

SERVING THE LORD IN

K-TOWN, GERMANY

NEWS FROM THE JENSEN FAMILY



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Landstuhl, Germany

February 5, 2025

Dear friends,

In November, we made a quick trip to the U.S. for my brother's wedding in Houston, TX. How wonderful to celebrate surrounded by friends and family! For most, this was the first time meeting Cecilia. From Houston, we drove to St. Louis, with stops in Dyess, AR, to see the boyhood home of Johnny Cash, and in Altenburg, MO, to visit our dear friends, the Mirlys, and see their renovated farmhouse. Most of our time in St. Louis was spent visiting family, especially Grandma and Grandpa Jensen. Our eight-day (!) trip went by too quickly. But we had to return to Germany to greet Emma's brothers, who arrived in Germany the same day we did to celebrate Thanksgiving.

With Emma's brothers in town, we decided to take a trip to Turin, Italy. The goal was to meet up with a student from the Fort Wayne Seminary who might be coming to KELC in the near future to serve as a vicar. I wanted to get to know him a bit first, so we made the trip down to Italy. On the way, we stopped near Bern to visit Heidi Gusset, whom we've visited before. She's the LCMS member who has been living in Switzerland for over thirty years. We enjoyed dinner with Heidi's family and then had a communion service in the living room, the first service of what we pray will become a church plant in Bern. From there, we headed to an Airbnb up in the mountains. The driveway to our accommodations was a 25% grade hill. Emma's brothers got stuck in the snow, which made for an exciting time getting unstuck . . . at 1:30am! It all worked out, and we still had a restful night's sleep.

During the Advent season, we held vespers and soup suppers every Wednesday. My mom came to visit over Christmas. We took her to Rothenburg ob der Tauber and Nuremberg to visit Christmas markets. The churches in Nuremberg were certainly worth a visit! We especially wanted to see the church of St. Lorenz because it's the church that St. Lorenz in Frankenmuth, Michigan, is named after. And Emma was especially excited to unexpectedly discover the tomb of beloved Lutheran hymnwriter Martin Schalling, who wrote "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart" (LSB 708). After visiting the Rothenburg Christmas Market and getting ready for bed, I learned of the terrorist attack at the Christmas Market in Magdeburg. It was somewhat surreal to think we were at a Christmas Market as a man was plowing through people at a Christmas Market just hours away. I kept thinking how that could have just as well been us, and I was reminded of Jesus's words: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5).

On December 8th, we received a gentleman from Syria into membership at KELC. This man came to Kaiserslautern to work for the United Nations and has been attending our congregation since last summer. After a period of instruction and a number of discussions, he decided to join our congregation. It was a joy to bring him the body and blood of Christ for the first time! Afterward, another member told me how excited this Syrian gentleman was because he "was welcomed into the Lutheran Church on the same day the Assad regime fell." Of course, not all Syrians received this change of government in the same way. Another regular visitor from Syria expressed concern for the Christians in Syria. Although there are various political opinions, I was thrilled to see both men meet and visit with each other on friendly terms a few weeks ago!

Between our Syrians and two Iranians we see periodically, I'm excited about the far-reaching impact KELC is able to have, even in unexpected places!

Shortly after Christmas, Stephen and Stephanie Guzik returned to the United States. Stephanie was offered a job at Fort Knox, which will allow Stephen to attend seminary for the next few years. We'll miss the Guziks an awful lot, but we're thankful the LORD will continue working through them in Kentucky, at the seminary, and wherever He leads them. As hard as it is to say goodbye, the fact that the Church will be blessed through them offers some comfort. I told the Guziks I was happy they were moving during Christmas when a pastor is so busy, because I didn't have time to start missing them. But now that the busyness of Christmas has worn off, I'm beginning to feel the loss. That's the nature of serving in this kind of transient setting, and it reminds us that the LORD will continue providing for this congregation! We're thankful and pray for the new members of KELC the LORD will bring to us in the next year.

Every Tuesday, I continue teaching a Bible Study at the Sembach military prison, the fruits of which I see every week. We've also added Latin class to our Tuesday schedule. When I return from the prison, a homeschool family comes over, and we have Latin lessons for an hour. I'm appreciating this opportunity to brush up on my Latin! And then on Wednesday evenings before our study of the Lutheran Confessions, we hold either Latin vespers or compline, always led by one of our German students. The opportunity to hear God's Word spoken and sung in the Latin language has become a highlight of our week.

On January 6th, we celebrated Epiphany. Before the Divine Service, we dedicated a new processional crucifix donated by one of our members, Mason Westphal. The old processional cross had corroded beyond repair, so it was time for a new one. Exactly one week after Epiphany, on January 13th, is the Feast of the Baptism of our LORD, which we celebrated on the day for the first time this year. We always appreciate the festive atmosphere of special midweek services.

In the middle of January, we returned to Switzerland with the Petersons, Mason Westphal, and Pastor Andriy Honcharuk (the Ukrainian pastor in Wittenberg) to visit the Ukrainian orphanage we support on Lake Geneva. Mason got a flat tire on the way, which made for an interesting trip going back and forth to get tires replaced, but it didn't hamper our mission! This was our second trip, the first being back in April. We brought donated clothing, toys, and kitchen equipment for their "kitchen classroom." The children taught us how to make Ukrainian dumplings (*varenyky*), which we could then enjoy for dinner. I also wore myself out playing soccer and basketball with the boys, a reminder that I'm not as young as I used to be. We also visited St. Maurice, Switzerland, one of the oldest Christian sites in the country and the place where St. Maurice (St. Moritz, in German) and the Theban Legion were martyred by the Romans.

On our way home from the orphanage, we stopped in the Bern area to visit Heidi Gusset once again. This time, Heidi organized the use of a local Reformed church. Our visits have progressed from being just visits to holding a Divine Service in Heidi's living room, and now Divine Service in a church building! Next time we visit, Heidi plans on inviting other expats in the area and young Swiss students who are interested in theology. We'll hold a service, a Study, and also a Q&A time for locals interested in Lutheran theology. My prayer is that our efforts in Bern, Switzerland, will lead one day to an English-speaking Lutheran congregation there. I'd say we're well on our way!

In January, we had another farewell, this time for Greg, the young airman I confirmed on Reformation Day. We presented Greg with a picture of the stained glass window at our church (which we give to all departing families), and we had a farewell lunch at a German restaurant. Just when we thought all the goodbyes were over, Greg learned there was a mistake with his paperwork that would keep him here a few more weeks. Though this causes some consternation on his part, we're happy he's still around! He'll be headed home to Iowa to visit family (and some LCMS churches nearby for his first time back home as a Lutheran), and then he's off to Korea for one year and Japan for two years! It's a joy to see our mission coming to fruition: to faithfully teach those the LORD sends to us and then send them out into the world!

At the end of January, I presented at the 100th anniversary conference for the “Society for Palatinate History” in Landau, about an hour away from Landstuhl. The organizer of the conference wanted someone to speak about the church life of U.S. military personnel in the Kaiserslautern Military Community. He contacted various bases here to no avail. Then he asked the editor of Lutheran Quarterly, who passed on the request to Dr. Harmelink at Concordia Historical Institute, who then contacted me. It was a roundabout way of receiving an invitation, but I’m happy I did! Not only was it a wonderful conference in general, but I also made great local German contacts (including the German Baptist pastor down the street from our church). My paper was called: “Kirchen von K-Town: Amerikanisches Christentum in Deutschland nach 1945” [*Churches of K-Town: American Christianity in Germany since 1945*]. I highlighted the work of the LCMS and the work of our German partner church (the SELK) in the Kaiserslautern area. I emphasized the back-and-forth exchange between Germany and America throughout the years, which continues happening every day in our church and community.

Things have really geared up in preparation for our congregation’s 40th anniversary, which we’ll celebrate on May 10th! Our planning committee is meeting regularly, and I’ve been combing through the congregational archives. I have to make sure not to look through records before bed or else I won’t be able to stop and end up going to bed too late. It feels like I’m in college again at Concordia Wisconsin, where I spent many hours working in the archives with Dr. Sohn, who taught me the basics of archival work. That bug has never left me, and anytime I’m around old records, I have a hard time stopping the research. My goal is to have a history of the congregation written by our anniversary celebration. Our invitation is open to everyone, and we’d love to have some of you, our friends and supporters, there to celebrate with us! Please contact me if you're interested!

We had our annual voters’ assembly at the end of January. Many were wondering if we’d be able to fill all the open positions on the church council. At the last minute, people stepped up and volunteered to help. I’m really excited about our church council for the next year! I’m expecting lots of good work. At the beginning of February, we had our regular Altar Guild/Acolyte/Tech Team breakfast. We also celebrated Agatha’s third birthday. How the time is flying!

Thank you as always for your support of our work. And please continue praying for the proclamation of God’s Word in our small but faithful congregation, especially as we give thanks for 40 years of ministry among English speakers in this area. The LORD has done amazing work here so far, and we look forward to, God-willing, many years to come!

Jesus be with you,

Rev. Nathaniel Jensen

The Jensen Family



With Mr. and Mrs. Mirly in Altenburg, MO



With Great Grandma Hick in St. Louis



With Great Grandma and Grandpa Jensen in St. Louis





At the Matterhorn in Switzerland on our way home from Turin, Italy.



Our first Divine Service in a living room near Bern, Switzerland



Agatha with Grandma in Nuremberg



St. Lorenz Church in Nuremberg



Agatha and her grandma made a gingerbread house, which in German is called a "Hexenhaus" (witch's house), based on the fairy tale Hänsel and Gretel.



The Guziks' last Sunday at KELC and their farewell lunch.



Merry Christmas from Kaiserslautern!



St. John hymnsing/Christmas party at the Jensen home



Our makeshift Advent wreath is starting to look pretty nice with this backdrop of the wisemen from Deaconess Brinkley.



Enjoying an afternoon in St. Maurice, Switzerland



Here's a look at what our study of the Lutheran Confessions looks like every Wednesday.



KELC's new processional cross donated by member Mason Westphal.

Our 2-3 times per year Altar
Guild/Acolyte/Tech Team breakfast



A Lutheran Divine Service in a Reformed church near Bern, Switzerland



Lots of drama with our Christmas tree this year. It wouldn't drink water, so we cut some more off the stump. The next morning I awoke to this. And even then it wouldn't drink water! We'll try harder next year.



To support the LCMS through the work of Pastor Jensen, you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
P.O. Box 66861
St. Louis, MO 63166-6861

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.

You can also support the Jensen family through: MISSION CENTRAL: 40718 Highway E16, Mapleton, IA 51034-7105. Mark checks: Nathaniel Jensen #A10798-69485