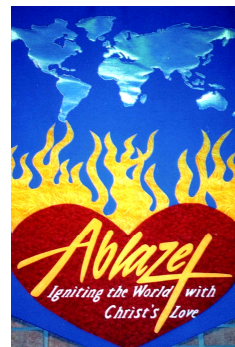


***"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." – Ecclesiastes 4:12***



Dear Friends in Christ,

It's difficult to believe that this newsletter marks the completion of eight months of service here! Thanks for sticking with us through these exciting and sometimes challenging times. We are thankful that God has placed you in our lives. Your prayers, thoughtfulness, and actions have helped to sustain and encourage us.

Spring Is Here!

As you know, this winter was a long and bitter one. What a joy to see everything transformed by the much-anticipated appearance of spring! Flowers are popping up left and right, and brilliant green is visible everywhere. I imagine that this time next year our newsletter will express a great deal of sadness at the thought of preparing to leave this place permanently. In the meantime, however, we are just soaking up the beauty – grateful that we get to spend this part of our lives here. We are also excited to see so many people out and about again after the torpidity of winter. We pray that the new activity of spring will provide increased opportunities to reach out to our students and to the community.

Easter Festivities

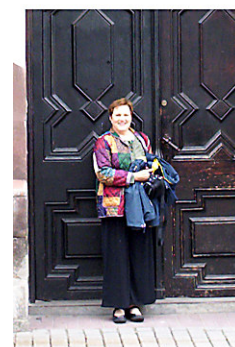
Christmas was a beautiful time but a difficult one also as it was one of our first Christmases away from home. Thankfully, at Easter, "home" came to us. Jon's mom, dad, maternal grandfather, and paternal grandmother came to visit. It was a blessing to have them here to celebrate this important holiday with us. The joy of celebrating Easter with family and having many new eyes here in Cieszyn helped us appreciate even more the many blessings we have been provided during our service in Poland. It was wonderful to see them take in the beauty and culture of Poland and to be able to share our lives here with them. If anyone wants a recap, please talk to Russ, Cathy, Paul, or Mary Frances – I think any of them would be eager to talk.

We spent Easter Monday (a holiday here) with our principal, Lidia, and her family. She has been so kind to us, and we were honored that she extended her kindness to our family during their stay. Our visit there was a highlight of the trip. It was a good time of celebrating and getting to know them better. Our family was able to see many places here in Eastern Europe including our apartment and church in Cieszyn. This made the family a lot more comfortable with our decision to come back next year. We were also able to track down some family roots which was a lot of fun and a unique cross-cultural experience.

Graduation

Like many students in the U.S., our seniors complete their school year a little bit sooner than their younger schoolmates. Just recently, they celebrated their graduation. Though they are finished with classes and high school, their graduation doesn't really equal freedom from scholarly duties. In fact, one of their greatest academic challenges is yet to come. They still have about a month left to complete various sections of their Matura exam. From what we have been told, this exam is essential to their being accepted to a Polish university and is a source of great stress and pressure. Please keep them in your prayers as they face the anxiety and strain generally associated with this exam.

Through the Ablaze! initiative, LCMS seeks to share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. No matter where we are, each of us has opportunities to share God's love with those around us. What opportunities do you see in your church, workplace, or neighborhood? LCMS also lists opportunities at www.lcmsworldmission.org. Check it out!





Looking Ahead

Now that we have decided to return to Cieszyn next year, we are doing what we can to make our next ten month stint as successful as possible. We believe that further language training will be incredibly useful, and we are enthusiastic about having the chance to participate in a Polish language course that is offered here in August. Though it means returning early from the U.S., we are thrilled at the chance to learn more Polish. We pray that this will open more doors for us and create greater opportunities to minister to our friends and co-workers in the coming year. The downside to this is that there are costs associated with this course and with other aspects of another year (ex. housing, a living stipend, insurance, flights, etc.). As with last year, we will need financial support to carry out our work here.

If your church or organization would be interested in supporting God's work here in Poland or in learning more about the mission work here, please let us know. We hope to make many visits over the summer – allowing us to reconnect with friends and supporters, to meet new people, and to share information about the Ablaze initiative of which we are a part. Since we will only be back in the States for six weeks and we are not yet certain where we will be living, please contact us as early as possible if we can come visit you. That will allow us to set up times to meet so that we can plan our short time accordingly.



Getting Involved

As we shared last time, short term volunteer opportunities are available in Poland. Having participated in mission work here and having worked with some members of CME (the location of the short-term opportunity), we feel confident recommending it to others. We have learned so much through our work here – it would be wonderful if our friends and family could participate in this experience as well. Individuals are welcome or, as stated in the position description, "a congregation with 8 willing short-term missionaries could cover the needs of this service opportunity for a whole year!" Visit www.lcmsworldmission.com and click on "Service Opportunities" to learn more about this opportunity or other mission sites in the U.S., Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other parts of Eurasia.



Prayers and Praises

- * For Heather's new job. In a short time, she will begin work with MOST Ministries in Ann Arbor, MI. For more info on Heather and MOST Ministries check out her blog at <http://www.xanga.com/searchedandknown139/>
- * That the Benning/Turis family had a safe, fun, and educational visit
- * For our students preparing for the Matura – that they may turn to God during this time of stress and lean on Him for comfort
- * For our preparations to return home in June and that we choose wisely about where to live and work during our short stay in the States
- * For our upcoming symposium with fellow volunteers as we collaborate to find the most effective practices in our respective ministries
- * For the Hinrich family and the Bible School at CME
- * That our friend and principal, Lidia Palac, is recovering well from serious back problems
- * For Jordan's brother, Brook, as he continues to face some health concerns
- * For support raising – that our fellow volunteers will receive the funding that they need and that supporters will be blessed as they see their gifts working throughout the world



We thank you for your continued prayerful support. We pray that we may all be open to opportunities to share the joy of Christ's resurrection so that others may learn about the joy of eternal life with our Lord and Savior.



Jonathan and Jordan Benning

Photos: (page 1) the Cieszyn flower, Cathy (Jon's mom) in front of the primary school, Grandma Benning and Grandpa Turis, graduation (page 2) wooden church in Zakopane, parish building window, inside Mátyás Church in Budapest, more of Mátyás Church, Statue Park

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