



Landstuhl, Germany

May 1, 2024

Dear friends,

Since last writing, the season of Lent has come and gone. Rather than using a theme for our midweek services, I simply preached on the historic Wednesday readings outlined by the Lutheran Missal Project. We did have themes for each of our light midweek suppers, however, organized by Emily Ponziano. A highlight of midweek services was the visitors that members brought with them for supper and service! It's great to see the passion of our people for inviting their friends to church. We also observed the Ember Days that fall in the first week of Lent with special services on that Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. For the Friday service, we had a Ukrainian dinner at Rhema Cafe scheduled at the same time. Directly across the street from the cafe is the "Alte Kapelle" (the old chapel), which dates back to the 14th century. The first Protestant service in the region was held in this location by Pastor Martin Bucer. Napoleon destroyed everything except the chancel. The bricks were used to pave the street! For our Ember Day service, I was able to get the key for the chapel from the local Roman Catholic parish. After the Ukrainian dinner, we held our service by candlelight in the old chapel.

Early in March, I had the opportunity to sit on a pastors' panel of local English-speaking clergy for a youth conference in Landstuhl hosted by Rhema Cafe. The audience submitted questions on theology and life, and they did not shy away from bringing up such controversial issues as homosexuality, women pastors, the real presence in the Lord's Supper, and more. After the two-hour-long panel discussion, a young couple approached me about coming to church. Sure enough, they joined us at church the next day! My prayer is that those who find their way into our congregation will stay for the long term.

Last summer, an intern came to Rhema Cafe in training to become a Pentecostal pastor. He brought along Luther's Small Catechism because he grew up Missouri Synod in Minnesota. We took Brandon under our wing and brought him to church activities as much as we could to bring him back to his Lutheran roots. In December, Brandon met Inga, a German employee at the cafe. They approached me for premarital counseling, so each week we met for counseling and catechesis. In March, Brandon and Inga flew to Minnesota to get legally married (a process that takes nearly a year in Germany). I performed the church ceremony when they returned. The service was entirely in German for all of Inga's family and friends. Brandon and Inga were then officially welcomed as communicant members of the congregation just after Easter, and we rejoiced with the angels in heaven over the return of these lost sheep.

After a few weeks of premarital counseling, Brandon and Inga referred me to another German/American couple about to get married. They, too, sought premarital counseling, which again included much more than advice for marriage. Our sessions always involved delving deeper into the Scriptures and any theological questions the couple had. My prayer is that they, too, will eventually find a home in our church.

In the middle of March, Emma traveled to Ireland with our friends, the Swensons. I stayed home with Agatha, which was quite a learning experience. Now I appreciate much more all the things Emma does for our family! Agatha and I enjoyed walking to the park, reading with each other, and calling Mommy. Putting Agatha down for a nap and bedtime was the hardest part. That's when Emma usually sings hymns for Agatha. When I ran out of hymns, I had to resort to the Star Spangled Banner and Old Man River, among other classics. This experience taught me that I need to concentrate more on memorizing our good Lutheran

hymnody! Taking care of Agatha on my own was also good practice for when her baby sister arrives at the end of August, Lord willing, and I will again have to help out more with Agatha at home. Please join us in praying for a safe delivery and health for mother and baby. Agatha asks regularly when baby sister is going to “come home.”

In our lead-up to Holy Week, for the last midweek Lenten service, the Sunday School children put on a Passion Play, where they intersperse the passion account with hymns. On Palm Sunday, we had members over for the third year in a row to listen to J.S. Bach’s *St. John Passion*. We opened with the invocation, closed with the benediction, stood for the Lord’s Prayer when Jesus breathed His last, and had a brief devotion/discussion on Psalm 22 between parts, as well as discussion questions at the end on what we had listened to. For the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week, we had vespers services each day. On Maundy Thursday, we held Divine Service and then had Tre Ore (three-hour service) on Good Friday and Tenebrae service that evening. Our Easter Vigil service began at sundown on Holy Saturday (6:48pm). After the service, we had folks over for our traditional Easter Feast with ham, cheesy potato casserole, pickled eggs, plenty of desserts, and all the rest. A number of German students were in town for Easter, and we ended up celebrating until 4:30 in the morning. Then we had to get up bright and early for our 8:00am Easter Service! We had to meet so early to avoid scheduling conflicts with the German congregation. After the Easter service, we had Easter brunch and an Easter egg hunt at the Ayers home.

Right away on Easter Monday, we made our way to Hesse for the ordination of a friend, Michael Wenz, who will be serving as pastor of the SELK congregation in Braunschweig. On the way, we stopped in Steeden, where Friedrich Brunn was pastor in the 19th century. Brunn was basically the Missouri Synod representative in Germany and trained over 200 young men for service in the Missouri Synod. Many of our congregations and schools in the U.S. were served by these men, so it was a joy to finally see Brunn’s old church, school, and gravesite. After the ordination, we stayed in the area to research where some of my family came from. Then we visited the Cologne cathedral and Königswinter, just south of Bonn. From there, we picked up a seminary friend, Rev. Joseph McCalley (Trinity, Columbia, MO), at the Frankfurt airport and drove to northern Germany for the wedding of a friend and former exchange student to the Ft. Wayne seminary.

In the middle of April, we drove with some students to the Luther Academy-Eastern Europe conference in Brno, Czech Republic. It was great to see other LCMS missionaries, old friends from partner churches all over Europe, and Dr. Bruss from the Ft. Wayne seminary, as well as to tour this fascinating former capital of the region of Moravia.

Last week, Pastor Honcharuk, the Ukrainian pastor serving out of the Old Latin School in Wittenberg, came down for a visit. He accompanied us and several members of our congregation to Switzerland to bring clothes, toys, candy, and books from the Lutheran Heritage Foundation to a Ukrainian orphanage that was relocated to Lake Geneva. One of our elders, Jeff Peterson, has been working diligently for quite some time to organize this event. A friend of the Petersons in Florida came to Poland when the war began to help with Ukrainian refugees. She came across this orphanage, which is how we first heard of them. This is actually the only orphanage that made it to the West. All the others were taken by Russia. The orphanage settled in Switzerland because it was the only country that would allow the orphans to stay together. Poland and Germany would have separated them into foster homes or between orphanages. But the goal of the orphanage is to preserve the Ukrainian language and culture of these children and one day return to Ukraine. Pastor Honcharuk taught a Bible lesson to the 46 children. There were 17 or so younger children housed in a different location. They will be reunited with this orphanage in a few weeks with everyone under the same roof. Our congregation plans to make trips to this orphanage with Pastor Honcharuk a semi-regular event. We look forward to bringing the love of God and God’s Word to these children!

After church this past Sunday, we then drove Pastor Honcharuk to Luxembourg to meet with part of his scattered Ukrainian congregation. He comes every five weeks or so to meet with one family in particular, along with other Ukrainians they can bring to the service. Afterwards, we enjoyed dinner in the home of this family. Their English is quite good, which led to conversations about how we can work together more

closely in the future. It might be that I visit the family periodically while at the same time seeking American expats in Luxembourg. We've had several at church before. We also discussed plans of bringing the Honcharuks along with this Ukrainian family to Kaiserslautern this summer to run a Vacation Bible School for the local Ukrainian children here. We continue sponsoring a Ukrainian dinner once per month at Rhema Cafe, and now we're thrilled to have more opportunity to offer Lutheran resources to the Ukrainians in our region.

By the way, you might recall from our newsletter two summers ago (June 2022) our attempt to visit an LCMS lady in Switzerland when we got stuck in a hailstorm and ended up with two flat tires. Heidi and I remained in periodic contact, but I always felt a tinge of guilt for never making it to her home that evening. Well, on our trip to Switzerland to visit the Ukrainian orphanage, we got to spend several hours with Heidi and her husband. We brought a stack of resources from Deaconess Carolyn Brinkley's Military Project (Lutheran Study Bible, Lutheran Prayer Companion, a Book of Concord, Small Catechism, and hymnal). But Heidi already had all these resources and much more, so we had her keep them to give to friends. There also happens to be a substantial American expat community in Bern, Switzerland, so Heidi has plenty of contacts she thought could use the resources. We also discussed the possibility of offering a Divine Service for Heidi on our trips to the Ukrainian orphanage and the hope of one day even sending a missionary to the area. Who knows what God might have in mind! And to think about how all this came out of the disappointment of two flat tires in a hailstorm. I think there must be a reason God had us wait nearly two years to finally reach our destination.

In the life of our congregation, our men's group continues meeting monthly to discuss the Large Catechism as it relates to fathers, sons, and men in general. The women's group is also meeting every month to study the hymn "O Morning Star" and Psalm 45. So far in the Lutheran Confessions study, we've made good progress in the Augsburg Confession and Apology. We're reading the article of the AC, the Romanist Confutation, and then the response of the Apology. In Bible Study, we continue with our study of Revelation. And in Catechesis, we're on the Lord's Supper. We're hoping to have some confirmations by Reformation Day.

I continue teaching Bible Study every Tuesday at Sembach military prison. This remains a highlight of my week. I'm constantly amazed at the level of engagement and interest from the prisoners. They always come with questions about what they're reading in the Bible. Several have also been coming for private confession and absolution. The biggest joy of prison ministry, in my opinion, is knowing that although I might never see these men in this life again, I might very well see them in eternal life! I pray I can introduce all of you to them there.

Jesus be with you,

Rev. Nathaniel Jensen

The Jensen Family



To support the LCMS through the work of *Rev. Nathaniel and Emma Jensen*, you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
P.O. Box 66861
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Make checks payable to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Mark checks "Jensen-Germany Support." Gifts can also be given securely online through the LCMS website, on my online giving page at lcms.org/jensen.

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Ember Friday Vespers by candlelight in the Alte Kapelle, Landstuhl.

Lenten suppers.





Agatha with Bishop Voigt of the SELK.



The children's Passion Play.



Easter in Kaiserslautern. Christ is risen!



Pastor Honcharuk and Jeff Peterson at the Ukrainian orphanage in Switzerland.



Baby sister, due at the end of August.
Please keep mother and child in your prayers!



Before and After. Every Sunday, we hold Bible Study at a church down the street. Periodically, they'll have this banner up, which fits well with our study of Revelation, where we also discuss the false theology of Millennialism. Some members decided to stage a picture of me getting "raptured."

