

6/24/09

Today was our last day with the youth. I know it has been a while since I wrote my lesson and so much has happened since then. I will try to give you all (or few) a brief highlight reel. Bible Studies were led by Christa, Josh, Me, and Liz. The kids were fairly receptive, and I think by the end they were opening up more and more to the word. Now we will pray that they will continue to be fed by Pastor Romas at St. John's Lutheran in Klaipeda. We traveled to Palanga (a coastal city of Lithuania), Latvia, and through the city of Klaipeda. We taught the youth how to play American football, ultimate Frisbee, and baseball – sort of. Have you ever thought about how hard it is to explain baseball? Let's just say they kind of reminded me of tee-ball games I have seen. Also, we crafted duct trape wallets, decouped some boxes (I cut out a bunch of pictures of old Martin Luther), and painted flower pots. The Lithuanians taught us many things as well. I learned about storks and their nests, Lithuanian card games, and the game of potato, as well as a few phrases and key words in Lithuanian.

It was wonderful to see the Word of God going out into these people's lives, to be part of that going out, and to hear it coming back in their answers to our questions, and their questions. In four days we have gone from not being able to communicate with these kids to wishing we could stay with them longer. It is amazing to see how our relationships together have grown along with our faith.

We will fly out of Palanga tomorrow around 5, to Germany, spend the night there, and then return home to Detroit the following day. I am very excited to be in Germany and to see how my speaking the language holds up. Please pray for our safety and for the continual spiritual growth of these Lithuanians.

6/21/09

This one will be a two-fer instead of a three-fer, so sorry if you were expecting long journals every time. On Saturday we spent the majority of the day in a bus with 30 Lithuanian youth traveling to Riga, Latvia. Riga is the capital city of Latvia and is a very nice place to visit. Unfortunately a four hour bus ride kind of takes you out of the mood to walk around a city, but we saw some interesting things. One unusual item was the church steeples of the churches and cathedrals. Instead of crosses, many of the churches had golden roosters at the top. This was to remind them of the three times that Peter had denied Christ before the rooster crowed and that we must not do that.

We attended church in the morning and attempted to sing songs in Lithuanian to mixed success. Pastor Thoma preached in English while Pastor Romas translated for the congregation. Today was our first day of teaching and doing our program. We had quite a good turn-out for tie-dying shirts, ultimate Frisbee, and the first of our four Bible studies. The youth seem very interested to spend time with us and to hear what we have to say. It will be fun to see our relationships progress throughout the week and to see them growing in their faith.

Continuing in our Lutheran mission work we went out for beer and pizza with Pastor Romas after the lesson. They have quite good beer, and the place we ate had 60 different selections of pizzas. None are quite as good as the home-cooked ones, but were

good none the less. We are now debriefing and preparing for another day in which to experience God's gifts to us in Lithuania.

6/19/09

I will attempt to cram all of the happenings of our first three days here into a single journal. The first day is easy, we flew. Detroit to Chicago and then Chicago to Copenhagen. Not much in the way of excitement, except for the Scandinavian Airlines flight over the Atlantic was the longest of my life. Just over eight hours in the air left plenty of time for dinner, a movie, and sleep. Plus, we were provided with our own personal TVs located in the headrest in front of us, providing an exciting option to view a live feed of the flight from the view of straight out the plane, or underneath the plane. This option was especially exciting on takeoffs and landings, giving a whole new perspective on the flying experience.

My visa received its first stamp in Copenhagen, and security checkpoints are now old hand. Luckily, I ran into no problems at these checkpoints, while others on our trip, Pastor Thoma, were not so lucky. Aside from a minor Scotch incident we had no hassles. That is, until we got to the Lithuanian baggage claim to find that our bags were still in Copenhagen. It wasn't until this afternoon that we got our bags, but I've gone longer on the same pair of clothes so I can't complain too much.

So here I sit, in the (deservedly) four-star Hotel Klaipeda, closet full of clothes, stomach full of food, and body full of weariness. We had an excursion to the Lithuanian sand dunes today. Large dunes on the Baltic Sea provided views of the far-off Russian and Swedish borders. Quite a bit different from the dunes in Michigan, and yet, very reminiscent of past memories.

This evening we had our first meeting at the church we are serving. Exactly 30 youth were there to meet us, play icebreakers (very interesting when you throw in a language barrier, but our translator was a big help), and worship together. It was an exciting preview of the ministry we will be offering them, and a great chance to see that the Word of God transcends the boundaries of human language.

The church itself is a three-story building that is more like a large house than a cathedral type church. The first floor is the sanctuary, with the second floor being more of a fellowship hall and kitchen, and the third floor is still a mystery. We didn't go up there yet. But, the church is nestled into the heart of downtown Klaipeda, surrounded by cobble stone streets, which made for a scenic, fun, and short walk from our hotel.

It is nearly midnight here, and we have a long adventure ahead of us tomorrow. I thank God for all of you and your supportive prayers for us. Continue to prayer for our travels and work here. There is so much more to tell, but my eyelids are starting to betray me, and the comfy bed is calling my name.