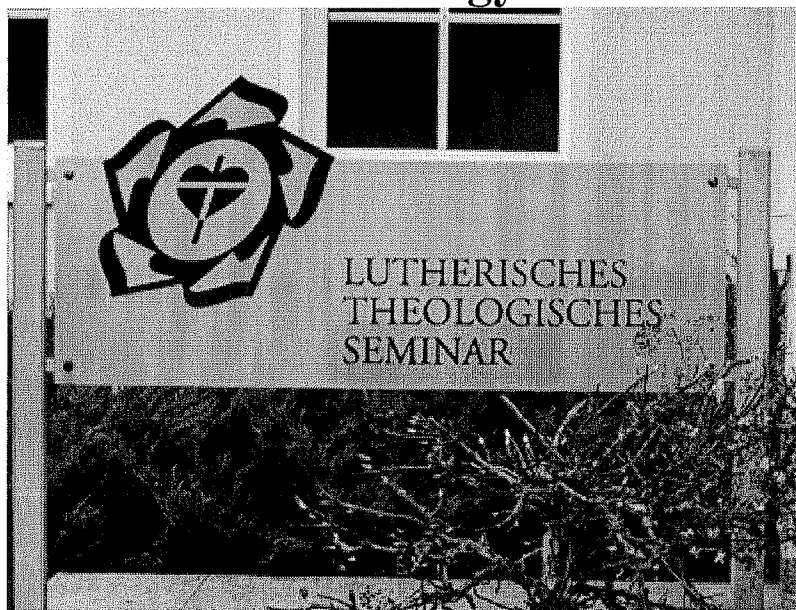


American Lutheran Theology Students in Leipzig



Senior Church History Report
Jeremy D. Laitinen
16th of December, 2008

Introduction: Ernst Wendland

In September of 1938, Ernst H. Wendland set out aboard the S. S. Hada County on a journey across the Atlantic to study for a year at the Lutheran Seminary of the Saxon Free Church in Berlin-Zehlendorf, Germany. During his time there he had a fascinating experience. He became acquainted with godly and respectable men who taught him theology. One of them, Dr. Paul Peters, went on to teach at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Thiensville. Ernst Wendland took in astounding amounts of travel and culture during his year. On one occasion he even made some money by singing in an opera chorus.

Most notably Ernst Wendland saw firsthand the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany. He witnessed the results the morning after the Kristallnacht. He watched with a critical eye the throngs of adoring supporters who looked to the Nazis for deliverance. From a distance, he even saw Hitler once or twice. Shortly before Ernst Wendland returned to America, he received a reprimand from a Nazi “Brownshirt” for singing the Happy Birthday Song in English at a German pub. After Mr. Wendland’s departure from Germany, World War II broke out.¹

This put an end to American Lutheran theology students going to study at the Lutheran Seminary of the Saxon Free Church for quite some time. Even after the war, it was virtually impossible for American students to study at the Lutheran Seminary in Saxony. The allied forces consisting of the U.S., Great Britain, France, and Russia divided all of Germany, as well as the city of Berlin, into zones controlled by each allied force. Saxony fell under the governance of the Russian forces. With the Soviet forces in power, a socialist government grew in East Berlin and East Germany. This government gradually restricted almost all interchange between East Germany and the West. One physical example of this was the infamous wall built to divide East and West Berlin.

¹ Which Way, Lord?

This government became known as the German Democratic Republic, or in German, the Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Most of those living in eastern Germany still refer to their former government as the “DDR.” The DDR policed everything from architecture to automobile manufacturing, from educational systems to religious beliefs. They were known for their propaganda and censoring anything that hinted at dissent.

The DDR tolerated the Lutheran Free Church in Saxony, but just barely. The Free Church, among many others, breathed a great sigh of relief when this government began to lose its grip on the East German people. In 1989 many and large groups of citizens held demonstrations that began the fall of the DDR. People broke holes through the hated Berlin Wall. Around 1990 the Socialist Unity Party lost the majority vote in the East German Parliament and East Germany began the unification process with the West.²

By this time the theological seminary of the Lutheran Free Church of Saxony had moved to Leipzig. In 1992 the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church obtained a facility at Sommerfelder Straße 63 in Leipzig-Stötteritz.³ They presently use this building for their future pastors’ seminary training as well as the gathering place of the St. Trinitatis Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. At this juncture in their history, with a new facility and the restrictive socialist government gone, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church could pick up where they left off with Ernst Wendland, hosting American Lutheran theology students at their seminary.

² Facts *checked, not first learned*, on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Germany

³ Auf Dein Wort, p. 177

A new Generation of Exchange-Students:

Richard Miller

The ELFK had never stopped training pastors during the time of the German Democratic Republic. They simply hadn't had opportunity to house and teach exchange students, especially from America. The first American to come to the new seminary building in Leipzig as a Gaststudent (exchange student) was Richard Miller.

Rich Miller was born and grew up in Bay City, Michigan. He attended a Wisconsin Synod elementary school and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, followed by a brief stint at Saginaw Valley State University. He attended Northwestern College during the transition of amalgamation into Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

He learned of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany earlier in his education than most other Gaststudenten. Richard tells his own story.

My connection with the ELFK began in 1991. As a junior at [Michigan Lutheran Seminary] in Saginaw, I took part in the 3-week German student exchange MLS had back then with a school in Annweiler (in the Rhineland-Pfalz). Since Germany had just reunified, MLS took the opportunity to plan for our group to take a few days to see some Luther sites and meet up with ELFK youth in Planitz and Zwickau. ...It was a wonderful thing to meet people on the other side of the world with a different background and culture but who share the exact same faith in our Savior.

My hosts for those few days were Jörg and Astrid Kubitschek (brother and sister, both around my age) and their parents. Two years later (1993), I had visited Jörg and Astrid again. I had just begun the pastor track at Northwestern. At that time, when I learned that Jörg had also started to study for the pastoral ministry in Leipzig, I had the idea in my head that I'd love to study there for a year. That was my dream, or hope. I wanted to study for the ministry for a time in this other culture and from their perspective. I wanted to build on this connection with these brothers and sisters of our sister synod (including really learning the language well, too). This was always my first and primary reason.

After another couple of years, Astrid and I started "dating" long-distance. So I then had an additional reason to want to spend a year in Leipzig.

At the start of my senior year in college, I made an appointment with then-[Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary] President Panning to discuss my hope of studying a year (between college and seminary) at Leipzig. He tried to encourage me to do it a few years later, after I had already been at WLS for a couple years. I think one rationale was so that I would get more out of the experience then, having first studied some Dogmatics and other seminary courses at home. Also – and I don't remember if this was spoken or implied or if this was just my impression – I got the feeling that WLS feared that if I took a year off between college and seminary, the chances were that I wouldn't come back. (In my case, they had nothing to worry about there.) But then I told President Panning about my second reason for wanting to go (my girlfriend), it was very interesting for me that he took that very seriously and agreed that that did change the picture. He spoke of the importance of finding a good wife and agreed that that might be a good reason for me to go that next year (between college and WLS – 1996-1997 school year).

However, not long after that visit with [President Panning], I did abandon the idea of going then. And I heard that someone else – a WLS student – was planning on studying at Leipzig that year (1996-1997).

Summer of 1996 I went to Germany for several weeks to visit Astrid. At that time (even though I was then not planning to study there that year) I talked with Dr. Gottfried Herrmann (the Leipzig Seminary director). He told me that the WLS student who had been planning to come cancelled and that it would be very easy for me to come instead. ...So I did. ...After flying home, I returned just a few weeks later and started the semester in Leipzig.

I lived in the seminary dormitory. I liked it very much. I had met most of the people before I had actually arrived for studying there. The students (besides myself) for that year were Martin Wilde, Jörg Kubitschek, Hendrik Landgraf, Marcus Richter, Karsten Drechsler, and Andreas Drechsler.

During his time at the Leipzig Seminary, Rich Miller took courses on *The Life of Christ*, Reformation church history, the Messianic Psalms, New Testament isagogics, pastoral theology, and one doctrine course. The Leipzig Seminary doesn't have full-time professors like many seminaries in America. Instead, the pastors of the ELFK take one day or more out of their week to teach courses for the pastoral students. These instructors are called Dozenten (docents). Some of the more memorable Dozenten at Rich Miller's time were Pastor Meinhold, Dr. Herrmann, Pastor Baumann, and Pastor Hoffmann.⁴ With the exception of Pastor Hoffmann, all of these

⁴ Rich Miller Survey

have to travel a considerable distance, either by car or train, just to teach their one day of classes at the seminary.

Some of the responsibilities of students at LTS (Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar – Leipzig) include travel and participation in ELFK youth activities. Rich Miller paved the way for other American Gaststudenten in this area. He took part in Kindersingeweche (Children’s Song Week, somewhat comparable to American VBS, only more musically oriented), Silvesterrueste (New Year’s retreat, where he gave a presentation), Kinder Camp, and some other student trips including one to Luther sites.⁵

As far as other traditions in Germany, Rich enjoyed the Advent season in the ELFK. He also noted the extra day of celebration that German Lutherans afford to the high festivals in the church year. The German Lutherans celebrate Christmas on the 25th and 26th of December, as well as two days of celebration for Easter. Rich had opportunity to visit a majority of the ELFK congregations. He felt most at home in the congregations at Zwickau, Planitz, and Leipzig.⁶

Richard Miller has very close ties to the ELFK. He ended up marrying his girlfriend, Astrid. Not only did he travel to eastern Germany numerous times before his year of study there, but he and his wife also spent a year living there from 2001-2002. Richard and Astrid now have a two-year-old son Kai.

Richard became a Wisconsin Synod pastor. He finished his seminary training in America in 2001. A year later he was ordained and still serves at Our Savior in Hart, Michigan. Yet, one cannot overlook this valuable part of Pastor Miller’s education. Almost 60 years after Ernst Wendland left Hitler’s Germany, Richard Miller began a new

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

chain of American Lutheran theology students at the seminary of the Free Church in Saxony.

Timothy Schmeling (with Lucas Moldenhauer and Thomas Meissner)

In 1998 the first Evangelical Lutheran Synod student came from America to study at the seminary in Leipzig-Stötteritz. His name is Timothy Schmeling. Timothy was born in Albert Lea, Minnesota and baptized at First Shell Rock in Northwood, Iowa, in 1977. He attended elementary school in Woodlake, Minnesota, and later in Okauchee, Wisconsin. He graduated from Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown, WI in 1995. He studied both at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato and Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts.

Before entering Bethany Lutheran Seminary, Timothy took time to study in Leipzig. The former president of the ELFK had encouraged him to do this at a Wisconsin Synod convention, which Timothy's father attended as an ELS delegate. Also during the 1998-1999 school year, Lucas Moldenhauer of Jackson, Wisconsin, and Thomas Meissner of New Orleans, Louisiana, studied at the Lutheran Theological Seminary – Leipzig. Timothy spent just one semester there.

Lucas and Timothy shared a room in the basement of Pastor and Mrs. Hoffmann's home in Leipzig. When it came to the German language, Tim Schmeling says that Lucas could pick up more easily on the local dialects due to a year he had spent in Germany prior to the year of study at the seminary. On the other hand, Timothy thrived on the older archaic German, the names in church history courses and the theological terminology.

Timothy experienced lectures from the same Dozenten as at Rich Miller's time. Timothy enjoyed Dr. Herrmann's church history lectures, particularly the history of the Free Church.

Also, Timothy appreciated Pastor Hoffmann's Dogmatics course and his thoughts on modern German theology.⁷

Overall, Timothy had a very positive experience at the LTS in Leipzig. He felt the first few awkward months that any exchange student has with adjustment to language and culture. He experienced some things new for him, such as the Saxon holiday of Buss- und Betttag (Day of Prayer and Repentance; this usually involved special worship services and a day off of work). Timothy learned a lot, gained some new perspectives on the world, and made some lifelong friendships.

After returning to the states, Timothy went on to Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato. He worked in the library there, taught German at the college, and served as a vicar in Ukiah, California. In May of 1999 he married Annette Habben. Today Timothy serves as pastor at Trinity in Sebastian, Florida.

Michael Seifert (and Michael Carr)

In October of 1999, two students came from America to study at Leipzig; Michael Carr and Michael Seifert. Mike Carr ended up leaving after the Winter Semester while Michael Seifert spent the whole year there. Like Rich Miller, Michael Seifert made other trips back to Saxony after his year of study, and also like Rich Miller, Michael had ties to Germany before his time in Leipzig.

Michael Seifert called Midland, Michigan, home for almost all of his young life. He attended Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Northwestern College for one year before the amalgamation. He had been to Germany three times before going to study at Leipzig, one of

⁷ Tim Schmeling Survey

which was an exchange program in high school. Rich Miller first planted the idea in Michael's head of attending the seminary in Leipzig.⁸

Michael received some words of caution from his parents about the implications of taking a year off from pastoral studies. Dean Brenner of WLS also mentioned the recommendation of the seminary that students wait until after their vicar year to take time off from their schooling. However, everyone with whom Michael talked about the idea spoke positively about his opportunity.

Michael found out that another classmate, Martin Valleskey, also had plans to go to Germany, to study at the University of Halle. The two of them convinced Michael Carr also to come and study at Leipzig. Upon arrival in Germany (the two Michaels came three weeks before the semester started) M. Carr and M. Seifert audited classes at a Gymnasium [German Prep school] to "get warmed up" to the German language. Michael Seifert commented that this experience intimidated him when he considered that he faced a whole year of instruction in German.

His fears were put to rest upon starting classes at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. He found the lecture style of the docents actually quite foreigner-friendly, since the student had a more passive role. He heard lectures by the above-mentioned docents; Meinhold, Herrmann, Hoffmann, and Baumann. His most memorable class was *The Free Church and the Third Reich*, since in this course Michael completed a substantial research report on the American-born pastor Wilhelm Oesch. This project intimidated him at first but turned out to be something in which he took a lot of pride.

⁸ Mike Seifert Survey

Michael Seifert's living quarters in Leipzig were away from the seminary facilities. Since the seminary could only house one American, Michael Carr elected to stay in the dorm while Seifert lived in a nearby apartment. He writes about this living arrangement:

I stayed in an apartment a few miles away (Crednerstrasse 9 in Probstheida) with a fellow ELFK seminary student, Hendrick Landgraff, and another member of the ELFK, Raimund Holland-Moritz, who was studying to be a piano maker. I stayed in the vacant room of Andreas Drechsler, who was studying that year at Bethany Seminary in Mankato, Minn.

The apartment was very decrepit by American standards. Most of the plaster on the exterior had crumbled off of the brick. The little that remained had been grayed by the years. The bathroom had an unfinished concrete floor. The water heater was still DDR-era "real time heating:" When you turned on the hot-water faucet you could hear the flames shoot up around the pipe to heat up the water.

Still, I enjoyed the apartment life very much. My room was large, and still furnished with Andreas Drechsler's stuff. I recall the heat going out for a couple of days in the winter, which was a little uncomfortable. I also remember our little refrigerator going out at one point and having trouble convincing my roommates that it wasn't working. They said it was just that Americans set their fridges cooler. After a couple weeks of eating warm yogurt, they were convinced and we got a new (used) one. Again, I was glad to be in the apartment. It was good to have a life at the seminary, and also away from it.

...I've been back since [then] and [the apartment] looks brand new. I'm sure the rent is a lot higher too.

A regular part of life for ELFK young people in Leipzig is Studentenkreis. Studentenkreis is a weekly gathering of high school-age & college students and other young adults. The group of young people usually studies a topic, most often in the format of a Bible class, although sometimes they study other topics. Michael and Michael Carr had opportunity to offer a presentation at Studentenkreis. Michael Seifert writes about his experience.

I enjoyed Studentenkreis very much as a participant, though the first time I presented was one of the most humbling events of my life. Mike Carr and I tried to explain the historical and scriptural interpretations of Jesus' descent into hell

about two months after our arrival. The blank stares were agonizing. I was sure that my incoherent babbling had jeopardized the faith of some!

The student body during Michael Seifert's time in Leipzig took some of the same trips as previous student bodies. They took part in Kindersingeweche and other student retreats. They spent time in Saalfeld where they observed some of the vicar work of a German student named Martin Wilde. Michael and his classmates attended an international retreat in Sweden.

At holidays, and at other times, Michael's travels kept him in touch with Wisconsin Synod contacts. During Christmas his girlfriend⁹ came to visit and they celebrated Christmas with the WELS civilian chaplain in Mainz. He visited a couple of other WELS retreats in Europe, even preaching once for a WELS church service in Switzerland. On more than one occasion Michael visited fellow WELS member Suzannah Lawrenz near Dusseldorf where she had a job as a nanny.

Michael Seifert returned to the United States in July of 2000. He was ordained into the ministry at Luther Prep in Watertown, where he taught German III. He presently serves as parish pastor at Living Hope Lutheran Church in Midlothian, Virginia. Michael married Sarah Micheel in 2006, and the two of them have a 9-month-old son named Jonah.

Peter Hermanson (and David Preus)

From 2000-2001 two students out of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod went to study in Leipzig. Peter Hermanson and David Preus attended Bethany Lutheran College. Peter grew up in Milwaukee, WI and then in New Ulm, MN.

While at Bethany in Mankato, Peter learned about the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig from Andreas Drechsler, mentioned above in connection with Michael Seifert. Peter had always wanted to study in Germany. At Andreas' suggestion Peter looked into it.

⁹ Not the same girl who became his wife

In August of 2000 he flew from Chicago to Frankfurt. Before taking classes at LTS in Leipzig, Peter studied for four weeks at the Goethe Institute in Frankfurt. From Frankfurt he took a train to Leipzig where he made his new home with the family of Pastor Martin Hoffmann.

Regarding the Hoffmanns' home for him, Peter said,

They have two "efficiency" rooms in their basement that have small sinks, stoves, and refrigerators. The living arrangements were fantastic and staying with the Hoffmanns proved to be very beneficial to learning German...

Peter enjoyed having fellow American David Preus around. David and Peter got along well. David had a good familiarity with German language and culture, which Peter envied. David had been to Germany already on an exchange program in high school. After Leipzig David would go on to complete his college education at Bethany in Mankato, but after one year of study at Bethany Seminary David transferred to Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he earned his master of divinity.¹⁰

Peter did not stay for a full year in Leipzig, leaving in December of 2000. During his semester of study he remembers classes on the Formula of Concord, Matthew and Genesis. He also had a major project that focused on *Original Sin*.

That year the student body made their usual trips for Kindersingeweche as well as a trip to visit Norwegian and Swedish Lutheran churches. Previous American Gaststudenten hadn't had the opportunity to visit the Martin Luther Schule (grade school) in Zwickau. This facility of the ELFK was set to open when Peter visited it for the first time during Kindersingeweche.

Peter has fond memories of German Christmas traditions such as Glühwein (hot spiced wine) and the Christmas market. He would often stroll around the town square or search for a

¹⁰ Peter Hermanson Survey

place that served a good cup of coffee. He especially enjoyed trips to Plzen (in the present day Czech Republic), which he made more than once.

Gaststudenten in recent years have had lively discussions with Germans within and outside of the ELFK. Much of the German sentiment regarding America stems from the person and policies of George W. Bush. Peter witnessed the beginnings of some of the German negativity, about which he comments:

I was [in Leipzig] during the 2000 Florida election debacle, so they had fun asking who my President was. I just kept telling them it was immer noch Bill Clinton bis 20.Jan.2001 [“still Bill Clinton ‘til January 20, 2001]. They also were hoping to see Al Gore win the election because they believed he would be better for Europe (I disagreed, and we never came to a resolution).

Peter is presently working toward his PhD from the University of Dallas. He and his wife, Amy, have been married since June of 2005. They have one child born in August of 2006 and one expected in May of 2009. After completing his PhD work, Peter plans on moving back to Mankato to attend Bethany Lutheran Seminary. He would like to be ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod after finishing that seminary training.¹¹

Geoffrey Cortright

Two years passed before the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig saw its next American students. In 2003 Geoffrey Cortright and Daniel Tess came over together. Geoff was born in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He lived in a variety of places growing up. He had a home in the states of California, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. For high school he attended Northwestern Prep in Watertown, which became Luther Prep. He followed the pastor track at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, and went to one year of seminary in Mequon before traveling to Leipzig.

¹¹ Ibid

Geoff began hearing about the ELFK in college. In 2000 he went on a trip to Germany which convinced him once and for all that he wanted to study at the LTS in Leipzig. There were voices that cautioned Geoff before taking such a dramatic step in his education. Both the academic dean of MLC in New Ulm and the president of the Seminary at Mequon encouraged Geoff to first spend some time at the WELS seminary before going to Leipzig. Geoff decided to take this advice. He waited until September of 2003 to make the trip.

He and Dan Tess lived in the basement of the Hoffmanns at Leipzig. They found the accommodations cozy and the hosts friendly and generous. Dan and Geoff got along well, but their German abilities didn't improve as long as they lived together. Dan eventually moved into the seminary dormitory and another student Michael Müller moved in with Geoff. During the second semester, Dan returned home for financial reasons and Geoff moved into the dorm.

Geoff took a full load of classes typical for a 3rd or 4th year student. Many of the same instructors from previous years also taught Geoff. One new instructor was Andreas Drechsler, who taught beginner Hebrew. Geoff's classes included Isaiah, Hebrew I, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Romans, and I Peter. Geoff completed long-term assignments for his courses on Isaiah, the Catholic Catechism, and a sermon for homiletics.

When Geoff and Dan first arrived, a student named Albrecht Hoffmann jokingly told them they had to throw a party. The two Americans thought he was serious so they planned a full American Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixings. They cooked Thanksgiving dinner for 26 people from scratch. It took three straight days and the LTS kitchen was a mess. However, everyone both German and American had a great time. After Geoff and Dan found out that they didn't really have to throw this lavish event, they made the Germans promise to have all future Gaststudenten throw similar parties.

Geoff and Dan took part in the usual required travel of the German Seminary students, such as Kindersingeweche, Jugendrüste, and Jugendcamp. The Jugendrüste they attended was in Hartenstein, where the ELFK youth held their annual foosball tournament. Geoff and Dan formed “Team Amis” (“Ami” is German slang for “American”). Surprisingly (due to the fact that Dan had a foosball table at home) “Team Amis” made it to the championship.

The worship services of the ELFK made the transition into the German language easier for Geoff, particularly the preaching. The preaching used theological terms, which was what Geoff had learned from his German courses at MLC. The ELFK hymnal, on the other hand, tended to be a little more difficult for visitors unfamiliar with the language. Geoff tried to voice some of these concerns to a student on the hymnal committee. The student appreciated Geoff’s concern. Geoff’s favorite part of worship life as a student at LTS was chapel before classes started, particularly the Tuesday “Matutin” (Matins) services.

Geoff and Dan had a lot of contact with a young pastor in Nerchau, near Leipzig, whose name is Martin Wilde. The history of his congregation fascinated Geoff. The congregation’s present facility used to be a paint factory. They bought the building for the equivalent of \$2 and overhauled and remodeled it. Geoff was impressed by Pastor Wilde’s leadership and the story of their congregation.

For an extra-curricular activity for Geoff sang in the Gewandhaus Chor. The Gewandhaus is a concert hall and music conservatory in Leipzig. Geoff had the chance to sing in their choir thanks to an ELFK married couple, Matthäus and Annette Stöhr. He had the enviable opportunity to sing Bach’s Weihnachts Oratorium (Christmas Oratorio), and St. John’s Passion on Palm Sunday. He also sang in the New Year’s Eve performance of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, which is regularly broadcasted across Germany.

When it came to residual effects of the DDR (Socialist East German government), Geoff worked closely with one gentleman named Herr Block. Geoff learned that the East Germans wanted so badly to be reunified with West Germany that, when DDR socialism finally fell, the East Germans felt somewhat betrayed that the west didn't welcome them more warmly. Herr Block stressed to Geoff the importance of appreciating freedoms. Herr Block also felt a little concerned that the younger generation wouldn't appreciate the struggles of the older generation under the restrictive socialist government.

Geoff was a prolific traveler during his year in Leipzig. He took at least two major trips. His favorite city was Rome, since this is where Peter and Paul had walked. He knew Rome so well that one time, while in Rome with another American friend, he led his own tour of St. Peter's in the Vatican. He freely told those listening in on his tour that the pope is the antichrist. On another occasion, when John Paul II gave his Christmas blessing and all the people were cheering, Geoff shouted out in the midst of them "Absetz the antichrist!" ("Depose the antichrist")

Also in Rome, Geoff ran into a group of Catholic charismatics. One of them, a Hungarian priest, debated with Geoff for hours on the teaching of purgatory. In the end the group invited Geoff to have supper with them at their commune. He thankfully accepted the invitation and continued to quote Scripture and testify to his faith over against their teachings of work-righteousness.

Geoff took another trip when his father, Charles Cortright, came to visit. His dad made a presentation at the Leipzig seminary on psychology and pastoral counseling. After this Geoff and his dad went to various cities together and then headed south to observe the Tour de France.

Geoff returned to the states in July of 2004 to continue his seminary training in Mequon. Before completing studies at WLS, Geoff took some more time off to fill a vacancy at Manitowoc Lutheran High School. He taught German there and found out that just because you can speak German doesn't mean you can teach it to others. He struggled with some unmotivated students. He also used his German skills to guest preach a few times at the St. Michaelisgemeinde, which meets in the chapel on the Wisconsin Lutheran College campus in Milwaukee.¹² Now Geoffrey Cortright and his wife Alicia serve at Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada.¹³

Daniel Tess

The other American studying in Leipzig with Geoff was Dan Tess. Dan was born in Marshfield, WI. He went to Manitowoc Lutheran High School and Martin Luther College. Like Geoff, Dan went to one year of seminary in Mequon before heading to Leipzig. Also like Geoff, Dan learned about the ELFK during college.

Dan always wanted to study in Germany ever since a 3-week exchange program in high school. Manitowoc Lutheran had connections to a Gymnasium in Bersenbrück, Niedersachsen. So when Dan learned about the ELFK in college, he and Geoff contacted Dr. Herrmann. Dr. Herrmann encouraged them to consult with the seminary in Mequon before taking a leave of absence.

Dan ran into some of the same voices concerned about him taking a leave of absence as other past Gaststudenten had. The faculty at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary had natural concerns about retaining students in an 8-year program. Family and friends didn't all think his time would be well spent by taking a year off. Dan also got engaged before leaving the country, which

¹² Leading these services is a common practice for former exchange students both before and after Geoff Cortright.

¹³ Geoff Cortright Survey

caused some anxiety at his departure. But the two of them knew they wouldn't get married until after his fiancé graduated in 2005. They knew they could always communicate via e-mail and phone.

As mentioned above, Dan stayed with Geoff in the Hoffmann's basement apartment. This was somewhat familiar territory for Dan, since he had stayed with a German family during his prior exchange experience, so he knew some of the routines and customs of a typical German family. Dan took many of the same classes as Geoff. His long-term project for Catechism of the Catholic Church involved analyzing some statements on the Lord's Supper. He received a good grade on it and positive feedback.

When it came to Kindersingeweche, Dan had a memorable experience. The students from the seminary were to supervise and maintain order among the children. They would also lead smaller groups in break-out sessions. Dan recalls:

They had placed me with a notoriously misbehaving child who was about 10 years old. During break out sessions, we would head over to the church to practice marimba in the balcony for the performance on Sunday. Imagine teaching someone not only a few notes but some complex rhythms with multiple mallets. Needless to say, it forced me to learn and use new vocabulary and patience. He also corrected my German on a number of occasions, most notably when I asked him to repeat a certain musical phrase I would always say, "Wieder mal, bitte." After enduring this a number of times he finally looked at me and said, "*Noch mal bitte.*" The concert was well attended, and well done, and the boy I worked with ended up doing pretty well at performance time.¹⁴

The Christmas break for Dan turned out to be a memorable one also. His sister, his sister's friend, and his fiancé came to visit. They all traveled to Wittenberg, Prague, Paris, and Frankfurt. His trip was tainted, however, due to an infection that brought him to an emergency room in Frankfurt. The doctor there gave him some antibiotics to make it back to Leipzig. The problem turned out to be an infected hair follicle in his back, which he at first thought was a

¹⁴ Dan Tess Survey

strained muscle. He headed straight back to Leipzig and there he experienced the first surgery of his life. Pastor Hoffmann's wife is a nurse, and was able to help him convalesce.

Dan enjoyed much of the interaction with the people in the ELFK. He has a few good anecdotes to share about his experiences with them. One involved the weekly "Sport" period, sort of a gym class for the LTS students. Almost always the sport of choice is soccer (at a nearby park in pleasant weather, at a small gym in poor weather). Dan saw the value in playing soccer and really threw himself into participation.

I remember one time I dove a little too fiercely (accidentally, not on purpose) for a ball and was kindly reminded that we don't go all out during our Sport period.¹⁵

On another occasion, Dan's grasp of the German language turned on him.

The one language example I can think of came when I was listening to someone talk about allergies, but because of German orthography and pronunciation, I had thought they were using the word in a sense similar to *allerheiligste* or *allerbeste* (_____ of all), so I asked the person, "Was ist *gie*?" We enjoyed a hearty laugh.¹⁶

Conversations with Germans in recent years sometimes turn to politics. As mentioned previously, Germans are not very sympathetic to American politics. Dan remained sensible in such discussions. He didn't take sides or make enemies. "I tried to act very sensitively to any comments or political criticism, hoping that the students would not think me a stereotypical arrogant Ami."¹⁷

Due to his emergency surgery, a depreciating exchange rate for the dollar, and expenses in general, Dan's funds ran low. He had to leave Germany and his studies at LTS in May of 2004. Since returning to the States, Dan has occasionally seen Jürg and Wendy Heyn, a married

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

couple whose engagement he celebrated while still in Germany. Dan attended one more year at WLS in Mequon and then withdrew in 2005.

At the present time, Dan is working both as a teacher and a student. He is working toward a post-baccalaureate teaching licensure through UW Milwaukee. He is also a Latin instructor for the '07-'08 school year at Magellan Day School. He married his fiancée, Jessica, in May of 2005. They live on the east side of Milwaukee and are active members at St. Marcus, Milwaukee.

Jeremy Laitinen (and Nathan Bode)

After the departure from Leipzig of Geoff Cortright and Dan Tess, two more pastor track graduates of Martin Luther College arrived in Leipzig a few months later. Nathan Bode and Jeremy Laitinen attended LTS for the winter semester of the 2004-2005 school year. Nathan came from Saginaw, Michigan, and Jeremy from New Ulm, Minnesota.

Jeremy was born in Toledo, Ohio. Since then he has lived in Palos Heights - Illinois, Oklahoma City, and New Ulm. He attended Luther Prep in Watertown, WI for high school and the pastor track at Martin Luther College in New Ulm.

During college Jeremy went on an immersion trip to attend a language school in Munich. After four weeks there, he and his group visited some Luther sites and sat in on a day of classes at the seminary in Leipzig. At the end of that day, Dr. Herrmann, who had done all the lecturing, asked the group of Americans, "So, which of you wants to come here and study for a year?" At first, the prospect intimidated Jeremy, but his father's encouragement and continued deliberation persuaded him to pursue a year of study abroad.

As far as words of caution, Jeremy experienced incidents similar to previous exchange students. The academic dean at MLC expressed concern about getting distracted from

completion of pastoral training in America. In correspondence with Dr. Herrmann, Jeremy learned that he needed a grasp of Hebrew, a language he hadn't taken yet, to get by at LTS. Dr. Herrmann also encouraged him to communicate clearly with WLS in Mequon. President Wendland of WLS seemed very open and accommodating toward Jeremy's time off.

Like his predecessor, Dan Tess, Jeremy also became engaged before leaving for another country. At the end of September 2004 Jeremy flew from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Leipzig. He stayed in the seminary dorm room belonging to Michael Müller, who had also taken a year off from his studies to attend WLS in Mequon. This arrangement worked well for Jeremy since he could now use Michael's well-furnished room and collection of books.

Jeremy shared the dorm with three other students. One room on the top floor was empty. The large room next to it belonged to Nathan Bode. The other room on the third floor belonged to Sebastian Bruske, a member of the ELFK who didn't attend LTS but went to a public university in Leipzig. On the second floor lived Jeremy and his next door neighbor Jewgenij Kaplunow, a student at LTS who came from Königsberg, Russia. While in Leipzig, Jeremy probably grew the closest to Jewgenij, although they haven't kept in touch for a number of years.

The worship life of the ELFK fascinated Jeremy. Some of it took adjustment, but once he made the adjustments he found the services beautiful. Some of the adjustments had to do with communion Sundays. The ELFK maintain the worthwhile practice of announcing oneself before partaking of the Lord's Supper. Sometimes it was difficult for this American to get himself to the pastor in time, before the service started, in order to announce intention to commune.

Another such adjustment had to do with the Beichtgottesdienst (Service of Repentance), which took place immediately before the communion service. The first time Jeremy experienced a communion service in Germany, he didn't know that a Beichtgottesdienst preceded it. He was

hurrying to get into the shower Sunday morning, when another student knocked on the bathroom door to inform him that church would be starting shortly. Jeremy didn't realize how shortly. The bathroom and shower are directly above the sanctuary in that building, and as he turned on the shower Jeremy could hear, to his terror, the first hymn beginning. After rushing out of the shower and getting dressed, he stood outside the sanctuary until the Beichtgottesdienst was over and then took a seat for the communion service with his hair still dripping from the shower.

During that semester Jeremy took, among others, the following courses; Exegesis of Matthew (The Sermon on the Mount), Dogmengeschichte, Konfessions Kunde, first-year Hebrew, an homiletical pre-seminary course, Exegesis of Romans, Genesis, Amos, and the Messianic Psalms. In these courses he completed larger assignments such as a student exegesis of a portion of Amos and a devotion for the homiletical course. His devotion was on Matthew 6, 2-4. The instructor required the students to deliver the devotion ^{from} for memory.

That year the Jugendrüste took place in Schönfeld in the Erzgebirge. Jeremy went as the only American, since Nathan had plans with his girlfriend that weekend. Immediately following the Jugendrüste was Kindersingewoche. As a field trip during Kindersingewoche, both children and leaders got the chance to play on a "Kletterpark." Very literally, this means "climbing-park," and an American term for it might be "ropes course."

Another required trip for the seminarians at LTS was a mini-conference with some ELS pastors and vicars in Plzen, Czech Republic. It took place at the end of the winter semester. The pastors at the ELS mission in Plzen asked the LTS students to come and Dr. Herrmann to present a paper on the teaching of church and ministry. The ELS congregation also wanted the LTS students to sing in their worship service on Sunday. In addition to hearing Dr. Herrmann's paper, the LTS students also went on a tour of Plzen led by one of the national vicars. On Sunday after

church Pastor Mark Grubbs (one of the two ELS pastors in Plzen) took the LTS students and Dr. Herrmann to visit the world's third largest synagogue, which is in Plzen, but isn't functioning due to a dwindling Jewish population.

Like Geoff Cortright, Jeremy had the chance to sing with Annette and Matthäus Stöhr in the Gewandhaus Chor. They performed an Advent concert at a large court building in Leipzig. They also sang Bach's Christmas Oratorio in the Thomaskirche and Beethoven's 9th around New Year's time. Jeremy saw a number of operas at the Leipzig opera house.

Throughout the year Jeremy kept in frequent contact with his fiancé. Once, when asked by a German if he felt homesick, he responded, "No. Only fiancé-sick." He also had other American visitors who came to see him in Leipzig. A high school and college friend of his, Jackie Horton, also happened to be teaching English in Poland, while Jeremy was in Leipzig. The two of them visited some sights in Germany, including the towns of Ulm and Aachen. On another occasion two other high school and college classmates, Luther Tollefson and Matthew Tobeck stopped by Leipzig. Jeremy was glad to show them around his new hometown and offer them a place to stay on their month-long tour. Michael Seifert also brought a tour group of his colleagues from Luther Prep to Leipzig in 2005. They worshiped with the ELFK for Easter.

Jeremy's brother Daniel came to visit during late winter of 2005. Jeremy and Dan went on a whirlwind tour of Berlin, London, and Rome. The two brothers traveled mostly by European discount airlines. They found flights for a matter of a few cents each (of course the astronomical taxes and airport fees almost negate the savings). In Berlin they visited Checkpoint Charlie and the Pergamum Museum. In London the highlight for Jeremy was at the British Library seeing Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus (not only two of the earliest manuscripts of Holy Scripture, but also material Jeremy had just covered in some of his New

Testament text critical courses). In Rome the two brothers saw the Vatican, the Coliseum, the Palatine Hill, and other famous Roman sites. All three cities on their tour contained museums full of gorgeous, valuable, and classic art work.

Jeremy inherited from his predecessors, Geoff and Dan, the responsibility of throwing a party for the ELFK young people in Leipzig. They decided since the last Americans had thrown a Thanksgiving party, Jeremy should introduce another uniquely American holiday, and so Valentine's Day was chosen. Jeremy's fiancé mailed him a package full of decorations and other party accessories. With the help of some of the other dormitory students, Jeremy set up the building like a restaurant and prepared a spaghetti supper for everyone. This wasn't as involved as Geoff and Dan's Thanksgiving feast, but after the dinner Jeremy arranged a poetry contest and a German version of the Newlywed Game. Everyone had a good time.

Originally Jeremy had planned to study in Leipzig for one and a half semesters, the first semester stretching from September to February, and the second beginning at the end of March and running through July. Jeremy's wedding date was the 10th of June, 2005, so he planned on flying home part of the way into the second semester. However, desires to get wedding arrangements finalized and strong separation anxiety from his fiancé brought him home before the second semester began. He flew home two days after Easter, which came at the end of March that year.

Since returning from the Seminary in Leipzig, Jeremy married his fiancée, Abigail, on June 10th, 2005. They now have two boys, Gabriel and Micah. Jeremy went through two years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, followed by a vicar year in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. He is presently completing his senior year at WLS.

The experience of Nathan Bode at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig differs greatly from all other Gaststudenten. His connections to Germany and the ELFK began before he graduated from MLC, similar to many others. He once took part in a choir tour during his high school years at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw. Their choir sang at different locations in Germany. While Nathan traveled in Germany, he became romantically interested in a German girl, who at the time was a member of the ELFK, not unlike the situation of Richard Miller. Her name is Josephine. She came over to America to visit Nate once while he was in college.

Nathan's parents had apprehensions about his leaving for Germany. However, Nathan had his heart set on travels abroad. Upon arrival in Germany Nathan's first contacts were with Josephine's family. They gave him a place to stay and drove him to the seminary when he moved into the dorm.

Jeremy and Nathan had a number of classes together. Nathan also prepared a devotion for the homiletical course as well as a student exegesis in the class on Amos. In addition to the classes they shared, Nathan also took a course in pastoral theology. Nathan became renowned for nodding off in class. In fact, as he dozed, his nods became so pronounced that he would rock back and forth. He had a good sense of humor about his classroom problem, though. He didn't mind when one student, Albrecht Hoffmann, sketched an idea for a contraption that would utilize Nathan's nodding to brew coffee. After one class that he particularly enjoyed, Nathan made the comment to his instructor, "Heute in Vorlesung war verrückt! Ich hatte keine Probleme mit dem Schlaf!" ("Today's lecture was crazy [a fun time]! I had no problems with sleep!") Part of Nate's problem may have had something to do with his blood sugar levels. Nate is diabetic and needed to get special prescriptions and equipment from the pharmacies in Leipzig in order to control his insulin.

Josephine began taking classes at a public university in Leipzig, which worked out well since it was near to Nathan's school. She was actively involved in dance and ballet. From early on, Nathan began spending a lot of time with her. Usually, after class he headed out immediately to go meet her. He was almost always gone for all weekends either traveling with her or visiting her family.

At one point around fall of 2004 Josephine's parents were in a serious car accident. Josephine was understandably upset by this trauma. Nathan went almost immediately to be with her and to see them in the hospital.

The students and other ELFK young people began to notice his absences. At first they considered the absences normal. At one party when someone asked where Nathan was, the seminary director, Dr. Herrmann, replied, "Er hat Minnedienst." ("He's on love-duty.") However, when Nate skipped the Jugendtreff, Kindersingeweche, and the Silvesterrüste in order to spend time with Josephine, the students and faculty began to wonder how committed Nathan was to studying for the ministry.

He answered their questions soon into the New Year of 2005. He and Josephine became engaged over the Christmas break. He also revealed to Jeremy his plans to withdraw from LTS after the semester. He wanted to attend the public university in Leipzig and study an ancient near eastern language like Akkadian.

Throughout the course of the winter semester at LTS Nathan regularly attended classes. On the other hand, he attended church services very irregularly. He wasn't known to have attended any ELFK church for almost a 20 week period at one point in time. He did admit once to attending a Russian Orthodox Church in Leipzig with Josephine, as well as a few other denominations. Yet by January of 2005 he hadn't had communion in a confessional Lutheran

fellowship for a matter of months. He did commune with the ELS congregation when the LTS students visited Plzen, but that may have been the last time.

The status of Nate's faith became a serious concern among the students (including his fellow American Gaststudent), the faculty of LTS, and his parents and family. All of these tried to persuade him to attend to his spiritual welfare and stay close to fellow believers. But he did not receive their counsel gladly.

He seemed to wrestle with a false antithesis between the ELFK and his girlfriend. He seemed to have before him a choice between Josephine and the ELFK. People encouraged him again and again to bring her along to church and social gatherings. They came to church together at least once later in the semester. They also came together to a Studentenkreis, where the leader of the discussion paid Nate a compliment on something he had said at a Studentenkreis earlier in the semester. That compliment seemed to impress Josephine and made Nathan proud. But it didn't make enough of an impression to bring them back for more Bible study. They became involved only in each other.

Today Nathan lives in an apartment in Leipzig. His family rarely hears from him. He was last known to be working on studies in Arabic at the University of Leipzig. He has done some teaching at the Wall Street Institute in Leipzig, an English language school.¹⁸

Anthony Barthels

As of this writing, there is one American Lutheran student enrolled at LTS in Leipzig. His name is Anthony Barthels. Tony attended St. Mark's church and school in DePere, Wisconsin. He graduated from Fox Valley Lutheran High School and earned his BA at Martin Luther College.

Tony began hearing about the seminary in Leipzig during high school through Dan Tess' brother. Tony's strongest desire to study in Germany occurred during an immersion trip he took

¹⁸ <http://www.wallstreet-institute.de/unsere-center/center-leipzig-mitarbeiter.html,c12>

in high school. This trip motivated him to work on his German skills and gave him a zeal for foreign cultures.

In September of 2008 Tony arrived in Germany. A German family, whom he had met in New Ulm, picked him up in Frankfurt. They treated him very generously, even buying his meals and his train ticket to Leipzig.

In the seminary building Tony lives in a small room at the end of the hall on the second floor. He finds it a nice place. The other two students living in the seminary building are Sebastian Bruske and Christoph Drechsler, both of whom attend classes at a public university in Leipzig. Tony is the only American attending LTS at this time.

The classes are a full load for Tony. In addition to some of the classes listed above, they include a course on the Large Catechism, the book of Jonah, History of Philosophy, and II Thessalonians. Tony's instructors for these courses include some of the original docents, but also some more recent faces such as Pastor Uwe Klärner, Matthäus Stöhr, and Pastor Holger Weiß.

Tony was told it was customary for him to throw his own welcome party when he first came to the seminary. Along with the help of a fellow first-year student, Benjamin Stöhr, Tony made a taco dinner. It took them three hours alone just to make the tortillas. He found it entertaining to watch some of the Germans eat tacos for the first time. He said they tended to load up the tortillas with too many fillings and then had to shovel the whole thing into their mouths. Overall, living in the dormitory has been a beneficial experience for him, since it has forced him to learn how to cook for himself.

At Kindersingeweche, Tony had a good time. The children peppered him with questions like, "Can you speak English? Does your family speak English? How do you get to Canada? Are

you from Ireland? Are from the Netherlands? Why do you talk funny?”¹⁹ Tony also accompanied, on the drums, the children’s final performance in the church service at the end of the week. This gave him the distinction of being the first person to play a drum set in that church.

As far as worship in the ELFK, Anthony has needed to do some adjusting. He finds it difficult to jump around from the liturgy to the hymns. Tony did comment that he enjoys the singing of the liturgy. In the realm of chapel services for the seminary, Tony will soon have to lead the Matutin service (Matins) for the student body and instructor. The prospect intimidates him, but if other Americans can get through it, he can too.

For holidays, Tony has noticed a difference in Advent Calendars. The ones with which he grew up didn’t have candy like the German ones do. He has also learned a thing or two about the German legacy of Weihnachts Stollen. Apparently, he heard some lively discussions about when it is appropriate to eat Stollen; only at Christmas or before? Tony plans on going to Sweden for Christmas. He has also celebrated a birthday while in Leipzig.

Tony has also made some adjustments to German social customs. He used to commonly ask people, “Wie geht’s Ihnen?” (“How are you doing?”) One or two fellow students told him that Germans don’t appreciate small talk. They asked him if he genuinely *was* interested in how a person is doing or if he was just using that question somewhat mindlessly. Tony most often *was* interested in how people were doing, but since he didn’t want to offend any of his German friends, he stopped using the question. Sometimes he still says it ^{by} on accident, and it gets a laugh.

One funny anecdote of cross-cultural misunderstanding occurred when Tony was at a restaurant with some friends. The waitress gave him his total, but all he heard was “vierzehn” (“fourteen”). He thought fourteen euro was a little expensive, but he didn’t want to make a scene, so he gave her fourteen euro. She started to give him change, but he told her to keep the change.

¹⁹ Anthony Barthels Survey

His friends started to tease him about flaunting his “rich American” status. It wasn’t until they left that he found out the waitress had actually said, “Sieben euro vierzehn” (seven euro, fourteen cents).

With the election of Barack Obama Anthony has witnessed a strong change of attitude among Germans and Europeans in general toward America. Sebastian Bruske, a fellow dorm-dweller, states that Germans are content with the results of the election and most would have voted for Obama. Europe seems to hail Obama as a messianic figure. Tony says that people were dancing in the streets of Paris and members of the German Parliament fought over which of them supported Obama more.

Tony enjoys the Studentenkreis. His course schedule for Tuesdays with the added classroom style of Studentenkreis makes for a somewhat long day in his book, but he finds the students’ knowledge of Scripture and individual passages outstanding. He is scheduled to lead a Studentenkreis shortly after the Christmas break in the New Year of 2009. Anthony also tells about a new type of Bible study group called Bibelgesprächskreis. This group has met in apartments and homes of ELFK members. They go into particular details of Bible passages. Tony is interested to see how this will develop.²⁰

Drawing Conclusions

The time has come to draw some conclusions about the practice of Americans studying at LTS in Leipzig. These conclusions will be based first of all on the comments made by the Gaststudenten themselves. Then one can also draw some conclusions based simply on the bare facts of what happened and why it happened.

²⁰ Ibid

Regarding Worship Practices

In recent years many groups and types of people have become engrossed in the debate in American Lutheranism over worship. One can also see these issues in the responses of American Gaststudenten to the worship practices they saw in Leipzig and throughout the ELFK. None of the Americans who observed worship in Leipzig *disliked* what they saw. Overall, the Americans offered a positive outlook on ELFK Gottesdienst (Church Service).

However, among the Gaststudenten, there is a certain tension between two different points of view. One side would comment on the difficulty involved with using the ELFK hymnal. They certainly don't despise or dislike the songs and forms in this hymnal by any means, yet they see a need for improvement in the realm of making the hymnal more user-friendly. Most, but not all, of the more recent American students (Michael Seifert, Geoff Cortright, and Tony Barthels) constitute this first group. His experience of struggle with worship services has helped Michael Seifert as a pastor to remain sensitive to visitors at his church who are unfamiliar with worship practices there.

The other side of the tension focuses especially on the positives of worship in the ELFK. (Not that the first side doesn't have anything positive to say; it's just that this second side simply doesn't have any criticism to offer.) Most of the earlier students to study at Leipzig (Rich Miller, Timothy Schmeling, and Peter Hermanson) saw only benefits in the ELFK style of worship. Peter Hermanson appreciated the stable nature of the church services. He and the others present knew what to expect in church. They didn't have to worry about innovations from week to week. He also had positive things to say about the chanting which plays a large role in ELFK church services. Rich Miller also commented glowingly about the role of music in the ELFK:

I liked the worship very much. Many of the hymn tunes are the same. In fact, I like the German setting of those hymns better. CW [Christian Worship, the

Wisconsin Synod hymnal], I think, tried to freshen up many of the melodies. I found the opposite. The German hymnal sounded a lot “fresher” to me. There is also more chanting by the pastor in their services, which also sounded very nice.²¹

On the whole, both sides of the question raise legitimate points. The ELFK hymnal and worship services do require some adjusting, and groups within their church body are presently working to publish a new hymnal. At the same time, their present hymnal has many historic, beautiful, and important songs and orders of worship in it that need to be preserved. Worship practices in the ELFK have proven beneficial for both their own people and the Americans visiting them, so these certainly should not be changed. Ultimately, our German brothers and sisters shouldn't have to catch the worship mania so prevalent in American Lutheranism. Thankfully, this is the case, as Dan Tess observed based on a conversation he had with a German student. “...many of the worship controversies, which had been boiling in the U.S., simply weren't a concern over there.”²²

Regarding Church and Ministry

Undoubtedly the bigger controversy within the ELFK and her fellow Lutherans came in the form of debates over the doctrine of Church and Ministry. The problem grew during the years from 2000-2001. Some of the Gaststudenten became closely involved. Michael Seifert heard about the discussions in their early stages during his time there. Peter Hermanson and David Preus saw the disagreements escalate. Peter offers this perspective.

While I was there the ELFK was reviewing [Church and Ministry], and there were a few current and retired Pastors that sought David and me out to discuss this issue. The individuals that sought us out were largely against the theses that were later adopted as the official doctrine of the ELFK. As I understand it a couple of these pastors are no longer with the ELFK over this issue. It was a bit disheartening to see how this issue was handled, especially since the Doctrine of the Ministry was hardly an issue for the ELFK before this, since they did not have

²¹ Rich Miller Survey

²² Dan Tess Survey

the questions surrounding teachers, staff ministers, etc. that we have in the WELS. What was most tragic in my opinion was that there was pressure (whether only perceived or actual) from the WELS for the ELFK to resolve the issue quickly. It is my opinion that it was this pressure (again, even if it was only perceived pressure) that caused the ELFK to rapidly adopt the theses and not allow adequate time and discussion to make sure that everyone understood the issue(s) thoroughly. The individuals, who sought us out, felt as though they were becoming the victims of a “railroad-job” and that the WELS was ultimately the ones that were creating the pressure. Doctrine should never be decided hastily, and all sides should always feel that their opinions were heard, even if in the end unanimity is not reached. It did not appear to me that this happened in this instance.²³

Like Peter and David, Rich Miller was also called upon to contribute to the discussion on Church and Ministry. He offers another perspective.

From everything I’ve experienced, there are very good relations between WELS and ELFK – strong bonds, high regard, and so on.

There were debates and things going on with the topic of church and ministry during the times I was in Germany. The great majority of the pastors had agreed with the WELS position, but a few thought the “Missouri position” for lack of a better expression was what they had always been taught and what was scriptural.

When I was back in Leipzig in 2001-2002, four ELFK pastors left the synod over the question. I attended one synod convention in Zwickau where it was dealt with (two of the pastors broke with the synod following that). . . . Three people in my congregation [he was a member of St. Trinitatis that year] there in Leipzig disagreed vocally with the doctrine. I was then part of a committee with Pastor Hoffmann and a couple others who took part in discussions on the doctrine of church and ministry. I was impressed with how well Pastor Hoffmann had a grip on it, including the history of the doctrine in the Lutheran church – studying Martin Chemnitz and others to show that our position HAS been the position of the Lutheran church.

This paper is not intended to make any kind of statement on the doctrine of Church and Ministry, nor will it discuss this doctrine in detail. However, both Peter’s and Rich’s comments make an important point about doctrine in general and the practice of fellowship. Peter makes a good point that doctrinal discussions need to take place slowly without bullying any one side into

²³ Peter Hermanson Survey

an agreement. Richard also does well to celebrate the unity in scriptural teaching that Lutherans have around the globe and throughout time. It is important to study history, and most importantly Scripture, when it comes to doctrinal controversies.

Regarding the German Democratic Republic

The most influential factor in recent ELFK history has to be the DDR socialist government. Even after its fall, those who attend the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig can still see the effects of this government. The feelings of most Germans in the east toward this government were usually negative and critical. But this also produced some fascinating anecdotes.

Simply from an aesthetic point of view, almost all Gaststudenten took note of the different look of East Germany, especially architecture but also automobiles. Many of the buildings seemed gray and dilapidated. The American students also noticed the renovation going on everywhere including Leipzig. One of the only good pieces of architecture in Leipzig from the DDR times, according to Pastor Andreas Drechsler, is the Gewandhaus mentioned previously.

Presently an ELFK pastor, Martin Wilde related an account from his youth. He and his friend (another ELFK member) would not join the East German “Pioneers” (a youth program meant to control and indoctrinate young people toward the wishes of the government) because of confessional reasons. Even though Martin and his friend got the best grades in the class, they were told they were unfit for higher education since they weren’t in “Pioneers”.

Martin Wilde also tells about East German pastors (not in the ELFK) who grew so discouraged and frustrated by the restrictive government that they immolated themselves. Wearing their full robe and Beffchen, the pastor would drench himself in gasoline, walk to the

front of the church, and put his hands over the candles on the altar to start himself on fire. Jeremy Laitinen saw a painting at the Checkpoint Charlie museum in Berlin of one such pastor performing this act.

Even ELFK members tried (and sometimes succeeded in) escaping from this government. Peter Hermanson relates what happened to Theo, an ELFK member, whose story is familiar to other former Gaststudenten.

There was a part-time student at the seminary while I was there who had bought a farm house with a little bit of land after the reunification. The farm house was a typical "Sozi Gebäude" ["socialist building"] but he was slowly working with his wife and children to remodel it. This individual, during the DDR Zeit [Period of the German Democratic Republic], had attempted to escape the DDR by swimming the Baltic Sea. He had trained for years and finally undertook the swim. He was in [West?] German waters, but hit a current that was pushing him back out to sea. A DDR military vessel discovered him and captured him. He was confined to a 6'x4' cell after his arrest. After he was released he successfully escaped to West Germany, but after the reunification he returned because he felt it was his responsibility to help rebuild former East Germany.²⁴

Peter also remembers discussions with fellow German seminarians, who would reminisce about loud-mouthed boys in school during the DDR times. These boys would talk about how their fathers didn't like the government. Then the next day or so it would be reported that the father had disappeared in the night.

Leipzig played a big role in the struggle to bring down the DDR. Geoff Cortright learned about this on his Seminartag. Seminartag is the day of opening services, socializing, and lecture that kicks off the winter semester at LTS. Geoff relates that Pastor Jonas Schröter gave them a tour of Leipzig for Seminartag. Jonas played a part in the demonstrations that brought about the change of government. He went to observe "Prayers for Peace" on Monday nights at the Nikolaikirche. These weren't so much prayers as non-violent political gatherings with thousands

²⁴ Peter Hermanson Survey

in attendance. Jonas was also among the crowd of demonstrators when the communist leader, Erich Honecker, ordered soldiers to shoot into the crowd. Thankfully the soldiers didn't.²⁵

However, not all the sentiments that Gaststudenten heard about the DDR were negative. Dan Tess writes, "I did hear various comments from the older generation about 'how things used to be' with a hint of nostalgia for perhaps lower prices or some sorts of economic simplicities."²⁶ Tim Schmeling also noted that he got the impression from some Germans (not necessarily those in the ELFK) that morality had declined in eastern Germany since the fall of communism. Even if the government was unfriendly to Christianity, they at least legislated morality in an external way. Now eastern Germans seem to have grown a little more licentious. Tim also commented on some of the let downs that came with the fall of the DDR. Under socialism the economy was stable. Many Germans had pensions upon which they depended that were regulated by the government. When that fell through, it had to play with their psychology.²⁷

What can we learn from the Free Church under the rule of the DDR? A couple of former American LTS students feel that the persecutions of the government really helped, in an earthly way, to keep God's teaching pure among the ELFK. The ELFK used to be in fellowship with the SELK, another independent Lutheran church body in Germany. However, the SELK, apart from such persecution, toyed with improper approaches to Scripture. Also, their persecutions under the DDR kept the ELFK from developing a sense of entitlement or becoming materialistic.

It is good for American Lutheran theology students to see and hear about these things. For one thing, some of the nostalgic reminiscences on the part of some former East Germans will help to curb the tendency in some American pastors to hold only to one form of government, and support only "democracy" or "the Republican party" as the divinely instituted form of rule. On

²⁵ Geoff Cortright Survey

²⁶ Dan Tess Survey

²⁷ Tim Schmeling Survey

the other hand, it is also good for American Lutheran theology students to see and hear about the persecutions that went on during this era, so that they do not relegate the thought of suffering for their faith only to early Christians in the coliseum or martyrs during the Reformation.

Regarding Future Exchange-Students

Finally, this essay wishes to present the argument that American Lutheran theology students should not only be allowed, but encouraged wholeheartedly, to attend the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig.

Some of the concerns surrounding the prospect of a year off for a pastoral student deal with retention in the eight year program from MLC in New Ulm through WLS in Mequon. Some on the faculty of both schools have expressed concern about students becoming distracted from returning home either by a potential wife or other academic interests. The case of Nathan Bode validates this concern. However, the case of Rich Miller presents a counter-argument showing that romantic interests do not necessarily distract from theological study and commitment.

Furthermore, the case of Nathan Bode does not provide a fair assessment of the exchange program. The evidence seems to indicate that Nathan had many priorities in addition to pastoral studies. Perhaps, even before leaving for Germany, he felt equally committed to all of his interests and did not place ministerial training over other possible paths such as marriage or other fields of study.

At this point in his education, Anthony Barthels states that he is over 75% sure he wants to become a pastor someday. His time in Leipzig has not changed his mind about that at all. Leipzig has been for him, more than anything, a time of reflection, not one of persuasion one way or the other.²⁸ Peter Hermanson has expressed commitment to the pastoral ministry after his

²⁸ Tony Barthels Survey

post-graduate work, as enunciated above. Dan Tess, although he left WLS, has said that his time in Leipzig had nothing to do with this decision.²⁹

Another important reason for allowing and encouraging pastoral students to take time off for Leipzig has to do with the CELC (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference). Many of the American Gaststudenten had no knowledge of the CELC at all before going to Leipzig. The ELFK has a greater appreciation for the unity of doctrine and fellowship in the CELC than many in her bigger sister WELS do. Allowing American Lutheran theology students to attend LTS would not only foster improved relations with between the ELFK and WELS but would also propagate knowledge within WELS circles of the greater number of fellow believers throughout the world in the CELC.

More than one former Gaststudent has commended the ELFK for staying connected with their youth. Tim Schmeling said, “The ELFK has done a good job of uniting youth and pastors. That relationship has been maintained well by things like Kindersingewoche and Studentenkreis.”³⁰ Geoff Cortright used Studentenkreis as a model during his vicar year for a youth program. Rich Miller agrees that the ELFK has had great success with their youth. He indicates that they have found a way to stay connected to young people without the glitzy, expensive, vacation-style entertainment of many WELS youth retreats.³¹ Geoff Cortright said it best. “Studentenkreis is a good example of how the WELS could learn from the ELFK about reaching out to youth.”³²

In the end, a year at the seminary in Leipzig will broaden the worldview of American Lutheran students in so many ways. For instance, Geoff Cortright says:

²⁹ Dan Tess Survey

³⁰ Tim Schmeling Survey

³¹ Rich Miller Survey

³² Geoff Cortright Survey

I learned from my time in Germany that the calling the WELS a “German synod stuck in their German ways” is not a fair judgment. It’s human nature not to want change. It was true in Malawi.³³ It’s true in Canada. It’s not a fair assessment to blame that on our German heritage.³⁴

Rich Miller sees this invaluable benefit in Americans studying abroad.

One thing that being in Germany (or Europe in general) taught me was that USA is not the center of the universe. I think many of us Americans unconsciously think that way sometimes.³⁵

Tim Schmeling wraps up this thought nicely tying it together with Confessional Lutheranism.

The ELFK offers us the least Americanized version of Lutheranism. The ELFK can help us to see how much our American culture has seeped into our Lutheranism. It wouldn’t help to absorb the different church bodies [of the CELC] into each other. It is a big advantage to get the perspective of someone with a different background and history. I like to bounce exegetical or historical questions off of the theologians [in the ELFK].³⁶

Lord grant that the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod continue to foster their fellowship with the saints in the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany. May He continue to provide WELS and ELS with pastors. And may at least some of these pastors take time to study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig.

³³ Geoff served as a sort-of vicar in Malawi, something he was spurred on to do by his time in Leipzig!

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Rich Miller Survey

³⁶ Tim Schmeling Survey

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