

Nachrichten aus Wittenberg

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MISSIONARY REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI



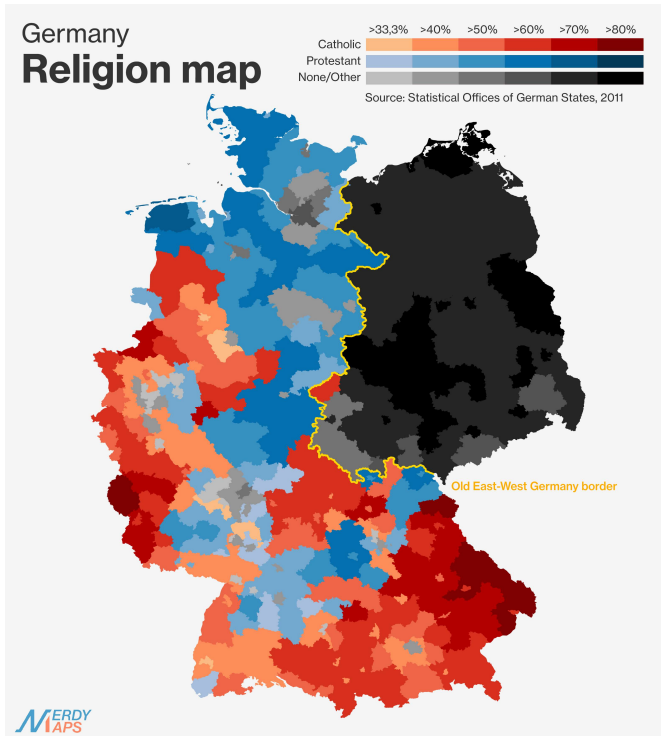
Newsletter note: I have decided to name my newsletters after the season in which I send it instead of the time period it describes. Therefore, this Spring 2026 issue highlights stories and happenings from my ministry from the winter season: January to April 2026. I hope this change makes the timing of the newsletter less confusing!

J-TERM TRIPS

In January, groups from Wartburg Seminary (pictured right) and Luther Seminary (pictured in the two pictures below) held travel courses in Wittenberg. The Rev. Dr. Martin Lohrmann was the leader and professor from Wartburg Seminary, and Dr. Jennifer Wojciechowski was the leader and professor from Luther Seminary. When ELCA groups come to Wittenberg, I schedule to meet with them for a meal or coffee and cake, a very important German tradition, and about an hour to give a presentation/lecture on the ELCA Wittenberg Center, ELCA Global Mission, and local church presence and history in Wittenberg. Most travel groups don't realize that Wittenberg, and the majority of Luther pilgrimage sites, is located in the former GDR (East Germany). This provides an opportunity to talk about church life in Wittenberg during Soviet communist control, which heavily discriminated against Christians and the Church. As a result, only about 10% of people in Wittenberg identify as Christians today, as opposed to about 60% in West Germany. In Wittenberg today, about 85% of residents do not have

January 2026





any religion. Though the map to the left is 15 years old, it does a good job at showing the stark differences between religious membership in former East and West today.

February/March 2026

SEMESTER ABROAD IN WITTENBERG

Another group I got to meet with in the winter season was a group of undergrad students from Wittenberg University in Springfield, OH (pictured in the two photos below). Wittenberg University is one of 28 ELCA-affiliated colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada. Students have the opportunity to study abroad in Wittenberg, Germany for 4 months and are accompanied by a professor. During the semester, students take German courses, an international studies course, and an additional class taught by the accompanying professor.

Students end their semester with a 100-hour internship in and around Wittenberg. This year, Wittenberg University celebrated its 15th semester abroad program in Wittenberg! To celebrate, the Rev. Dr. Christian Brady, President of Wittenberg University, and Meghan Mason, Director of International Education, visited Germany to experience the program firsthand and celebrate the milestone. Wittenberg's Mayor Thorsten Zugehör spoke at a reception about the importance of the partnership between sister cities Springfield, OH and Lutherstadt, Wittenberg as well as the semester abroad program, called "Witt in Witt." Pictured to the right is President Brady signing the official town registry of visitors with Mayor Zugehör looking on.



I was also able to welcome President Brady and International Education Director Mason to the ELCA Wittenberg Center the day after the reception (pictured on the right). President Brady is an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, so we got to talk about pastoral ministry and geek out about theological topics. I emphasized the ELCA Wittenberg Center's support of the semester abroad program. As a learning center of the ELCA, a big purpose of ours is to support educational opportunities for ELCA members, ministries, institutions, and partners. It also brings me great joy to be able to connect with and



support these students during their 4 months in town. I was asked to give a lecture one afternoon to this year's group of students about religious history and religious life in Wittenberg today. It was also a great opportunity to talk about how Wittenberg University is an ELCA-affiliated university and what that means. Pictured below is the group of students from this year's semester abroad program.



SPRING BREAK TRIPS

March 2026

In March, a group of about 30 students from Appalachia State University and Virginia Tech (pictured below) travelled to Wittenberg together for their Spring Break trip! The main group leader was Deacon Stacey Triosi, who serves as the campus minister of the Lutheran Student Association at Appalachia State, and accompanying leaders were the Rev. Steve Triosi and the Rev. Bryan and Katie Katz (Virginia Tech, Lutheran student group "The Well"). I got to talk with them about my ministry at the ELCA Wittenberg Center and the history and current situation of the Church in Wittenberg. They also had some great questions about the current political situation in Germany.

I was able to join them for dinner that night and worship the next morning in the Castle Church, and Deacon Stacey told me that it meant a lot to the students to meet me as an LGBTQIA+ pastor. The Lutheran Student group at Appalachia State, like at many universities, is the only LGBTQIA+ affirming Christian organization on campus. Because of this, a lot of students from various evangelical backgrounds have found their way to Lutheran campus ministry, because they wanted to find a Christian group that welcomed their LGBTQIA+ identities. This goes to show how important Lutheran campus ministries are! And what better way is there to explore the Lutheran faith than in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany! Grace Lutheran Church in Boone, NC, where the Rev. Steve Triosi is pastor, was a big financial supporter for this trip, making sure every student who wanted to was able to attend this trip. As for the Virginia Tech students, I hear that they fundraise through working parking at Virginia Tech football games. Whatever works!



Also in March, a group of undergrad and seminary students from Lenoir-Rhyne University and Southern Seminary came to Wittenberg for their Spring break trip! The Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer, Rector and Dean of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary at Lenoir-Rhyne University, led the group through the sites of the Reformation. For several years now, Southern Seminary has been part of Lenoir-Rhyne University. The group is pictured on the right.



As I am writing this issue, I am now realizing how many university and seminary groups have come to Wittenberg this past winter! It is great to see the surge of ELCA schools and campus ministries making their way to Wittenberg. It also helps to keep me busy in the winter, because not many tourists travel to Germany in the winter months because it's cold.

March/April 2026

WORSHIP

On Palm Sunday (pictured below on the left), I was invited to preach at the American Church in Berlin (ACB), which is an ELCA-affiliated congregation. Pictured next to me is the Rev. Ryan Birkman, a graduate of Luther seminary and ordained in the Episcopal Church, has served as the pastor of ACB for just over a year now. Next to Pastor Ryan is Greg Hemme, who plans to start studying at Luther Seminary this year to become a deacon in the ELCA. There are a lot of exciting things going on at ACB!

On Easter Sunday, I was invited to preach at the Heilandskirche in Leipzig. Pictured below on the right is the organist, then me, then the Rev. Martin Staemmler-Michael. Before the service was an Ostern Mitbringsfrühstück, an Easter potluck breakfast, which is a tradition in many German churches.



ELCA VISITORS AND LINE DANCING!

Other than all of the groups I met with this winter, a couple individuals came to Wittenberg. Pictured to the right is the Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen (Canada), myself, and Brother Ken Taylor (Metro DC Synod). The Rev. Dr. Jensen served as a professor of a LWF seminar trip in Wittenberg in March, and Brother Ken was a participant at the LWF seminar.



One exciting opportunity I led for the Wittenberg locals was a line dancing evening held at the local community center! Part of the job of ELCA missionary is cultural exchange and connecting with the locals, so I thought this was a perfect opportunity to do, also because I love line dancing! About 30 Germans came, almost all of whom who had never line danced before (pictured left), and we had a really fun time dancing together! A couple of local church members came, as well as a group of vicars. Everyone else had no connection to the church, so it was also a great outreach opportunity.

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, Robesonia, PA
- College Lutheran Church, Salem, VA
- Faith Lutheran Church, New Providence, NJ
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
- St Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Baldwinsville, NY
- Zion Lutheran Church, Long Valley, NJ
- Kimberly & Daniel Gautieri
- Alyssa & Quan Dan
- Rev. Dr. Carol Lindsay & Jeanne Elmuccio

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