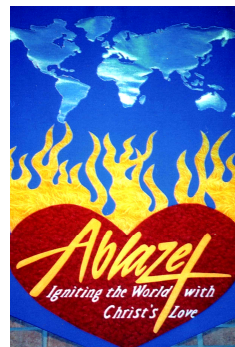
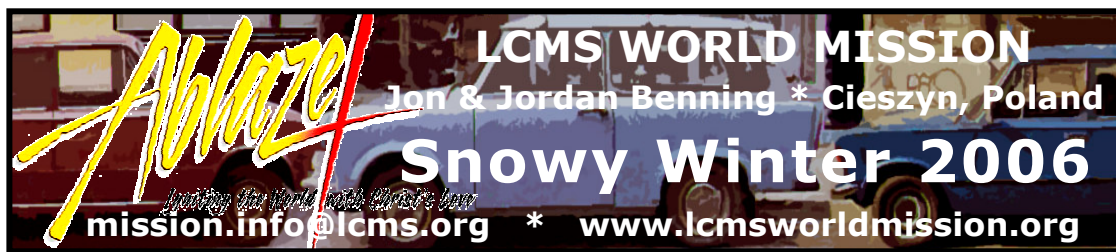


***"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." – Ecclesiastes 4:12***



Dear Friends in Christ,

It's so good to be writing to you again, both because we enjoy being in touch with you and also because it means that we have the means to write. During the past couple of months, as some of you know, we've had a bit of technology trouble. Our trusty laptop proved itself not-so-trusty, self-destructed its hard drive, got shipped back to the U.S. for repairs, held hostage at the customs office in Warsaw, and – after over almost two months of such adventures – was finally returned to us. During this time, we learned that we were not cut out to serve in remote areas of the world. It seems that without 24/7 computer access (preferably with an internet connection), our work and daily lives seem much more difficult.

While the realization of our technology dependence is a bit humbling, it also brings with it an appreciation for how often we *do* have the tools of a laptop, Skype (a computer telephony program that allows us to call home from our computer), and the internet. They truly have been important in our work, in our communication with friends, family and supporters, and in our adjustment to living in this new place. During the time since we last wrote, we have also been blessed with other aids to our work and special additions to our regular routine. This newsletter contains information about some of these changes, decisions about the future, and exciting possibilities for ongoing mission work in Poland.

Studniowka

For seniors at schools throughout Poland, one of the very biggest events of the year (next to graduation and the matura/college entrance exam), is Studniowka. It takes place approximately 100 days before graduation and is similar to Senior Prom in the U.S. Jon and I were thankful to be invited by our students, and it was interesting to take part in this significant event. There were some short speeches to begin the evening, followed by a couple of dances during which students pair up with teachers, including us. The first dance was a kind of ceremonial march around the dance floor and was fairly easy to follow. The second was a waltz – I have to say that I was a bit rusty and the dance floor was very crowded so that one wasn't quite as successful. Following those dances, the students performed a couple of skits. They were parodies of teachers and situations at the school – I was really impressed by their creativity and humor. After the skits, we ate a nice dinner which was followed by more dancing and (though we had returned home by that point) some karaoke as well. From what we heard, festivities went on into the wee hours of morning. Ah, to be that young again. =)

Missionary Retreat in Poland

From time to time, the volunteers in this region have the pleasure of reuniting with one another. The whole gang got together in early November in Stary Smokovec, Slovakia, and then again in Bratislava around Thanksgiving. We met again in late February in Wisla, Poland. Wisla is a town about 45 minutes from Cieszyn, most famous for its ski slopes and Poland's ski-jumping superstar, Adam Malysz. Though Adam didn't fare as well as hoped at the recent Olympic Games, he's still a hometown hero. In addition to the variety of A.M. products available all over town (mousepads, t-shirts, etc.), you can also find a life-sized chocolate sculpture of him and his skis housed near the town square. Now that's love.

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!





In addition to providing such a unique tribute, Wisla also offered plenty for us to do and see during our short weekend visit. We shopped, soaked in the beauty of the surrounding mountains, and frolicked at the indoor water park (hooray for waterslides!). Even with all of that excitement, the favorite activity seemed to be hanging out in the common room at our hostel – catching some of the Olympic coverage, relaxing, and enjoying fellowship with one another. We were grateful for Harriet's (the volunteer in Gliwice, Poland) help in organizing the event and for being able to stay in the hostel affiliated with her school. It was a great time for encouragement and fun.

Should We Stay or Should We Go Now?

As some of you may have noted from our web log, we recently had to decide what to do about a second year in Cieszyn. Former volunteers told us from the start that staying for a second year would be a very sound decision, yet we were torn about whether we should stay for an additional year or not. Are we really making any difference? Will a second year be useful to our school/students/ministry? Is it practical? And (most importantly) is it God's will? After a lot of prayer, advice-seeking, discussion, and pro-con lists, we have chosen to return to Poland for a second year of service.



Book It!

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Thank you to everyone who has donated English reading materials! The elementary school (SPTE) library is in dire condition as far as availability of English books is concerned, and your donations are helping to gradually make it a valuable resource to both teachers and students. As you can see by the pictures, the library is tiny. They only have three bookshelves and enough books to fill maybe one. Before your donations they only had two books in English. We have received about 120 books from you, and half of those books have been given to the library. The other half we are saving to use for classes and give to students. We have already passed some books out and the students have been very excited. We explained to the librarian where the books had come from and she was very thankful. She expressed how helpful the books would be to those learning English. Thank you so much, and if it is possible, please continue to send new or gently used books as they are available. We are very grateful for your support in this endeavor.



So, for those of you who have considered a trip to visit us here but haven't had the time or funds, you now have extra time to manage it. You're welcome on our couch any time when we are here. We will be returning to the States in the middle of June for Jon's brother, David's wedding. He will be getting married in Carlinville, IL, and the family is in the midst of gearing up for a big party. We should be staying in the States for six to eight weeks, so we will also try to get some sort of job. If anyone has a good idea, besides detassling, we will listen to you.



Bible School

Shortly after moving to Poland, we were happy to be introduced to Tim (American) and Renata (Polish) Hinrich. They have been working in the Czech Republic and in Poland for the past seven years or so and are instrumental in the work of the Lutheran Bible School in Dziegielow, Poland. Dziegielow is about a twenty minute bus ride from Cieszyn.

For our first Thanksgiving in this new land, Tim and Renata invited us to their home for a traditional Thanksgiving meal. They also host a monthly worship service in English at our school. Their friendship and ministry have meant a lot to us, and we are currently trying to determine how we can be of more service to them. Jon already teaches an English class to some of the Bible School students – a highlight of his week and a special time of conversation with mature Christian adults - but we know that there are other areas in which they could use assistance. Most notably, housing for their students (from Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine) is no longer available, and new housing will have to be located for next year if they hope to continue the work they are doing. This is causing a significant financial and logistical challenge. Please keep them in your prayers as they search for answers to their many questions for the coming year.



Out of the Loop

We have one more area that could use some prayer. While we have made some progress with our language skills and enjoy the friendship of some of the teachers, we still find that we are frequently left out of the loop. Classes are cancelled, meetings are

planned, and events begin and end without our prior knowledge. Obviously, flexibility is an important skill to practice in a new culture, but we still wish there was more we could do to avoid some of these information gaps. Please pray that we become as accessible as needed so that we can have the details we need to be effective in our work and time management. Pray also that our colleagues will come to consider us as fully part of the team, encouraging them to ensure we are kept up to date with the school/class schedule.

Volunteer Gary from Chicago

We recently had the honor of being joined in Poland by another Midwesterner. Gary Tate, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Roselle, Illinois, was here between January and early March. He volunteered at the Center for Mission and Evangelism (CME) in Dziegielow, helping with the development of an after-school program, conducting classes on puppetry, and serving in whatever capacity he was needed. It was a blessing to get to know Gary, to share in his stories, and to witness his willingness to serve.

Gary's time in Poland was valuable, and hopefully others will be able to follow in his steps. The CME is the Polish Lutheran Church's mission outreach arm. It organizes many programs, for young and old throughout Poland, to share the love of Jesus with as many people as possible. If you are interested, World Mission has posted the position description at this address: <http://www.lcms.org/ca/mission/service-opps/detailpage.asp?ID=159>. Short-term volunteers (for about three months) are needed to help continue the work going on at CME.

Prayers and Praises

- * For Heather as she prepares to return home and searches for work there
- * For an enjoyable and restful retreat with friends and fellow volunteers
- * For the Hinrich family and the Bible School
- * For the recuperation of our friend and principal, Lidia Palac, from serious back problems
- * For recent opportunities to strengthen relationships with the teachers at our schools
- * That we have been kept safe and warm throughout this very harsh winter
- * That our computer was returned to us and is in good working order
- * That we would be granted wisdom, creativity, and insight as we prepare lessons for our students – particularly those who have stressful tests to take in the near future
- * For Jordan's brother, Brook, as he is experiencing some health concerns
- * That Harriet's health has improved
- * For healing and help to the many people affected by the tornados in Springfield, IL
- * For the family and friends of Joseph Voigtmann as they celebrate his life and rejoice in the knowledge that he is now where we all want to be, with our Lord and Savior
- * For the opportunity to be a student in Dr. Reed Lessing's (a Concordia Seminary professor) class on the book of Amos during his visit to CME
- * For the arrival of spring and the melting of the snow
- * For the safety of Jon's parents and grandparents as they travel to visit us here
- * For our preparations to return home in a couple of months and hopefully find work during our six to eight week stay
- * For the coming of Easter and the opportunities to focus on and witness about the death and resurrection of our Savior

Thank you again for your steady stream of prayer, encouragement, and generosity. We are grateful to be sharing this mission field with you.

Jonathan and Jordan Benning

Photos: (page 1) Jesus Church @ Christmas, winter is still here, Jordan and Heather and our teacher friend from LOTE, Christmas concert @ theater in town (page 2) SPTE first grade class, ahhh colors, the bare SPTE library, some of the few books they have, the front of SPTE (page 3) cleaning the snow off the roofs, volunteer Gary from Chicago, skit @ Studniowka, disco ball @ Studniowka, students dancing



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