in 2024, the panorama got the funding and approval to remain open for another 5 years!

I was invited to the re-opening celebration in February, where Yadegar Asisi, the artist of the panorama and many others throughout Germany, was the keynote speaker of the evening. Asisi, both an artist and architect, grew up in the GDR (East Germany) and is son of Iranian parents. Camilo Seifert and Ulrich Schneider are the co-directors of the LUTHER 1517 panorama, and are excited to offer this immersive Reformation experience to visitors and tourists through 2029. When you come to Wittenberg, I highly recommend checking it out! Visitors are given headsets with audio information about the different scenes depicted in the artwork. The panorama is truly breath-taking, and it feels as if you are walking the streets of Wittenberg in 1517. Audio and visual effects are projected as well, adding to the immersive experience. Visit [www.wittenberg360.de](http://www.wittenberg360.de) and [www.asisi.de](http://www.asisi.de) to learn more.



Pictured on the left is artist Yadegar Asisi speaking at the re-opening celebration on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Pictured below is a portion of the panorama.



Photo Credit: Rolf Zoellner

## ELCA WITTENBERG CENTER SEMINAR

March 2025

As a Learning Center of the ELCA, the ELCA Wittenberg Center seeks to create educational opportunities for ELCA members and our partners. One way we do this holding seminars in Wittenberg and online webinars that focus on connecting 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversaries to modern-day life and faith. In 2024, I put together and led a 5-day long seminar in Wittenberg celebrating the ELCA Wittenberg Center's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Just a few months later, I put together and led a 5-day long immersion trip in Lutherland in collaboration with our tour partner Christian Tours Europe.



From March 24-28, 2025, the ELCA Wittenberg Center and Christian Tours Europe welcomed 23 ELCA pastors and lay leaders to Lutherland. We spent time in Berlin, Wittenberg, Erfurt, Eisleben, Leipzig, and Eisenach. It was a resounding success! The group included 1 bishop, 10 pastors, and 12 lay leaders. The group was intergenerational (ages 18–70), with approximately 60% identifying as POC (people of color) and 30% as LGBTQ+. This was thanks to a strong and valued partnership with the ELCA's Ministries of Diverse

Cultures and Communities. A priority of the ELCA Wittenberg Center is to lift up marginalized and minority Lutheran voices, which we are intentional about this when we select speakers for our webinars, as well as create opportunities for diverse groups of Lutherans to come to Wittenberg and experience our shared faith history. Through the generosity and partnership with Christian Tours Europe, all lodging, tours, meals, and museum visits were completely covered, so participants only had to pay for their flights to/from Berlin. Pictured to the left is Christian Eggert, owner and director of Christian Tours Europe. He also gave us a fabulous tour of Berlin!



Photo Credit: Jesse Brown

Participants engaged deeply with Luther sites and explored East German history, current political realities, and the life of the church today. Pictured to the right is the Rev. Dr. Sámuel Nánási, Director of Studies for the LWF Center Wittenberg, giving the group a tour of the Luthergarten. Leading up to 2017, 500 trees were planted in Wittenberg to represent 500 years of reformation in the church.



Pictured below is the Rev. Dr. Ulrich Seidel, who



Photo Credit: Jesse Brown

shared with our group what it was like being a Lutheran pastor in the former GDR (East Germany) and what it was like to be part of the Leipzig Peaceful Revolution and Monday Demonstrations that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and reunification of West and East Germany in 1990. He said they were inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and his emphasis on peaceful protests. Rev. Seidel told us that on October 9, 1989, the biggest day of the Peaceful Revolution, "something was in the air – the Holy Spirit was guiding us." The conversation with Rev. Seidel was the highlight of the trip for many participants.



We also had an evening prayer service each night, with different participants signing up to lead. We had a full communion service while in Wittenberg, where I had the honor of preaching! This is pictured on the right.

Another very powerful moment for the group was when we were in the Castle Church in Wittenberg and gathered around Martin Luther's grave. With the encouragement of our tour guide, we decided to sing "A Mighty Fortress." In the middle of singing the first verse, a tour group from South Korea came in, ran up to us, and joined in singing "A Mighty Fortress" in Korean. After we finished singing all four verses together in our different languages, we spent some time in conversation. The group was from the Methodist Church in South Korea, and it turned out that both of our groups had a bishop present! We took a picture of the bishops together, pictured to the right. Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod was with us. It was a joyous and spirit-filled moment for us all.

Here are some reflections from our seminar participants:

*"Learning more about Luther and the Reformation helped me further reaffirm my identity as a Lutheran. God's church continues to be reformed every day when we learn to accept ourselves and others with love."*

*"It was a delight to work with such professionals and have the deeply theological content, not just the historical sites. Thanks for the meaningful worship services."*



Photo Credit: Jesse Brown



Photo Credit: Jesse Brown



Photo Credit: Jesse Brown



## PALM SUNDAY

April 2025

On April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, I had the joy of preaching and presiding at the Palm Sunday service at the Castle Church, and we had quite the crowd! We started the service outside with our green branches and processed into the church through the famous theses doors. Two groups were visiting, one from Australia (pictured to the right), and the other from Lüneburger Heide and the Harz in Germany (pictured right below). When I preach in German, I always print a few copies of the sermon in English in case there are English-speaking visitors. What was extra special was before the service started, the pastor of the Australian group reminded me that that very day the Lutheran Church in Australia was ordaining its first woman pastor. There was a lot to be thankful for that morning! On another note, since there are no palm trees in Germany, churches typically cut branches off of trees and bushes in their gardens. Below is a picture of my "palm," which was a palm like no other! Leading worship at local German churches is a great



example of our partnership between the ELCA and EKD (Protestant Church of Germany). When I introduce myself at the beginning of the service, I always say that I am an ELCA pastor serving in Wittenberg, and that we are partner churches of the EKD. It is important to highlight this, to remind people that our churches have strong global partnerships.



## DEUTSCHE WELLE INTERVIEW

The "Deutsche Welle," a German state-funded broadcaster, reached out to me in April asking for an interview about the impact of Luther internationally and the tourism that the Reformation sites like Wittenberg bring. They reached out to the tourism office in Wittenberg, who then recommended them to me and a few other locals who work with international visitors! You can watch the 12-minute video by going to YouTube and looking up "Martin Luther in Wittenberg: One Man Against the Church" by DW Travel, which was just uploaded at the beginning of July. I hope it inspires you to come visit Wittenberg as well!





## 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!



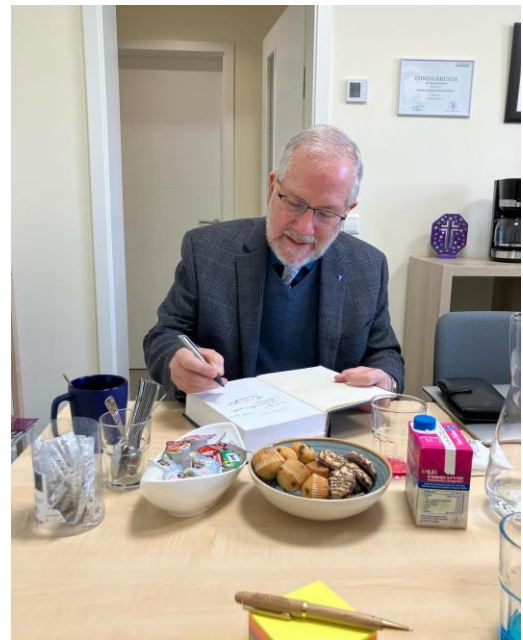
*Journalism students from the University of Southern California with Professor Diane H. Winston*



*Rev. Daniel Locke (Florida)*



*ELCIC pastor Rev. Jennifer (Canada),  
Rev. Robin Lutjohann (New England Synod), and  
Rev. Dione Klepetka (Upper Susquehanna Synod)*



*Rev. Dr. Timothy Wengert  
(New Jersey Synod)*

*All pictures without  
photo credit are courtesy  
of Bridget Gautieri.*

Pictured to the right are our March seminar participants in front of the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach. This is where Martin Luther hid and translated the New Testament into the German language. We had to walk all the way up a mountain to get there!



## 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](http://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](mailto: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
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Robeson, PA
- Faith Lutheran Church, New Providence, NJ
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
- 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](http://www.ELCA.org) → Our Work → Global Mission → Global Service → Support Missionaries → Missionaries "Give now" → Select "Bridget Gautieri" from the drop down.