

Nachrichten aus Wittenberg

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MISSIONARY REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI

The summer is the height of tourist season in Wittenberg, meaning I have been busy meeting and greeting many US visitors here. The biggest event that happens in Wittenberg is Luther's Hochzeitfest, or Luther's Wedding Festival, which is celebrated each June. This summer was also my first Home Assignment visit of my ministry, which brought me to the US for 8 weeks to visit with the congregations that sponsor me. I had a wonderful time meeting so many of you in person! I will highlight those visits in this newsletter.



LUTHER'S HOCHZEITFEST (WEDDING FESTIVAL)

The biggest festival of the year in Wittenberg is Luther's Wedding Festival. Tens of thousands of people come from around Germany and the world to join in the festivities. This is a 3-day long festival that typically takes place during the second weekend of June. Each year, a new Martin and Katharina Luther are chosen and are featured in the parade. The chosen couple who got to be Martin and Katharina are pictured on the right!



There are dozens of food stands, shops, organizations, and activities set up to make you feel transported back into the 1500s. Many are dressed in costumes, which you can borrow from the Historical Costumes Club of Wittenberg. I did this myself, and after trying out a few different costumes, I decided to rent a yellow and blue peasant's outfit for the occasion (pictured left).

I was invited by the Oberbürgermeister (Lord Mayor) of Wittenberg to attend a special reception at the Old Town Hall before the parade started. At the reception, a band played using all historical instruments. They played some modern tunes, and with everyone in costume, I felt like I was in an episode of

Bridgerton! The band is pictured on the right. After many words of welcome and speeches regarding this traditional celebration, the parade began.





There is a lot of church involvement during this festival. The Stadtkirche (Town Church) offers personal blessings for couples during worship on Sunday morning. I was asked by the pastors of the Stadtkirche to assist in the marriage blessings for the international visitors who would like a blessing in English. I happily agreed and prepared myself to give blessings in English. We had 3 blessing stations, and those who wanted an English blessing were instructed to come to me. In the end, 5 of the couples who came to me asked for a blessing in German, and only 1 couple asked for a blessing in English! I was nervous about this, because I usually write out all of my prayers when leading worship in German, but I hadn't for this service because I was expecting to only be speaking English. The Holy Spirit worked through me, though, and gave me the words to pray extemporaneously in German, and it worked out just fine. It was a good realization for me that I can pray in German without preparation or notes. I look forward to the next Luther Wedding Festival in June 2025.

CHRISTLICHE BEGEGNUNGSTAGE (DAYS OF CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS) JUNE 7-9, 2024

Another big event that took place in June was Christliche Begegnungstage, or Days of Christian Encounters, in Frankfurt Oder (Germany) and Slubice (Poland). This event takes place every 3 years and brings together thousands of Lutherans from Central and Eastern Europe, from countries that were once controlled by the Soviet Union. The Lutheran churches in Eastern Germany therefore also take part in these festival days. Lutherans in Central and Eastern Europe are minority churches, and these festival days are held to bring them together, to learn, exchange ideas, worship together, and have a unifying message. The topic for the gathering was: Nothing can separate us.

The ELCA Europe Desk had a booth where we spoke about migration. The ELCA has started to expand its migration justice work to Europe, where many migrants cross from the Mediterranean Sea from northern Africa to Europe. We talked with others about theological and biblical views of welcoming the neighbor as well as connected with our European partners who are doing migration justice work.



WELCOMING ELCA GROUPS TO WITTENBERG



A few big groups visited Wittenberg this summer! Pictured to the left is a group of seminarians and clergy from Texas, including Bishop Erik Gronberg of the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod of the ELCA. Pictured below is a group of seminarians from Luther Seminary, who were in Wittenberg for a May term course. I spoke to each group about ELCA Global Mission and my specific ministry at the ELCA Wittenberg Center, including the history, structure, and happenings of the German Lutheran Church.



Pictured below is me talking to the whole Texas-Lutheran group, which totalled more than 30 people! They are so far the biggest ELCA group I have seen in Wittenberg. We had a nice traditional German meal together of meat and potatoes. The group was interested in Wittenberg's GDR (former East Germany) history and learning that only 12% of the Wittenberg population identifies as Christian.



HOME ASSIGNMENT: PART 2

As I mentioned in the Spring newsletter, every 2 years, the ELCA sends its global mission personnel to the US for 8 weeks so that missionaries can meet with their sponsoring congregations and individuals in person. I split my home assignment into two trips: one month in April/May and one month in August. In April/May, I preached at Calvary Lutheran in Cranford, NJ, attended NJ Synod Assembly and lead a workshop about my ministry in Germany, attended a First Call pastors' retreat, and attended a spiritual retreat for NJ Synod rostered leaders.

In August, I attended a week-long ELCA Service & Justice retreat in Illinois, where I got to meet all of the other ELCA missionaries, as well as the rest of the Service & Justice team. I then preached at St. John's Lutheran Church in Evansville, WI. Even though I had never been to rural Wisconsin before, I felt absolutely at home with the hospitality and welcome I received! I enjoyed having dinner with congregants, seeing the town (which had many cornfields), and trying Culver's for the first time. One congregant even took me on a ride in his 4-wheeler, so I could get a better look at the soybean and corn fields (pictured right)!



The following Sunday I preached at St. John's Lutheran Church in Parkville, MD, which is where I did my internship in 2018-2019. Pictured here is me with those from my former internship committee who could make the service (pictured left)! They are still a wonderful support to me. St. John's still keeps up their tradition of having donuts and coffee after church each week, which I very much enjoyed. It was great to reconnect with so many familiar faces, and also meet St. John's new members.

The next Sunday I preached at St. John Lutheran Church in Ocean City, NJ. I have a lot of St. John's congregations sponsoring me – how cool! The congregation put on a lovely coffee hour after worship to continue the conversation about my ministry. They also posted signs all over the church to welcome me (pictured right)!



Lastly, I preached at Trinity Lutheran Church in Robeson, PA (pictured left). They threw a make-your-own sundae bar after church (all of my sponsoring congregations are so generous!). Some people in the congregation could speak Pennsylvania Dutch, which was very cool to hear the similarities and differences with German. Again, the hospitality was unmatched. I flew back to Germany the next day to wrap up my home assignment visit. I can't wait to come back and visit my sponsoring congregations again in 2026 – thank you all!

AND LASTLY: ELCA VISITORS!

I was able to welcome several ELCA guests to the ELCA Wittenberg Center for coffee/tea and conversation. The ELCA Wittenberg Center seeks to be historically rooted and radically relevant while being centered on intersectional justice. 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. Please email me if you plan to visit Wittenberg!

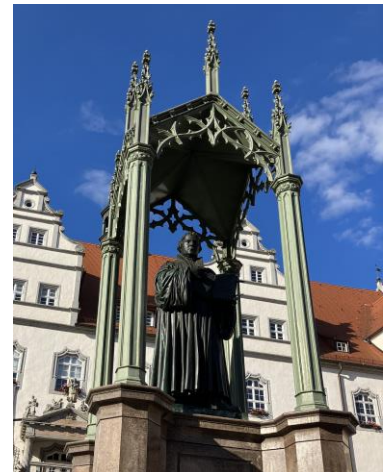




THANK YOU

Thank you again for your prayers and financial support. You are always welcome to visit Wittenberg and experience the spirit of the Reformation for yourselves. Keep an eye out for the next newsletter, follow us on Facebook and Instagram @ELCAWittenbergCenter, 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
- St. John Lutheran Church, Ocean City, NJ
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Robeson, PA
- Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Omaha, NE
- Kimberly & Daniel Gautieri
- Alyssa Gautieri
- Rev. Pastor Carol Lindsay & Jeanne Elmuccio
- Wannetta Phillips

You can now 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.