

NACHRICHTEN AUS BERLIN



Insights and experiences from ELCA missionaries Marissa and Viking Dietrich in Berlin where Viking serves as Regional Representative in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Global Mission.

Dear Friends,

As thanksgiving approaches, Marissa and I grow resigned to the fact that, due to the pandemic, we will not see most of our children during the holidays this year. In many ways we can be thankful that the very real losses to the COVID pandemic felt by so many families have not fallen upon us. Still, as the infection rates rise and nighttime falls earlier each day, we recognize stress and gloominess creeping into our lives.

Yesterday, we looked at each other and wondered if it was time to put out some of the Christmas lights! We won't, not yet! But in northern Europe, when in winter it is dark by 4 pm or earlier, it is easy to understand why the tradition of Christmas lights is so cherished.

I suppose Thanksgiving falls in late November for a similar reason. Certainly, the timing has to do with the end of harvest, but isn't it also important for us to take stock of what we are thankful for as the dreary dark days draw near and we are overtaken by Winter. Thanksgiving is like a ritual dance of gratitude meant to chase away the evil spirits of despondency. Thanksgiving is a taking stock of, a meditation, a centering on the strengths and assets available to us in our pursuit of the well-being of our neighbor and peace in the world.

And no greater strength is this, but the promise of God, Emmanuel, to be with us at all times, to embrace us when others exclude, to extend grace when we don't deserve it, the promise of God for a life abundant in faith, hope and love.

Let us therefore proclaim our gratitude to Providence for manifold blessings—let us be humbly thankful for inherited ideals—and let us resolve to share those blessings and those ideals with our fellow human beings throughout the world. On that (this) day let us gather in sanctuaries dedicated to worship and in homes blessed by family affection to express our gratitude for the glorious gifts of God; and let us earnestly and humbly pray that He will continue to guide and sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice, and understanding among all men and nations and of ending misery and suffering wherever they exist.— John F. Kennedy

Central Europe Teachers and Realities of Covid

Continued travel restrictions are affecting how we get our work done in many ways. Recently, our annual fall visit with the schools and volunteer teachers participating in the Central Europe Teacher program was replaced with a 'virtual' visit via video conferencing. Over a two week period in October, Rachel, Viking, Naomi and Kyle visited all the schools and teachers, and though we would have preferred to be there in person, the video technology that we are all becoming accustomed to allowed us the opportunity to stay in touch.

As you know, last year the school year ended with online teaching which put everyone in front of a huge learning curve in a context of palpable concern for friends and family, students and teachers. The pandemic had further impact on our recruitment of volunteer teachers for the current year; though we had wonderful candidates ready to go to Slovakia, travel restrictions ultimately prevented any new teachers from participating this year. The administrations of our school partners were forced to find last minute solutions.

We are very thankful for our teachers who have remained in Slovakia during this historic health crisis. Sue Strekal, John Rogers, Nick and Naomi Sveholm, Megan Freudenberg, Jennie Norberg, Edward Patricks, Jack Kent and Rachel Bossuyt have done a marvelous job orienteering in uncertain terrain the pandemic in a foreign land. Though the CET program made great improvements over the last two years in terms of community-building, the pandemic increased the challenges of isolation for our teachers. We are grateful for our Education Coordinator Naomi Sveholm and for Kyle Svennungsen, Pastor of the Bratislava International Church who provide meaningful support to the teachers. At the end of November, teachers traditionally celebrate the holidays with a community meal, one more event that will be missed because of the pandemic. Please keep all our volunteers and their families, school administrators and teachers, as well as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia in your prayers this Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season.

During our virtual tour, we also visited with General Bishop Elko, Bishop Hrobon, Daniela Vesala and Andrej Kuric of the General Bishop's office. Bishop Elko remembered fondly the friendly spirit of the CET consultation last November, and the wonderful momentum that was built for the program that has become a hallmark of the bilingual education offered by the schools of ECACS. He lamented that the pandemic has caused so much to be put on hold and shared his hope that the program will continue.

Not knowing exactly what lies ahead, we will begin recruitment this month for next year with the hope that all will be well. Please think about how you might spread the news of this program and encourage others to consider a year of teaching in Slovakia.



Virtual visit with the school in Kosice. Edward Patricks - CET volunteer, Sandra Mrázová- Head of English Department, and Jozef Krišťan - Principal



Teachers Sue Strekal and Megan Freudenberg with students in Bratislava

Webinar Series, ELCA Wittenberg Center

The Europe Desk through the ELCA Wittenberg Center organized three webinars at the end of October in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian."



Rev. Robert Moore, Director of the Center, hosted the events which featured three different speakers. The Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, ELCA Director of Theological Diversity, examined *The Freedom of a Christian* from a Neuroscience and Liberation Theology Perspective. In the second session, the Rev. Dr. Moses Penumaka, Lecturer at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, explored the text from an interfaith perspective to show *The Freedom of a Christian* teaches us to live in Christ and love our neighbors. The Rev. Nicolette Maria Peñaranda, pastor at First Trinity Lutheran in Chicago provided prophetic insight and pragmatic strategies for connecting our faith to political life in the third and final session. You can view the three webinars at :

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/ELCAWittenbergCenter>

You can find the treatise and a study guide for the treatise at : <https://www.elca500.org/>

Companion Synod Networks

In October, my colleague Johanna Olson hosted three 'virtual' network meetings.

- The Russia Network is comprised of three synods partnering with three companions in Russia: Northwest Washington with Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia (ELKER or ELCER) or known as European Russia Northeastern Minnesota with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, and Central States with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia and Far East (ELCUSFE), Far East Deanery. The effectiveness of the online meeting encouraged the group to try monthly gatherings.
- Originally planned as an in person two-day meeting, the network supporting the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land also went on-line. The following organizations attended: Southeast Michigan Synod, New England Synod, Eastern Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), Lutheran World Federation, Opportunity Palestine, Bright Stars of Bethlehem, Arab Middle Eastern Ministries of Domestic Mission, Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH) along with representation from Karin Brown, Peace Not Walls, Dennis Frado, Lutheran Office for World Community, ELCA as well as members of our Global Mission team.
- In addition, after a two-year process of relationship building, leaders of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod and the Löbau-Zittau District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony came together to witness and celebrate the signing of a new covenant agreement that sets the purpose and parameters of their partnership.

Thank You for your support

KEEP IN TOUCH...

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Marissa and I share our news in these bi-monthly newsletters to give you an up-close look at our church's work in Europe and the Middle East. We would love to hear from you, too. You can write to us by email:

Viking.dietrich@elca.org

or at :

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SUPPORT GLOBAL MISSION!

By check: Make payable to "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" with "Viking and Marissa Dietrich GCS 2050" in the memo line. Give through your synod office or mail your check to: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gift Processing Center, P.O. Box 1809, Merrifield, VA 22116-8009.

By credit or debit card: See ELCA.org/MissionaryGiving or call 800-638-3522 and specify "Viking and Marissa Dietrich GCS2050".

By automatic monthly bank withdrawal, or to establish a covenant of prayer, communication and support: Contact 800-638-3522, ext. 2820, or globalchurch@elca.org.

For contributions to the ELCA's Covid-19 Response go to: [ELCA Covid-19 Response](#)

I want to thank all of you who support the work of the ELCA's Global Mission through prayer and important financial contributions.

For congregations that have submitted a covenant of support -

- First Lutheran, Colorado Springs, CO;
- Faith Lutheran, Somerset, PA;
- Holy Trinity, Lanse, PA;
- Palm Lutheran, Palmyra PA;
- Trinity, Mechanicsburg, PA,
- St Matthew, York, PA.
- Trindle Springs Lutheran, Mechanicsburg, PA

For all who have sent financial support to Global Mission in our name -

- The Cozmanoff family, Avon, IN;
- Shirley Smith, Turbotville, PA;
- Friedens Lutheran, Friedens, PA;
- the Allegheny Synod, Altoona, PA;
- Centerville Lutheran, Newville, PA;
- St John, Montgomery, PA.

Special word of thanks and welcome to our newest sponsoring congregation-

- Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

For all of you who have supported Lutheran Disaster Relief, and for you who supported in particular COVID-19 relief, here is a video featuring the Ospedale Evangelico Betania in Naples, Italy: : [Covid Relief Naples](#). The hospital received a grant to provide personal protective equipment and more as the it confronted one of the earliest waves of the pandemic. In all, the ELCA has sent 1.5 million dollars in Covid relief funds around the world.



" give thanks to the lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever" -
Psalm 136