

LUTHERLAND AND BAVARIA

A trip to Germany sponsored by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis arranged
by Christian tours Europe in Wittenberg, Germany
Tuesday, October 18 – Saturday, October 29, 2016

PARTICIPANTS:

Gerry and Linda Berglin

Pam Domanosky

Pamela Kildahl

Rodney Johnson

Dennis and Lynda Nordholm

John and Stephanie Sulzbach

Kent and Marilyn Christensen

Rob and Sharon Englund

Arlene Helvig

Randy Nelson

Deb Sodt

Shirley Weglarz



The intrepid group, all seventeen strong, before the Castle church in Wittenberg where Luther is alleged to have publicized his 95 theses.

THE GROUP JOURNAL

Preparation

In January and February of 2014, a group of travelers from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church spent several weeks in Africa, primarily Tanzania. Upon their return talk turned rather quickly to what might be the next sponsored trip by Holy Trinity. On the threshold of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, talk about a trip to Germany was probably to be expected.

Inquiries were made about the possibility of joining with groups sponsored by other institutions, Luther Seminary and Augsburg College in particular. Those interested in such a trip agreed that it would be better to avoid the actual year of the celebration—2017—and consider going the year before in 2016.

Luther Seminary had such a trip planned but it was for the year 2015. Augsburg College did have a trip planned for the fall of 2016 but the estimated cost including airfare was between \$4600 and \$4800 a person. Knowing that David and Carol Berg and Dodd and Myrna Lamberton, all members of Holy Trinity, had been on trips like the one we envisioned arranged by Christian Tours Europe, I asked them about it and what their experience had been. All were very positive and the cost had been reasonable and significantly less than what Augsburg had estimated.

Sometime in early 2015, over 20 persons from Holy Trinity indicated interest in a trip to Germany in the fall of 2016. The number of those interested suggested that arranging such a trip was feasible and I contacted Christian Tours Europe to explore such a possibility. By August of 2015 an itinerary had been proposed for a cost of \$1870 per person based on a contingent of 20 persons. With every additional five persons the cost would be reduced. Air fare would need to be arranged personally by each individual traveler, but I was fairly confident that round trip flights to Europe could be arranged for approximately \$1,000 (or less) meaning that \$3,000 would cover the basic costs of such a trip, not counting noon meals and personal expenses. Some tweaking of the itinerary was made with the most significant change being the inclusion of a one-day trip to Leipzig. The end result was a twelve-day trip that included a travel day at the beginning and the end. The task then was to get commitments from the 20 persons necessary to make the journey possible.

The trip was scheduled to begin on October 18, 2016. A 20% deposit of \$3,750 was due on Feb. 1, 2016. Fourteen persons submitted their deposit by that date. Six more would be needed to meet the expectation of 20 persons and several persons were considering the possibility. Invitations to join the Holy Trinity group were also extended to members of several other neighborhood churches and three other persons who had expressed interest in such a trip arranged by Luther Seminary that had not worked out.

The fourteen soon became sixteen when Rob and Sharon Englund signed on. Two other couples briefly explored the possibility but ended up not being able to go for

various reasons. Shirley Weglarz from Kansas City became number seventeen, but additional commitments seemed unlikely.

Fearing at best an additional cost per person and, at worst, the need to cancel the trip, I contacted our host institution in Germany about options. To my surprise, relief, and gratitude, the response was encouraging. At least fifteen persons were necessary to maintain our hotel reservations. We had that and if we were willing to forgo the one free space available for every twenty participants—which I was not even sure would be available for fewer than twenty travelers—we could make it work with seventeen travelers. Not only that but the Director of Christian Tours Europe, Christian Eggert, would honor the quoted price of \$1,870 per person even though we only had seventeen participants. Thus, after hoping and planning for about a year and a half, we sent our money to Germany, made our flight arrangements, and began to get ready for our common experience to begin upon arrival in Berlin on Wednesday, October 19 when we would meet our tour guide for the first time.



Luther before Frederick the Wise

DAY ONE – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2016 – BERLIN, GERMANY

Stephanie and John Sulzbach

So this is Berlin . . . Our plane descended through a dark, thick shroud of clouds before finally settling down on the tarmac. It is interesting to me how those first impressions can negatively or positively affect how you view or remember a certain place. I am hoping that Berlin will grace us with its more cheerful face.



One of the many museums along the river Spree in Berlin



A monument at Humboldt University noting that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was once a student here

We travelled with an exceptional group—Arlene Helvig, Pam Domanosky, Rod Johnson, and our fearless leader, Randy Nelson, all congenial, intelligent, and definitely above average. That intelligence aspect was tested when we tried to use an ATM machine in the terminal to obtain Euros. There were two different slots flashing green. Randy attempted to feed his card into one of them—the card would not go in. So John fed his card into the other one and experienced a completely different outcome. Far from being rejected, that lousy machine ate his card, thus providing us with our first “hiccup” of the trip! Thankfully the card was recovered later in the day and John repossessed it that evening. Does anyone else agree that the world would be a kinder, gentler, and simpler place if we could figure out how to all use the same currency? I’m just sayin . . .

The rest of the day proved much more pleasant—a nice lunch in a nice warm restaurant out of the rain, a nice walk along Unter den Linden, a visit to the Brandenburg Gate, and the Holocaust Memorial, a cozy little nap before dinner, and the pleasure of meeting our tour guide, Christopher Swennen, a most congenial and very young man, who is a new



Brandenburg Gate with Pam, Linda, and Christian

father of a four month old baby of whom he has promised to show us pictures. Christopher's daughter is named Sofia Louisa.

And by the way, our first dinner together as a group at Galerie, the restaurant in our Maritim Pro Arte Hotel in Berlin was delicious! Get some well-deserved rest everyone—Berlin has much more to share with us and, you know, it's definitely growing on me.



Views of the Holocaust Memorial

DAY TWO – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016 -- WITTENBERG, GERMANY
Pam Kildahl

We started our Berlin city tour at the Holocaust Memorial. This was a very moving, emotional experience for me. I had two friends (who have since passed away) who were Auschwitz survivors. They met in the camp and married after they were freed. Helmut told me that he promised God that he would become a religious Jew if only they could survive. He kept his word, and I learned much about Orthodox Judaism from them.

The memorial is built on top of Hitler's bunker, so that no one would ever be able to go there to see it. It is simple in design: a little more than 2,000 concrete blocks in various sizes, standing on very uneven ground. The blocks all tilt slightly in different directions. As one walks the paths between them we are to remember the

difficulty and the unknowns faced by the Jews and other inmates in the Holocaust. A brilliant design. The blocks also have a graffiti free surface, so that if anyone marks on them, it can be removed. This was my most memorable time in Berlin.

On a totally different note, the airline had lost my walker, which was checked baggage. Although it was promised to be delivered to the hotel last night, a call came in this morning that it had to be picked up at the airport due to some problem with customs. As a result, the tour bus had to make a detour to the airport on the way to Wittenberg. Christopher kindly escorted me to the lost luggage area and I finally got it back. No one there had any idea why it had been a problem. With John and Stephanie's card recovered and the walker acquired, we think that all problems with the trip have now been met.



Holocaust Memorial –
Rod, Christian, Christopher and Randy



Holocaust Memorial

DAY TWO

Shirley Weglarz

Today in Berlin it felt like our driver, Herbert, took us to a filling station, but instead of getting gasoline to fill our engine, God filled up all of us on the trip with new sights, sounds, and experiences. Together with a full measure of the Holy Spirit.

For some of us it was the second sighting of the Holocaust Memorial in two days. It was our second chance to absorb the stark and sobering stones set in straight and seemingly unending gray rows. Fall foliage in bright yellow offered such a hopeful contrast to the stones and what they represent.

So many other sights, I'm sure, are stored already in our hearts and minds from just that one day on the bus, including the little green or red men with the hat (a very small tribute to East Berlin) in the stoplights. The Trabi autos, Checkpoint Charlie, the Hauptbahnhof (train station second in size only to New York's), and myriad embassies—to name a few.

Two "Holy Spirit sightings" happened for me at the Chapel of Reconciliation at the Berlin Wall Memorial, and the second at the majestic and breathtaking Berlin Cathedral.



Cathedral ceiling

Stepping into a lovely place of peace featuring Christ's cross was quite a contrast with the image of the Berlin Wall—meant to keep people out—and the sobering bed of sharp spikes that undoubtedly injured so many unsuspecting potential escapees. God and reconciliation were so sorely needed!

Words cannot begin to describe the Berliner Dom (Berlin Cathedral). I goggled the spectacular organ, which has over 7,000 pipes! This beautifully ornate church cost 11.5 million Marks. I felt the

presence of God strongly when the organ started to play and at the final blessing of the short service. The sermon talked about an old woman who was quite alone and the hope of the Gospel, which is quite available for all to receive.

There is so much more to write—but it's almost time for breakfast! Food and fellowship have been amazing today! The "sole sisters"—Arlene and Pam (whose boots decided to separate—well, at least the soles)—discovered the Weiner Café at the Potsdam Place Mall. We feasted on little brats, mustard, sauerkraut, the best potatoes ever, a little salad, beer, and we bee lined for a gelato store and stuffed ourselves full of

chocolate/hazelnut and other



assorted gelatos!

Berlin Dom

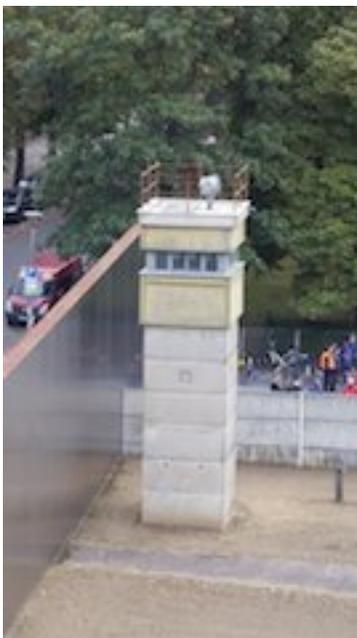
A brief trip to the airport rescued Pam K's walker! Yes, God!

Then we soaked up scenery whirring by at a fast pace—more of God's amazing nature (especially the forests of tall trees) to fill our souls.

After dinner Christopher led us on the after dark walking tour of Wittenberg. The air was crisp, the buildings were charming, and the lighted church provided the focal point and guide to help us know where we were.

THEN (and I've only mentioned the highlights!) during after-walk conversation at the Colleg, Sharon soloed one of her trio's numbers that spoofed getting older (not that any of us could relate!).

PERFECT DAY! Thank you, God, for giving us this opportunity! Help us "pay it forward!"



Berlin wall tower



Kent and Marilyn

DAY THREE – FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21 – WITTENBERG, GERMANY

Pam Domanosky

Although we were short on time, two of us decided to leave the Luther exhibit to attend the worship service at the town church. Christopher was kind enough to accompany us back there, telling us of his early work history as a tour guide. He spent years working on cruise ships and started as a guide at age 18 (he is now 33 years old).

We parked ourselves gratefully in two pews in the middle of the old and beautiful church, looking forward to hearing a majestic performance of Luther's standard "A Mighty Fortress" when we noticed a man at the front of the church holding worship bulletins. I went to get one for each of us and learned that the service wasn't being held in the majestic sanctuary but in the adjacent sacristy.

With one exception—a gray and somber portrait of Christ holding a sword—everything in this room was modern (and not particularly attractive). There were fewer than 30 people present; the minister was from Omaha. There was no organist (The minister asked if anyone could play the organ!)

The service was basic but rich in those basics—a hymn of praise, scripture readings (Shirley got to read one), prayer, the Apostles' Creed, a brief sermon about Luther and a Psalm on which Luther's "A Mighty fortress" is based.

I expected the hymns to be awful, but they were rich and full, filling the room even without accompaniment.

The sermon was brief but informative. The minister spoke about Johann von Staupitz, who listened to Luther's six-hour confessions. Luther was afraid of God and even hated him. He thought he could never do enough good to be saved. Von Staupitz essentially saved Luther by reassigning him to teach the Bible. In order to do that, Luther studied the Bible for himself. In his study he found grace and peace.



Wittenberg at night, setting out on a walk

DAY THREE

Deb Sodt

Our first full day in Wittenberg. The schedule graciously allowed for a slow morning start. Some people are still adjusting to jet lag. After a good buffet breakfast with bread, jam, cheese, sausage, yogurt, muesli, cereal, hardboiled eggs, juice, coffee, and tea we started our morning tour at 10. Two delightful and informative hours walking in Wittenberg in the chilly and drizzly weather. We saw the castle church, which was the university church of 95 theses fame. It also is where Luther and Phillip Melancthon are both buried. Their gravestones are in the sanctuary—on the floor as we approached the baptismal font and altar. We also visited the town church, a simpler place where Luther's children were baptized.

A particular memorable part of the town church was on the exterior. A fairly small stone relief at the upper back corner is an anti-Semitic depiction dating back to the middle ages. Local Jews recommended that this not be destroyed but rather kept as a monument to history, during modern times when the building was being restored. Close by is a cedar tree donated by students in Israel.



Pam, Randy and Christopher at Wittenberg



Wittenberg globe: countdown to the reformation

After lunch we again did a 2-hour walk, which included the Phillip Melancthon house and an exhibition at the Luther house. A few of us went to the 4 p.m. worship service at the town church where Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress" was sung. Others lingered at the Luther House and/or explored the town on foot.

Wittenberg is clearly gearing up for the observation of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. Much construction and road repair around town.

Our tour guide, Christopher Swennen, is a thirty something man who was born

and lived in East Germany until reunification in 1989. He has lived in Russia, and has a Russian wife who is in St. Petersburg with their four month old Sophia right now. Christopher is knowledgeable, kind, flexible, and efficient. An excellent guide whose own faith and respect for the important history of Wittenberg are evident. He takes good care of us!

We also have a beautiful, comfortable, new tour bus owned and operated by Herbert. Comfy seats, biffy, microphone, so we can hear the tour guide easily. Herbert is an excellent driver who has gotten us to where we need to be on time.



Herbert and his bus



Christopher



Christopher and Kate, Luther's wife

DAY FOUR – SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016 – WITTENBERG, GERMANY with an excursion to Leipzig

Arlene Helvig

Today we took the bus to Leipzig on the road that Martin Luther walked between Wittenberg and Leipzig—his trip took two days—students walked only halfway with him because of the danger.

Fun facts about Leipzig:

- third largest city in Eastern Germany; 10th largest in all of Germany.
- one of Germany's greatest cultural arts centers – musical past includes Bach and composer Richard Wagner.
- current German chancellor Angela Merkel is an alumna of Leipzig's University.
- fastest growing city in Germany for three reasons: 1) mother of all trade fairs, 2) fantastic cultural history—music and religious history; home of St. Thomas Church, and 3) home of a large university.
- one gallon of gas was 5,20 Euros (a gallon).
- site of the Peaceful Revolution in 1989 which eventually led to the demolition of the “Wall.”
- April 1945 American troops liberated Leipzig, East Germany.
- 20 years of animosity between East and West because West Berlin prospered with the Marshall Plan and East Germany paid reparations to Russia for damage done in war.
- 1968 wall built and the church had to figure out how to be a church within socialism (and not be for or against socialism),
- 1975 Helsinki Conference – was a mutual acceptance in an attempt to live together economically, culturally, and politically and to honor human rights: the human rights issue was a tool for requesting mobility in and out of East Germany—people who applied for visas lost their jobs, had their school age children mistreated in school, and sometimes waited for years before receiving them. The church was asked to help in this situation.



Leipzig Town Hall

- 1981-82 brought the threat of nuclear war because of East Germany's geographic position. Therefore the church and its parishioners turned to prayer.
- the basis for their every Monday prayer meetings was the "Sermon on the Mount," love your enemy, and the Beatitudes.
- prayer was a fight against injustice not the government; hearts were changed by this prayer and time together.
- communists put pressure on the people by instilling fear with threats, guns, teargas.
- but the people remained peaceful and in the final street demonstration 70,000 people marched around the city holding candles (they keep people calm).
- they had three slogans: "we are the people," "no violence," and "join us."
- now called the hero city

St. Thomas Church

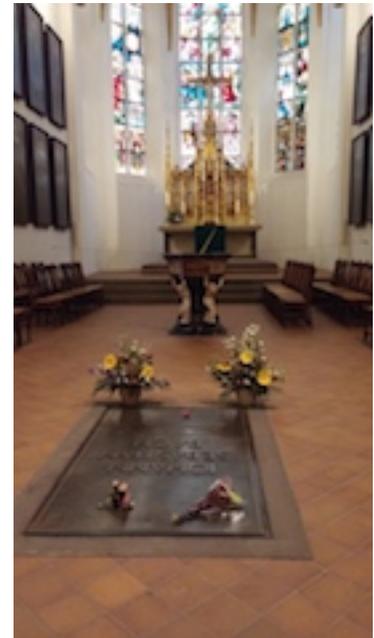
- how many times was Bach buried? His third and final gravesite is inside St. Thomas Church
- 1539 – Pentecost Sunday – Martin Luther preached. The Peaceful Revolution was also based on his teachings.
- St. Thomas Boys choir has been in existence 400 years. Bach as the church cantor, led the boys choir.
- his weekly cantatas that he composed were to praise the Lord, not entertain the people.
- he had 20 children and 10 made it to adulthood.



Leader of the peaceful revolution



Selvio in St. Thomas Kirche



Bach's grave

DAY FIVE – SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016 –WITTENBERG, GERMANY with an excursion to Eisleben and Halle

Rob Englund



St. Peter and Paul Church-Eisleben

We are up and stirring a little earlier than usual. What is it about breakfast in Germany that's so enjoyable? For me it is probably the "brötchen" – warm on the inside crusty on the outside. Breakfasts at the Colleg have been wonderful. Also, coffee!!!

We are off for Eisleben, coincidentally the place where Martin Luther was born and where he died. We are told that it took Luther two days to travel from Wittenberg to the town of his birth. We do it in two hours.

Our group is warmly welcomed at St. Peter and Paul Church—even with the barrier of our languages. An English bulletin, the invitation to sing "The Church's One Foundation" in English.

The sharing of the peace with fellow Lutherans.

Luther's birth house museum gave a peek into life in Eisleben at the end of the 15th century. We are well guided by Dorothy.



Dennis and Lynda, John and Stephanie, and Kent at worship

We reunite with Selvio in Halle [he had been our guide yesterday in Leipzig] and tour the cathedral there. I am moved by Luther's death mask—a powerful evocation of this giant of a man at the end of his life. I imagine so many other pictures of him are from earlier in his life. Here is Martin, God's beautiful child, at the completion of his life.



Organ at St. Peter and Paul Church



St. Peter and Paul Church



Memorial to Jews from Eisleben sent off to a concentration camp

DAY SIX – MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2016 – EISENACH, GERMANY with a stop in Erfurt

Gerry and Linda Berglin

After our last breakfast in Wittenberg we set out for Erfurt, one of the most preserved medieval cities in Germany. The city center dates to 742 (although it is believed to be dated back to the stone age) beginning as the center of two major trade routes.

While not much of the city was destroyed in World War II, about half of the Augustinian Monastery was. While Erfurt had many monasteries at one time, the Benedictines were first in 1113, followed by the Dominicans, Franciscans, and then the Augustinians.

This monastery also developed into a university in 1392, in which Martin Luther began his legal studies in 1501. Following receiving his law degree, he famously encountered a storm while on a journey and praying to St. Anne he promised that if he were saved he would become a monk. He then entered the Augustinian monastery. In 1510 he walked to Rome and was very disappointed with what he saw in Vatican City. This is believed to be the beginning of his reformation.

In the chapel (with original floor, etc.) where Martin Luther took his final vows we all sang “Now thank we all our God.” Our guide, Gudrun then led us into the city past a myriad of shops to view two impressive churches on the expansive town square.



Deb and friend in Erfurt

After another very wet and cold day we traveled to the Haus Hainstein hotel in the city of Eisenach. Getting to the hotel on the drive up the seemingly impossible narrowing and winding road was an experience.

General observation! We have greatly enjoyed the drives through the countryside with beautiful thick forests, lovely walled gardens, and no bill boards.



City walk in Erfurt

Stephanie and John with the bear,
a symbol of Germany



DAY SEVEN – TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2016 – EISENACH, GERMANY with a visit to Wartburg Castle

Rodney Johnson



Wartburg Castle as seen from Haus Hainstein Hotel

Upon awakening in the morning one could see the Wartburg Castle on the adjoining hilltop bathed in light and fog. The trees of the Thüringen forest are just starting to turn color, which adds to the beauty of the hilly area.

After breakfast we descended the hill on

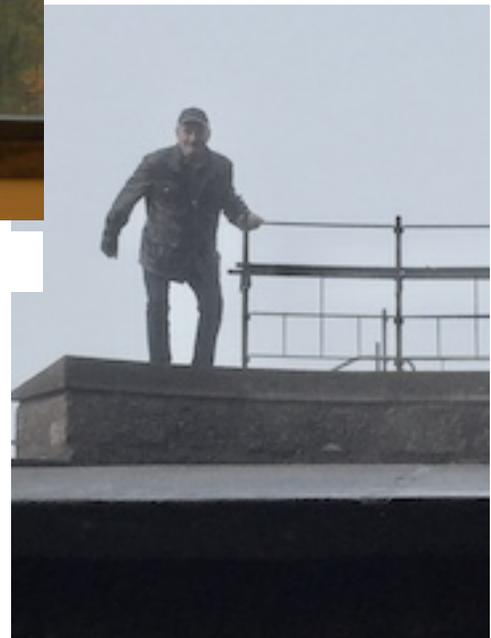
which the hotel sat, driving past the many mansions that line the drive. The ascent to the castle was steep from where the bus could drop us off. Those of us who decided to walk as opposed to taking the mini-van definitely got a good aerobic workout.

Our guide told us the story of how Ludwig the Springer (Ludwig the Leaper) started the castle in the late 11th century by having soil from land he did own hauled to the place of the Wartburg so

that he could say that he was building the castle on his own land. His heirs constructed the castle in the stone Romanesque style. The use of an in-floor system to move the smoke from the fireplace to heat one of the rooms we saw was fascinating.

Probably the most spectacular room was the one possessing the glass mosaic work from floor to ceiling in honor of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia. Elizabeth was the wife of Ludwig IV, who founded a hospital and became a saint and one of the most revered women in Germany.

Wartburg Castle from the outside



Herbert "The Leaper"

The castle was also where Martin Luther was sheltered as Squire George after his excommunication at the Diet of Worms. We saw the room where he lived and worked to translate the New Testament into German.



Inside the Wartburg



Inside the Wartburg Courtyard



A monk's study room



Dennis and Arlene warming up

Christopher took us on a short walking tour of Eisenach showing us the market square so typical of the cities here, the place where Martin Luther learned Latin, and the place where Bach was baptized. We then dispersed to do some shopping and find a place to eat lunch.

After lunch we met at the Bach house for a tour. Our first part of the tour consisted of a young man describing five instruments (organs and harpsichord) that existed during Bach's time and then playing a short piece by Bach on each instrument. This room also had examples of the various string and other instruments used by Bach during his time. The ancestry of the Bach family and the extensive involvement in music through many generations was interesting. The best room for me was the one where one could listen to all the genres of music that Bach wrote music for and for which he influenced subsequent composers.

What I find most intriguing is that this relatively small area of the world that we are visiting on our trip produced these individuals who had such a significant impact on the world. Martin Luther for his impact on politics and religion and Bach with his defining impact on music.



Group at Bach Haus sans Gerry



The Master himself, Bach



Lynda listening to Bach music



Kitchen, Bach Haus



Bedchamber, Bach Haus



Stringed instruments, Bach Haus

DAY EIGHT – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016 – OBERAMMERGAU,
GERMANY with a stop at Buchenwald

Pam Kildahl

We started the day with devotions in the chapel at our hotel. We sang, Arlene led us in a moving prayer, reminding us of our journey today to Buchenwald.

During the bus trip there Christopher read a piece written by Edward R. Murrow about the conditions at the camp when it was liberated by the Americans in April of 1945. I was filled with an overwhelming sadness. We passed through the nearby town of Weimar, the cultural center of Germany. Many famous authors and musicians have lived there, including Goethe, Schiller, Bach, and Liszt. It was also the home of the Bauhaus Art Movement founded by Walter Gropius, and the German National Theatre.

We reached Buchenwald and the fog was so thick that it was difficult to see more than a few yards away. Buildings were misty, and the many other groups of people (mostly school children) were ghost like. It seemed appropriate. We walked through the gate where the inmates walked on their way to work assignments. We saw a detailed map of the camp as it existed. And we were taken to see the ashes room, the ovens where many flower and candle memorials had been left, and the basement where men had been hung. Solemn and sacred-feeling places.



Ovens at Buchenwald

I learned many things about the camp:
- It was built as a forced labor and re-location camp, but not originally for extermination.
- It was liberated by General Patton, who forced many townspeople of Weimar to visit the camp to see the horrors that had taken place there. They had claimed that they did not know what happened there.

- In the beginning only men were in the camp. They were forced to work in a quarry and armament factories there.
- Werner von Braun was an honored member of the SS.
- Elie Wiesel was at the camp at age 15.
- Children were called “useless eaters” and mostly sent to Auschwitz for extermination.
- Pastor Paul Schneider was sent there for speaking “you should follow God more than

humans.”

- The inmates wore badges that were color-coded to designate the value of a life:
 - red – political prisoners
 - green – criminals
 - lilac – Jehovah Witnesses
 - pink – homosexuals
 - black – antisocial groups
 - yellow – Jews
 - brown – Romo
- The camp gate reads “Jedem das Seine,” (to each his own)

Yesterday at the Bach House Museum we saw an exhibit about Bach, Luther, and the Jews. It was a sober reminder of the damage that has been done by Luther’s anti-Semitism. From Bach’s St. Matthew Passion to Nazi propaganda, his words have been used in terrible ways. As we stand at Buchenwald we must remember “Never Forget; Never Again.”



Wagon at Buchenwald used to transport corpses



Gymnasium students visiting Buchenwald as mandatory part of their education

DAY NINE – THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2016 – OBERAMMERGAU, GERMANY
with visits to Neuschwanstein Castle, Wies Church and Etal Monastery

Lynda Nordholm



Neuschwanstein Castle from
the Maria Brücke

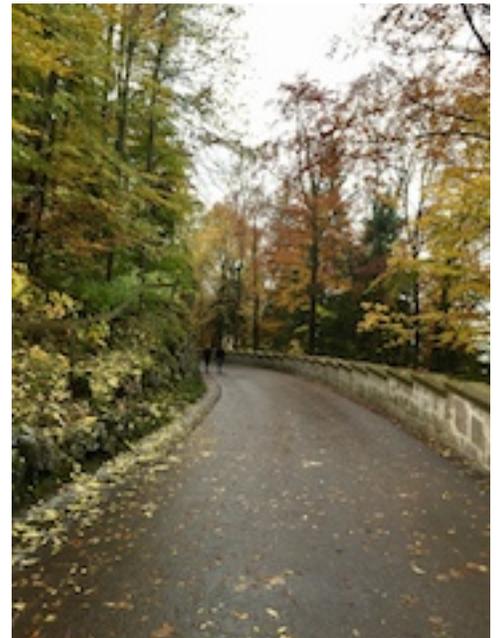
After gathering for yet another substantial German breakfast, we set out from Hotel Alte Post in Oberammergau, Bavaria for Neuschwanstein Castle—the ostentatious residence of King Ludwig II. So through the dense fog we headed to this “new castle” that Ludwig imagined while growing up in Hohenschwangau Castle—owned by his father Maximilian II.

From the parked bus there were three ways to reach the castle: hiking, transfer bus, or horse-drawn cart. We each found our way and re-gathered at the castle before going in. The fog lightened a bit, but still hindered the clear view we had hoped for.

Once inside the castle, we heard in our half hour tour that:

- Ludwig became king in 1864 and two years later was forced to accept the defeat and domination of his country by Prussia.
 - He wasn't able to cope with the role of being only a constitutional monarch, so he created his own alternative world in which, as the reigning king of Bavaria, he could live like a king of the Middle Ages.
 - Ludwig II had written in the letter to Richard Wagner in 1868 that he wanted the New Castle to contain reminders—primarily with murals—of the works of Lohengrin and Tannhauser.
 - Construction began in September of 1869 and, although heavily in debt—and taking money from the people—he continued his plan to build his fairy tale castle.
 - When the banks threatened to seize his property, the government had him certified insane and interred him in Berg Palace.
 - Ludwig lived in the castle only about 160 days.
 - On June 13, 1885, Ludwig was found dead in Lake Starnberg.
- Ironically, this castle that Ludwig intended only for self-gratification and personal use—and which no outsider was ever allowed to enter—was opened to the public in 1886. It was only named Neuschwanstein after Ludwig's death knowing Ludwig's love of swans.

The road to Neuschwanstein Castle



Neuschwanstein in the mist



Gerry and Linda

On our way back to Oberammergau, we made a stop at Wies Kirche—in the meadow—where in 1748 a statue of Jesus was found with real tears. This made the church a pilgrimage site—where many who have prayed at the statue have claimed being miraculously cured of their diseases. It is on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



Shirley, Arlene and Pam in front of the Castle

Our last stop was at the Monastery Etal, an active community of more than 50 monks. The Gothic Abbey—founded in 1330—is one of the largest Benedictine houses. During the winter of 1940-41, Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent some months at the monastery. Like Bonhoeffer, a number of those in the Etal community were involved in the conspiracy against Hitler. Many of us found the liquor distillery/brewery and bookstore of special interest.

Though we observed the lavish wealth of King Ludwig's castle, the real richness we experienced today was in the beauty of God's creation. Winding through those quaint villages, our group concurred that we were witnessing some of the most vibrant stretches of autumn's peak colors—chestnuts, oranges, reds, and golds. And the memory I will cherish from today is the horse-drawn cart ride. Moving at a snail's pace as we wound our way to the castle allowed us to take in the richly hued tapestry of leaves, listen to the rhythmic clip-clop of the horses' shoes, and breathe in the sweet mustiness of the damp Bavarian forest.



Two views of the Wies Kirche

Walking path in Oberammergau





Elephant mascot outside our hotel in Oberammergau

“Celebrated reformers” Sharon and Rob



Painted buildings in Oberammergau



DAY TEN – FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28 – MUNICH, GERMANY

Marilyn Christensen



Lunch at the Hofbrauhaus – Sharon, Rob, Arlene, Lynda, Dennis and Rod

The last day of this never-to-be-forgotten time together in Germany. As we rode from our hotel in Oberammergau toward Munich, once again we were impressed by the beauty of the landscape and the excellence of the highways.

Our trip to Munich began with a short walking tour in the heart of the city, Marienplatz. Bridget, our guide, provided information about the city while we waited for the famed Glockenspiel's performance. She told us that Munich is Germany's third largest city and was first settled in the 9th century A.D. Monks played an important role in the city's origins with its name deriving from the German word for monk. The city was walled for many centuries but today only the gates remain as reminders of where the wall once stood.

At 11:00 a.m. the Marienplatz Glockenspiel attracted large crowds for the seven-minute performance of knights jousting. Afterward, Bridget was our guide for a bus tour of the city. Among other attractions we saw the Olympic Village complex built for the 1972 Olympics, the Viktualien Market—an extensive food court in existence since the 1800s--, the headquarters of the National Socialists (Nazis) during the 1930's and 1940's, the Nymphenburg Palace—residence of former rulers of Bavaria--, many art museums, and the BMW factory/headquarters.

After giving us many suggestions for lunch places nearby and attractions to visit during our afternoon break, Bridget wished us well and members of our group scattered for shopping and other activities.

We spent our last night together at a Radisson Hotel in East Munich. After dinner, Christopher and Herbert and Randy were toasted with original songs by Sharon, Pam K., and Shirley as well as Sharon and Rob and Stephanie and John. We hope all three of them feel appreciated for their part in making our time in Germany unforgettable. And as we say, Auf Wiedersehen, may we someday meet again.

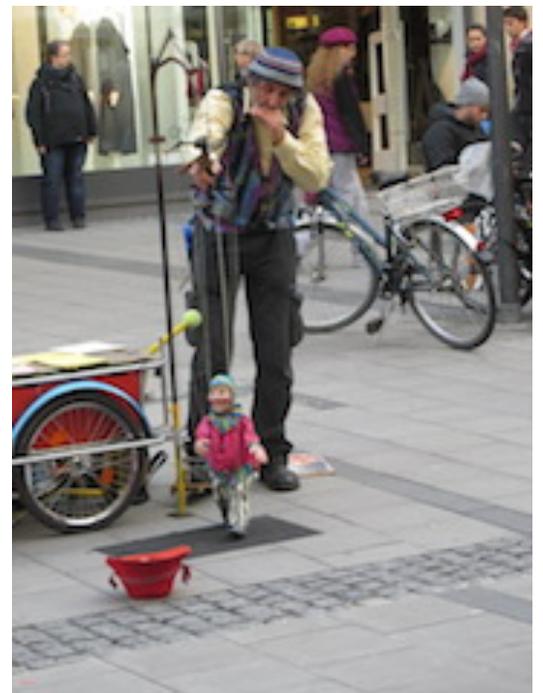
Highlights of Munich



The Glockenspiel at City Hall



Nymphenburg Palace



DAY ELEVEN – SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29 – DEPARTURE FROM MUNICH, GERMANY

Randy Nelson

Our trip to Lutherland and Bavaria concluded today as eleven of us took the bus for the last time as Herbert and Christopher dropped us off at the airport for our flights back to the United States and the two of them journeyed back to Wittenberg after which Christopher was to continue on to Berlin to welcome another traveler.

Six of us extended our stay in Europe by traveling on to the Czech Republic and a visit to the city of Prague.



Wind turbines

A day spent in travel, especially waiting in airports or sitting in airplanes, does not lend itself to exciting news unless there is difficulty, which gratefully was not the case for those of us returning to Minneapolis or Kansas City. The trip through customs and passport control is

almost always time consuming and exhausting as are the flights themselves, but in the end all arrived at our destinations safely.



Sharon



Pam and Shirley

Rather than try to come up with something exciting or even descriptive to say about the last day, perhaps some thoughts about the whole trip are a better way to put a wrap on this experience. The daily journal entries reflect some of the variety of activities in which we were engaged. We rode a lot, we walked a lot, we ate and drank a lot, and we talked/listened a lot; but such a summary does not do justice to our time together nor capture some of what gave flavor to the trip.

There was plenty of fog and mist, cool and damp days, probably leading some of us to wonder about the accuracy of Christopher's conviction, uttered more than once, that "fall is the best time of the year to visit Germany." Most of us would have welcomed more sun, which we saw for the first time in nine days for about five minutes on our visit to Halle where it briefly poked its head through the clouds for pictures of the castle. Our time in Bavaria broke the pattern and the vibrant fall colors compensated to some extent for the lack of sun.

Still the greyness and mist did not carry over to our mood and we journeyed on to each next adventure, if not always eagerly, at least with determination and in good courage. And there was even a certain sense of appropriateness for the concentration/labor camp of Buchenwald to be shrouded in fog and mist given what that memorial site documents. Similarly to see the castle of Neuschwanstein emerge out of the mist simply enhanced the fairy tale quality of that visually striking scene.



German cuisine

We spent most of our time in what was formerly the Deutsche Demokratische Republic (East Germany) until the reunification of the two Germanys in 1990 after the wall came down in 1989. Even though the fate of the two countries after the Second World War had been very different and the unification of the country had been difficult, there were, at least to my mind, few vestiges of that troubled time in German history.

Our tour guide at Buchenwald had been raised in East Germany but he said very little about those years and what it had been like growing up under Communist rule.

The cities of Eisleben, Halle, Erfurt, Eisenach, and Leipzig had been less seriously damaged during World War II than was the case in many other cities in Germany and the damage that had been done had been pretty well taken care of since unification. Erfurt was a particularly striking and intact city thanks, as our guide Gudrun said, to General Patton of the U.S. army whose decision to go around the city rather than through it apparently spared it of much destruction. In its architecture, Erfurt began to manifest more of the Bavarian influence than what is characteristic of northern Germany.

Berlin reminded us of Germany's past more than the countryside and other cities of the formerly East Germany did. The Brandenburg Gate, the Holocaust Memorial, Checkpoint Charlie, the remnants of the wall at Bernauer Strasse, the Trabant Museum, the memorial to those East Berliners who were killed while trying "to escape over the wall," and the simple memorial to the Roma and Sinthi ("gypsies") reinforced the notion credited to Santana that "those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it."

Luther himself and Bach, to lesser degree, are not without their own flaws as a special exhibit in the Bach Haus in Eisenach about "Luther and the Jews" reminded us.

Somewhat ironic about all the emphasis on Luther was the number of times that we were reminded that we will need to complete our trip by going to the Minneapolis Institute of Art to see a number of items relating to Luther's life that were not in their normal homes in Germany but now reside in the MIA until January 15, 2017.

In the midst of the greyness of the weather, there were also moments of beauty and unexpected grace. A noon fifteen minute devotion surrounded by the grandeur of the Dom (Lutheran Cathedral) in Berlin featuring one of the largest organs in the world, a similar brief worship service in the Town Church in Wittenberg, and the packed St. Thomas Kirche in Leipzig where its famed boys' choir sang at the 4:00 p.m. Saturday Vesper Service are but three examples.

Churches of ornate and intricate beauty such as the Wies church, the monastery church in Etal, contrasted with the severe simplicity of the Cathedral in Munich and the crisp clean lines of the smaller church in Eislebern. Arriving at the Mary Bridge and seeing Neuschwanstein across the valley with the waterfall pounding below was another moment that took one's breath away. The visit to the Francke Foundation in Halle provided an insight to another dimension of the Lutheran legacy with its

emphasis on caring for those members of society who are often without the resources to succeed on their own.

Then there was the unplanned moment in the chapel at Haus Hanstein in Eisenach that Christopher had arranged to have open for us on the morning we were traveling to Buchenwald. At the beginning of another misty morning, the spontaneous singing of “Beautiful Savior,” the reading of the Psalm by Shirley, and a prayer by Arlene reminded us of who we are as Lutheran and why such a trip was more than a cultural experience.

The Colleg in Wittenberg gave us a chance to stay put for a few days, get our bearings, and introduced a number of us to “Farkel,” which threatened to become an addiction that even carried over to Eisenach. What it really did, however, was enable engagement with each other on a less than serious level, although it seemed to be taken quite seriously by a few.

There were other unplanned moments that added spice to our time together such as Sharon’s commandeering the microphone to entertain us with her singing on the way back to our lodging in Wittenberg. (She later reprised her role at a music jam in Oberammergau as documented by Shirley.)

There were leisurely conversations over dinner and breakfast where even in Germany we could not always escape comments about the chaotic political reality back in the United States that we had hoped to leave behind.

More important than political talk, however, was the engagement of individual with individual over tasty meals prepared by Frau Muller and her morning colleagues as well as hotel staffs along the way. And there was beer and wine, not to excess however, but this was Germany after all where beer comes in all colors and varieties and is as inexpensive as any other drink available—except tea and coffee. Above all there were personable and knowledgeable city and site guides and the special relationship that developed with Herbert, our bus driver, and Christopher, our superb overall leader. Christopher, with his wife and four month old child currently in Russia, was always available for us.

He told jokes that were not funny but at which we laughed anyway and used certain idioms that reminded us that English was not his native language. But his knowledge was great, his willingness to accommodate our needs, and sometimes even our wants, was always evident and he became the measure by which I, at least, will measure all future tour guides.

His generosity, his cheerfulness, his faith: all were employed in the service of making this trip the best it could be.

I think we end the trip content with what we experienced, hopefully a little wiser, not only about Luther and the country in which he grew up, but also about the expanse of the world in which we live. There are many languages, a variety of customs and cultural practices, strange currencies, and different histories, but we are one people enhanced by those differences if we can accept them as manifestations of God’s good creation. AUF WIEDERSEHEN:

THANKS BE TO GOD.

