

25 June AD 2009 – 10:20 p.m.

I have been pretty sick the last two days. I think I ate some bad food two nights ago in Palanga. That's why I haven't written. Just wasn't up to sitting and typing.

We are in Germany now. We arrived, navigated the airport to find the trains, figured out how to buy tickets, found the train we needed, made our way to the center of the city, found our hotel, and now we are safe and sound inside. At dinner we spoke of taking a train to Heidelberg to see the castle there (along with some Luther sites). It's about an hour by train. We'll see. I'm still feeling queasy so I may stay behind.

I must say that Christ had some pills to help with the nausea (and other difficult symptoms) and it helped me get through the day today, that is, a busy travel day. It's tough to travel when you're ill. This has never happened to me before. It has been a new experience.

We are all very pleased with the results of the work in Lithuania. We are all very excited to come home and tell everyone about it!

Blessings to all. See you soon.

23 June AD 2009 – 12:08 a.m.

Okay, so you get the idea that I am continually returning to the hotel so late that I can't actually write a journal for the day without it actually being the "next" day. Yikes.

It was a good day. Romas told me at dinner tonight that he really wants us to come again next year. He has been talking with the youth and they have been really receptive to the work. He confessed that he expected a good turn out the first day, but that he expected it to dwindle through the week. He did not expect that we would have so many each day. And we did have a lot...as many as thirty per day.

He also said that a German group came last summer and they were never able to make the connections that we made. The youth became good friends with our group the very first day. He is surprised, but gives thanks to God for His blessing of the work.

Today we went to a little old church just over the border of Latvia in a town called Liepaja. It was only about an hour and a half away from Klaipeda. Good experience for the group. The priest was there to meet us. We had our study there and then went to the sea. The lesson went well.

The whole country of Lithuania is celebrating the festival of St. John the Baptist tonight. Interestingly, this festival has its roots more in the pagan traditions of the country. People walk through the streets singing traditional Lithuanian folk songs, drinking A LOT, and

generally having a good time. Tonight, to celebrate the feast, Romas and Ingrida took us to a little restaurant where live music was being played. Good music. It is interesting to hear Lithuanians singing Stevie Ray Vaughn and The Beatles.

Tomorrow is the last day for the camp. I'm sure it will go well. It went by quickly, but the time was certainly well spent.

Blessings to all.

22 June AD 2009 – 1:09 a.m.

Actually, once again, it is really the NEXT day, but this counts for the 22nd.

Another long day, however, it was a fruitful one. By God's grace, the lessons are going well, the group is cohesive, and the efforts are showing real fruits in that the kids are coming back for more each day! This is great news.

Tomorrow we will continue as planned, however we may do our work in a different location. That's okay. We'll see.

By the way, for those of you checking out the pictures on the website, you probably noticed for the last couple of days that I gave up doing photos that only happened on that particular day. Too tired to sort them. Also, you may have noticed that yesterday, Romas armed Joe and I with authentic medieval armor and had us battle in the yard of the church. That was pretty neat, except that all of the armor I was wearing weighed 100+ pounds at least. When I took it off, I thought I ruptured a disc. Yikes.

Ibuprofen land is nice.

Blessings to you.

21 June AD 2009 – 8:00 a.m.

First of all, happy Father's Day to all dads, especially my dad, Ed! I hope you have a great day. I love you.

I just got back from breakfast and it looks like the internet is still not working. I suppose I'll mention it at the desk again.

Our group will meet at 9:15 this morning and we will walk to the church for worship. Afterwards we will come back to the hotel to rest for a few hours before we continue our program tonight. That will be nice.

I just got back from the church and it looks like the internet is functioning again.

It was nice to see some familiar faces in the service, that is, some of the youth from Friday and Saturday. After the benediction, Father Moras invited his wife forward to give us a gift from the congregation. It is a framed portrait of the significant structures in Klaipeda. Very nice. They also send their love and greetings to their brothers and sisters in Christ at Our Savior in Hartland. I told them that it is always a joy to be served by and give thanks to the same Christ who lives and reigns among all His people, no matter on which side of the ocean you reside.

We in turn gave to them the \$1,000 we saved as help toward their building program and the work of the Gospel among the youth in the region. They were very delighted to receive it. Romas said that the city government has halted their building plans and they are making it very difficult. Sounds familiar. He asked if it would be received well if they put all of the funds toward their work with the youth. I thought it would be fine.

There is a special festival service in the local cemetery this afternoon at 2:00 p.m. We are not planning to attend because we still have planning to do and everyone is dragging and in need of rest. You can only do so much. Romas explained that each year they gather in the cemetery in remembrance of the years when the communist occupied the land and restricted worship in the churches. During those times of fierce persecution, the Christians met in the cemeteries for worship because it was less suspicious in that the government allowed for burial ceremonies. So today they will go and rejoice that they are now free to worship Christ without fear.

Well, that's all for now. Peace to all in Christ. Thanks be to God. His mercies are new every morning!

20 June AD 2009 – 1:30 a.m.

Actually, it is now June 21.

The internet is down right now. I hope it will be up and running by the morning. I wrote a note to be read by Pastor Heckert after the Divine Services but am unable to send it. I will try very soon to call my wife and dictate it to her so that she can get it to him before tomorrow.

Today was a very busy day. We left the hotel and walked to the church where we met the youth and the bus that would take all of us to Riga, Latvia.

I had a scheduled meeting with Dr. Weinrich, a former professor of mine at Concordia and now the president of the Seminary in Riga. That didn't work out too well.

Remember the scotch I bought which was confiscated? That was for Dr. Weinrich. Well, I bought another bottle here in Klaipeda before we left for Riga. Romas told us it would be a three and a half hour drive to Riga, which would put us there by 12:00 or 12:30. We would eat lunch and I would be to my meeting on time (which was scheduled for 2:00).

After the meeting we would go back to Klaipeda, arriving no later than 6:00 p.m. I should tell you now that we didn't anticipate that our bus driver would only drive 45 mph. Yikes.

Anyway, we left Klaipeda at 9:30 a.m. and rolled into Riga and stopped at the main bus station to pick up our tour contact right at 2:00 p.m. She was with two other young girls, one of which (after we went a bit further) hopped off the bus with me to run through the city to find where I was to meet Dr. Weinrich. We made it there, only a few minutes late. I waited for two hours but he never showed. Hmm...not like him.

Eventually I saw our group come passing by the cathedral (the designated spot for meeting Weinrich). I finally gave up and went with them. We walked for a while when we came to THE city cathedral right across the street from the Luther Academy building (which is the cathedral where I originally told Romas and the young girl I was to meet Weinrich). The girl took me to the wrong cathedral. Yikes, again.

So...after all this (and remember I had already waited two hours), we toured a few more hours, stopped at a "Frankenmuth" style amusement park/shopping/restaurant place for dinner, and then went home. We got back at midnight. It was a long day.

BUT... The Americans had a long bus ride to have lots of fun with the Lithuanians. They played games, taught and learned each others songs, and pretty much had a great time.

Tomorrow morning we will attend the Divine Service at 10:00 am at the church. I am preaching. After that, we'll most likely come back to the hotel for naps (since we are all pretty tired) and then the first of four full evenings of activities and studies begins. After our initial study and activities to get everything rolling and our time in Latvia together, I'd say the group is very cohesive and will be very receptive to the work. The Lord bless all of you. More to come in the morning, just a few short hours from now!

19 June AD 2009 – 11:59 p.m.

As you can see, I'm awfully close to this being a journal for tomorrow...since it is very late. We had a very busy day. I'm sure the others have shared the details with you. And since it is very late, this journal will be short.

I would say that our first evening with the youth went very well. The kickoff was splendid and we saw relationships being stirred to life almost immediately. In addition, because they are in some sticky situations with regard to worship style, we had a wonderful opportunity to discuss liturgical things when our group got back to the hotel. We sat and talked for about a half hour. Great stuff.

Tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. (as has been the custom on the past trips) I will begin the day with Morning Prayer and start a read-through of one of the Gospels. I have invited the others and all are planning to attend.

The key highlights for today:

Liz had a bird poop in her hair. She has a lot of patience for things like that. She managed to go the whole day without needing to go back to the hotel for a shower. She's tough.

The luggage finally arrived at about 5:30 p.m. We were thrilled. Per usual, everything had been rearranged and I was missing one thing. Nothing too important, but nevertheless, still very annoying. I would say that it has been pretty much every trip I have lost at least one item during a search.

That's it for now. I need to wrap up and get to work getting some images on the site. Lots to do before bed.

Blessings to all.

18 June AD 2009 – 10:03 p.m.

Well, we made it. And there's a lot to tell so far.

First of all, this is a great group of servants. We're having fun, getting along, and generally enjoying each other's company. Again, the Lord has provided the right folks for the task at hand. I'm glad they're all here.

Now for some interesting notes.

This was Christa's first time in an airplane. When we left Detroit for Chicago, we were cheering for her. And when we landed, we did the same! I didn't realize that she gets motion sickness, though. I did find out on the way from Chicago to Copenhagen when just as we were about to land, Christa started to get sick and she threw up in her paper coffee cup! And then frantically, I called to Joe right in front of me (because I was holding the coffee cup for Christa and couldn't search for a vomit bag) to find a bag or something bigger. He did and Christa managed to finish off what was left in her stomach while I was still holding the little paper coffee cup nearly full. To top off this story, remember, we were about to land. I motioned to the stewardess to come and get this cup because I knew we were in for trouble when the plane touched down and the pilot hit the brakes. She motioned to me that there was nothing she could do because she was strapped in.

A couple of Swedish guys (maybe they were Swedish) sitting across the aisle from me looked really worried and I'm sure they could tell I was, too.

I think everyone watching, fully knowledgeable of what was in the cup, braced for impact together.

The plane touched down, the pilot hit the brakes, and I did everything I could not to spill the cup. I didn't spill a drop. I did get a couple of drips on my hands, but that was from the previous act of vomiting and not from the landing. I thought the guys next to me were going to put me up on their shoulders and carry me around as a hero. But, you know, after three kids and now being faced with the situation of holding the cup sturdy during landing, I accepted it as a new challenge. Focusing on that perspective (and knowing that I had hand sanitizer in my backpack) kept me from gagging.

The next big event took place after we got off of the plane. Now, mind you, I have a meeting with Dr. William Wenrich on Saturday at the seminary in Latvia. He used to be one of my professors at Concordia, Fort Wayne. He is a Scotch drinker like me, so in Chicago (because I knew we only had a few minutes to get from our arrival flight in Copenhagen to our departure flight) I bought a bottle at the duty free shop to bring to him as a gift. The saleswoman put the bottle (still in its box) into the clear customs bag, put the receipt into the bag, stapled it and then sealed the bag for transport through the airports. This didn't stop security from confiscating it at the checkpoint in Denmark. As I went through, the guard told me that the only way I could keep it was to check it as baggage and that I could do that back at the ticketing booth. Mind you, I had exactly 17 minutes before the doors closed for our flight (since we were cutting it so close in our connection flight schedule). I think he figured I'd just leave it with him. I ran through the airport, back to the booth. They told me it was too late and that I would need to check it in a suitcase, which I did not have; just a bottle of Scotch in a plastic customs bag. A little upset, I gave it to the man behind the counter and said "Merry Christmas" and then took off running for the security check point. I made it back with 10 minutes to spare; however, it took exactly 7 minutes to get through the line. Once through, I ran through the terminal and got to C3 (our departure gate) right after the transport bus had already departed to drive everyone to the plane. Thankfully, they sent a special car back for me and they let me on the plane. When I walked on the plane, the folks in our group waved and smiled. They did say they were worried when they started to leave and I wasn't there yet.

The moral of this story...well...I don't know what it is. I guess, don't buy the Scotch until the last leg of the trip, even if the people in the airport say it will be fine. There's always a thirsty security guard or ticket-booth attendant waiting in the wings to take it away from you and claim "European Union Liquid Transportation Policy"!

Enough of that. When we finally made it to Lithuania, it was without our luggage. And when I say it was without our luggage, I mean ALL of our luggage. Not a single suitcase made it through to Palanga. Needless to say, we are eagerly awaiting for all of it to arrive. God willing, tomorrow morning. That would be very nice. We all need showers and clean clothes.

Romas picked us up in a little church van which he and a few kids from his church decorated the inside with balloons. We went to dinner with Romas and his wife Ingrida. But before that, they took us to the hotel to drop off our backpacks where we were surprised by about 15 kids from his church youth group standing outside with signs

welcoming us to Lithuania. That was really nice. We'll be working with some of them throughout the week. Should be a great experience for all.

Can you tell I'm very tired? Blessings to all of you. More to come.