

Nachrichten aus Wittenberg

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MISSIONARY REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI

Summer is the busiest time for events, celebrations, and tourism in Wittenberg. I kick off this newsletter with news about Kirchentag and United4Rescue, then move to my U.S. visit in May and June, ELCA group visits, the Rev. Dr. Luke Powery's visit to Wittenberg, meeting with German and ELCA groups, and lastly, highlighting some visitors from over the summer. The featured picture to the right is me, Martin Luther, and the Rev. Rachel Eskesen, ELCA Europe Desk Director, at Kirchentag in Hannover. Read more about this event below!



KIRCHENTAG 2025 IN HANNOVER

May 2025

Kirchentag, translated as "Church Days," is 5-day long, biannual festival organized by the Protestant Church of Germany. It attracts more than 100,000 participants from around the globe, offering a wide range of events and activities including worship, workshops, Bible studies, keynote lectures, performances, and art installations. Former keynote speakers include Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Barack Obama. This year's keynote speaker was Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of Washington, D.C., who spoke about courage, echoing this year's Kirchentag motto "Mutig, Stark, Beherzt," meaning "Brave, Strong, Courageous."

Kirchentag began in 1949 and, according to its website, "it emerged as an open forum advocating for democracy, human rights, ecumenism, and the fight against discrimination." Kirchentag remained active despite Germany's division, even hosting an event in Berlin before the Berlin Wall was built. Though formal gatherings such as Kirchentag were banned in East Germany (where Wittenberg is located), local Christians organized smaller meetings to express their faith, and after reunification in 1989, the movements from East and West merged. Over time, Kirchentag has influenced German society through interfaith dialogue, innovative worship, and discussions on peace and environmental issues.



I was able to attend this event with ELCA Europe Desk Director, Rev. Rachel Eskesen, and Intersectional Justice Resource Specialist in Europe, Sarah Grow (pictured above with the Kirchentag 2025 motto). We were able to meet with numerous German and international church partners, connect with organizations that the ELCA supports and works with, and learn about the pressing issues and developments of the German Protestant Church. It is vital for us to connect with partners in person when possible, and to continue to build strong relationships with fellow Lutheran churches across Europe.



One example of an organization that the ELCA supports is United4Rescue, whose mission is to save people from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. United4Rescue was founded through the Protestant Church of Germany in 2019. According to the UN Organisation for Migration, more than 30,000 people have drowned or gone missing in the Mediterranean since 2014. European governments have knowingly let and even watched migrants from Northern Africa drown in the sea, rather than providing help to save them. Moved by their Christian call, the Protestant Church in Germany decided to act.

Their motto, a quote from German Lutheran Pastor Rev. Sandra Bila's sermon at Kirchentag in 2019, is "You just don't let people drown. Full stop." Since 2019, United4Rescue has purchased 5 rescue ships that they run and operate as well as a Seabird plane that they are able to use to locate stranded or sinking ships.

United4Rescue held a worship service focused on migration during Kirchentag in Hannover. Sarah Grow and I were able to attend, offer prayers, and bring greetings and words of support from the ELCA (pictured above). Since United4Rescue's is based out of Berlin, which is only 45 minutes away from Wittenberg, I was able to attend one of their events over the summer. Through my work in Germany, I am constantly reminded that we belong to a global church community. We are not alone in our ministries or Christian call to care for our neighbors and to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. I feel encouraged by the work of the ELCA and our partners, and I hope this brings you some encouragement, too.

For more information about Kirchentag, go to www.kirchentag.de

For more information about United4Rescue, go to www.united4rescue.org



U.S. ENGAGEMENTS

May & June 2025

I spent a couple of weeks in the U.S. in May. I was able to attend NJ Synod Assembly, where I am rostered, and run a table for ELCA Global Mission (pictured on the right). It was a good opportunity to meet with people from my sponsoring congregations in NJ and to make new connections. What was especially exciting about the assembly was that we elected a new bishop – the Rev. Christa Compton!

In addition to attending NJ Synod Assembly, I was able to attend a First Call Retreat in Upstate NY. Since I was ordained into this position in 2023, I am doing First Call Theological Education for my first 3 years of ordained ministry with pastors and deacons in NJ and NY, and soon to be all of Region 7.



I have a cohort of four other first-call pastors and we meet online once a month, which I am able to join in from Germany. Retreats are held in person twice a year, and I commit to attending one of them per year due to the distance. I always look forward to my cohort meetings and these retreats, because I am reminded that I am not alone in my ministry, and it helps me stay well connected with the Synod I am rostered in.

NEVER AGAIN

LUTHERANS IN GERMANY AND THE U.S. FACING THE RISING TIDE OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

How can Lutherans in the US and Germany learn from each other to address the rise of far-right movements and governments?

Rev. Bridget Gautieri shares her experience in a time of political polarization and calls us to faithful response and resistance.

SUNDAY
MAY 25, 2025

10:00 AM
TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
MANHATTAN BEACH
1340 11TH ST.
MANHATTAN BEACH, CA 90266

3:00 PM
CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY
THOUSAND OAKS
PREUS-BRANDT FORUM
PARKING AT GILBERT SPORTS CENTER



REV. BRIDGET GAUTIERI
DIRECTOR OF THE ELCA WITTENBERG CENTER
WITTENBERG, GERMANY

MARK C. REILY SPEAKERSHIP
PRESENTED BY



I also spent a few days in Los Angeles, where I was invited to preach at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan Beach and to give a lecture at California Lutheran University entitled, "Never Again: Lutherans in Germany and the U.S. facing the rising tide of Christian Nationalism." The speakership was organized by SoCal Lutherans, an LGBTQIA+ organization of the Southern California Synod of the ELCA and Reconciling Works.

In my lecture, I spoke about my work at the ELCA Wittenberg Center, the context of East Germany, the rise of right-wing extremism in Germany, the Lutheran/Protestant Church's response, and key takeaways. U.S. and German Lutheran churches are facing very similar issues: declining membership and finances and the rise of right-wing, extremist politics. There is a lot our churches can learn from each other and a lot of work we can do (and are doing) together, such as our migration ministries and United4Rescue (see page 2).

WELCOMING ELCA GROUPS TO WITTENBERG

A few big groups visited Wittenberg this summer! Pictured to the right is a group of students and Professor Dr. Rob Willingham from Roanoke College, an ELCA-affiliated college in **Virginia** (and also my alma mater!). They were in Germany for a May-term course about German history, including Luther, the Reformation, and WWII and the Holocaust.

Pictured below the Roanoke College group is a group from **Wisconsin**, led by the Rev. Dick and Naomi Bruesehoff. Dick served as Interim Director of the ELCA Wittenberg Center in 2000, and is still an avid supporter of the Center (and is pictured on the far left in the red-checkered shirt). The group first spent a week in Scotland, which included visiting the Iona Community, and then came to Germany to visit the Reformation sites.

Below are two pictures of the Rev. Dennis Rodenberg's group, where he is pastor of two ELCA churches in Olin and Wyoming, **Iowa**. We enjoyed dinner together at the Brauhaus in Wittenberg, which has the best schnitzel and apple strudel in town!



THE REV. DR. LUKE POWERY'S VISIT TO WITTENBERG

July & August 2025

Through the invitation of the Protestant Church of Germany's (EKD) Center for Worship and Preaching Culture and the Theology Department at the University of Leipzig, the Rev. Dr. Luke Powery preached and lectured in Wittenberg and Leipzig. Rev. Dr. Powery is a Baptist pastor and the dean of Duke University Chapel and professor of homiletics and African and African American studies at Duke Divinity School. The EKD's Center for Worship and Preaching Culture holds an annual speakership that brings in engaging, powerful preachers, who through workshops, lectures, and worship, teaches German pastors, lay people, and students different styles and ways of preaching.

Dr. Powery gave both a lecture and workshop about African American Spirituals and the work of the Holy Spirit. On Sunday, he preached in the Castle Church in Wittenberg about an "and" God and the holy diversity of God's creation. Dr. Powery preached in English and the sermon was printed in German. I was asked to help create the liturgy for worship on Sunday that would blend U.S. and German styles of worship, as well as a mix of English and German hymns. This is a great example of one aspect of my work: strengthening local partnerships and supporting educational opportunities. We had a spirit-filled service with a beautiful mix of music, liturgy, language, and traditions, and it was a blessing to be a part of!

Pictured to the right is the worship leadership team (from left to right): Rev. Bridget Gautieri, Rev. Lars-Robin Schulz, Rev. Dr. Luke Powery, and Rev. Dr. Alexander Deeg. We are standing in front of the "Theses Doors" at the Castle Church, where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses.



MEETING WITH GROUPS

In August, I had the honor of meeting with the NJ WELCA chapter (Women of the ELCA) online, a women's Bible Study group in Bitterfeld, Germany, and an "Ecumenical English" group of the Lutheran Church in Saxony. These were all great opportunities to present on the ELCA Wittenberg Center and ELCA Global Mission. Pictured on the left is the women's Bible Study group in Bitterfeld.

AND LASTLY: MORE 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!



*Rev. Arden and Roxanne Dorn from
Pickrell, Nebraska*



*Rev. Dennis Rodenberg and family
from Wyoming, Iowa*



*Rev. Mike and Lisa Peck from
Overland Park, Kansas*



*Rev. Barbara Jones and Rev. Jon Brudvig
from Shawnee, Kansas*



Rev. Steve and Deacon Stacey Troisi and family from Boone, North Carolina

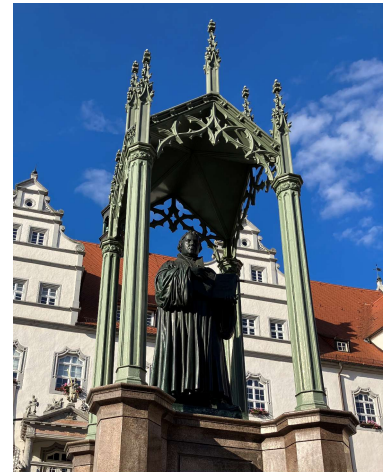


Deaconess Hannah Koby and Annalee from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts

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 Lutheran Church, Ocean City, NJ
- Faith Lutheran Church, New Providence, NJ
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
- Trinity Lutheran Church, Robeson, PA
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Parkville, MD
- Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Omaha, NE
- St. John's Lutheran Church, Evansville, WI
- Kimberly & Daniel Gautieri
- Alyssa & Quan Dan

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.