



# ***Are You a Wise Steward?*** by Pastor Glenn Huebel

*Note: The following article is the third of five articles published in Messiah Newsletter in 2007. The series is being republished this year in order to remind us of the principles of living as stewards of God.*

This is the third article in a series of five articles on Christian Stewardship. In May, I showed the breadth of Christian stewardship. Through faith in Christ the Christian is moved to offer freely and joyfully his whole life as a "living sacrifice" to God (Romans 12:2). In other words, stewardship is not about fundraising for the church. In June, I showed the importance of "faithfulness" in stewardship. God has *entrusted* us with many gifts to use for His gracious purposes and to His glory. Are we being faithful with these gifts, or do we use them to serve only self? In this article I will show the importance of wisdom in the stewardship life.

Stewardship is the management of one's whole life to God's glory. On a practical level, this is largely a matter of making decisions. The difference between good management of an asset, and poor management is found in the choices that are made. If you entrust your retirement savings to a financial manager, you want him or her to be prudent and wise in investment strategies. You probably would not use a financial manager who selects stocks by blind draw or the flip of a coin. You probably would not use a manager who just blindly follows everyone else in the market. You want a manager who studies the market, analyzes, and makes careful, thoroughly reasoned decisions based on sound assumptions. A wise and prudent investor can multiply a thousand dollar investment many times over in a period of time. A foolish investor can lose millions

even in a short time. Think of your life as a precious gift God has entrusted to you to invest. He has given you freedom to make decisions with your life, but the fruits belong to Him. Are you investing wisely or foolishly?

As a working definition I define wisdom in stewardship as follows:

*Using all gifts thoughtfully, carefully, creatively, and efficiently to achieve maximum benefit (the greatest return for the owner).*

For some people the tithe is little more than a bone thrown to satisfy or appease God. They truly believe that if they fulfill that obligation God is indifferent about whether or how they "spend" the rest of their lives (or money). That is like the small businessman giving the neighborhood mafia boss a fee each week for "protection." Treating God this way is a sign of unbelief and slavish fear, not love or honor. The Lord purchased us with a price, the innocent sufferings and death of Jesus. He cannot be "bought off" with a tithe. Are you wisely using ALL gifts entrusted to you?

Every decision is a stewardship decision. We are practicing stewardship when we shop for groceries, clothes, a house, or a car. We are also practicing stewardship when we choose a marriage partner, a job, a church, a school for our children, etc. Some of these decisions, though seemingly unrelated to stewardship, are actually the most important stewardship decisions of life because they have such huge consequences. Foolish decisions can result in a handicapped, or barren life which produces little fruit to the glory of God. Foolish decisions can lead a person out of faith altogether, and therefore out of stewardship. I firmly believe that the most important and wisest stewardship decision I ever made was the choice of my beloved wife. I am convinced that that single decision has not only blessed me, but has significantly increased the potential for blessing others through my life. I am sure

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*That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. —John 20:31*

that many husbands, and perhaps a few wives, can affirm the same in their own lives. How do we make wise rather than foolish decisions in life? Obviously, prayer has a large part to play in the decision-making process of a Christian. Jesus prayed all night before appointing the 12 apostles. The disciples prayed before choosing Judas' replacement. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). David's words, "Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me in a smooth path because of my enemies" (Ps 27:11) is a wise prayer for all of us as we make daily decisions. We should not, however, expect that God will give us some visible or audible sign to mark the right path to take in every decision we make. Many decisions do not have a right and wrong path. God gives us great freedom to make decisions in life. We do not have to live in constant, dreadful fear that He will rebuke or punish us for making the "wrong choice" at every cross road. Though some will probably disagree, God does not direct some people to buy vanilla and others to buy chocolate ice cream. Neither does He guide you to pick the winning horse, though one might question whether betting on horses is a wise decision to begin with. We would not need to apply "wisdom" if God simply made every decision for us.

Important decisions in life are usually made on the basis of a priority system. We all have one, but our systems may be entirely different. A right set of priorities, consistently applied, usually results in good decision-making. Foolish priorities usually result in foolish decision-making. Wise stewards have right priorities. This is where faith in Christ makes a huge difference, for the world has a very mixed up, often inverted priority system. The world, and our flesh, place a high value on worthless things, and a low value on important things. The chief example of that is Christ Himself whom the princes and wise men of this world rejected and crucified. He is a precious cornerstone to believers, but a stone of offense to unbelievers. Biblical priorities are contrasted to worldly priorities below:

<b><u>Biblical</u></b>		<b><u>Worldly</u></b>
Eternal	over	Temporal
Soul	over	body
Kingdom of God	over	kingdoms of this world
Heavenly treasures	over	earthly
God's wisdom	over	man's reason

The world, of course, inverts the above priorities and makes decisions on that basis. The world thinks that life consists of things possessed. It considers treasures of this earth (wealth, power, status, popularity, etc.) to be far more valuable than the treasures of heaven (Christ, justification, peace with God, faith, inheritance in heaven, etc). Though we Christians would intellectually choose the right priorities, our heart and daily decisions are not always consistent with our profession. What priorities are indicated by the way that you have spent money? What priorities are evidenced by the way that you have spent and continue to spend time? What priorities are evidenced by the major decisions you have made in your

life? Are you like the foolish rich man who collected things of the earth, but was not rich toward God (Luke 12:13-21)? Are you a wise steward?

Wise stewards seem like foolish people in the eyes of the world because their priorities are so different. The world does not, and cannot understand a person who truly "seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." His decisions seem absurd. On that note, it is gratifying to hear that young adults in America today are making some unusual decisions about life that disappoint their "baby boomer" parents. A surprising and growing number is turning back to orthodox Christian doctrine and morality, including a spiritual understanding of vocation. Young women with impressive degrees from elite universities (Harvard, Princeton) are making the decision to become stay-home mothers. Young men and women with potential for skyrocketing careers are abandoning materialistic goals and asking how they can best serve God and their fellow man in their vocations. Many young people have seen the emptiness and vanity of a materialistic lifestyle in their parents, and they are seeking to live "meaningful lives." Their parents and many of their contemporaries think they are foolish, but are they? (For an overview of this social change, read [The New Faithful](#) by Colleen Carroll)

Wise stewards make wise decisions on the basis of right priorities. If priorities go wrong we get lost fairly quickly in this deceptive world. Priorities, therefore, need to be examined from time to time. What are the real priorities that guide and shape your decisions in life? Are your goals worthy of your Christian confession of faith? Are you placing too much emphasis and importance on things that pass away (1 John 2:15-17) and not enough on things that really matter (Mark 8:36)? Do you seek FIRST the Kingdom of God, and trust that all earthly things will follow, or do you seek first the things of this world, and hope that the kingdom of God will follow?

One cannot be a wise steward without priorities generated by faith in Jesus Christ. Other aspects of wisdom may also be considered, but I'll have to save those for the September article.



*Kaiserpfalz Goslar, view from the Great Hall windows*

# Christian Marriage by Pastor Tom Chryst

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Late spring – early summer: it's the traditional time of year for weddings. June weddings used to be the most popular, though some claim that has changed in recent years. But either way, many of us will be celebrating wedding anniversaries around this time of year. Brenda and I marked 22 years together in June. Wow!



A friend of mine likes to say, “All men marry up!” In other words, all husbands are made better by their wives, whom they don't deserve. I think there's some worldly wisdom in that, but it made me think deeper. What about the great spiritual marriage of the Lamb and of his Bride the Church? Really, all marriages – and especially Christian marriages – are a picture of the union of Christ and the Church.

Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom, and we, the Church, are his Bride. So Scripture paints the picture. In Revelation 21, for example, you have the Bride beautifully adorned and presented to her husband:

*Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God... (Rev. 21:9-11a)*

Here, the Church in her glory is pictured not only as the Bride but also as the Holy City of Jerusalem, but in idealized form. Radiant like a jewel, 12 magnificent gates, streets paved of gold... but no temple. For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb ARE the temple. There is such perfect union with God, that his people don't need a special place to meet Him. He is with them always, perfectly.

So it's really proper to say, in this case, the Bride “marries up”. He finds His Bride in the gutter, dirty and dead. With all the ugliness and impurity of our sin, helpless and hopeless. But the Bridegroom rescues us from all of that. He restores, renews, even resurrects us and takes us to the altar. He pledges Himself to us forever. Not even death will us part.

We, the church, “marry up”, not only to a far better Bridegroom than we deserve, but we marry up to a blessed eternity and a glorious forever with our God. Because the Bridegroom died and rose. The dowry, the bridal price, is paid in His blood, more precious than all the gold in the world. And yet, like all His gifts, it is given freely.



In other words, YOU are blessed to be a part of that great spiritual marriage. You are part of the Bride of Christ, connected to Him in Baptism, sustained at the rail with his own Body and Blood. You are blessed to hear His Word, that life-giving, life-sustaining word of Gospel. And in that Word, the promises abound. The future is bright. In that Word, the “happily ever after” called Heaven is yours.

*The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord;  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word.  
From heav'n He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died.*

*LSB 644 “The Church's One Foundation”, v1*

Jesus also uses the picture of a wedding to draw an analogy to his second coming. In the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25), he tells of a wedding that is about to begin. But the bridegroom is “delayed”. The virgins, part of the wedding party, are waiting for his arrival and for the festivities to begin. But some of them are wise and well-prepared, making sure they have enough oil for their lamps. The foolish virgins are not ready – and end up locked out of the party. The lesson is clear: be ready! The Bridegroom (Jesus) may return at any time. Only those who are wise, well-prepared, and ready for his coming will hope to join him in the eternal wedding celebration. Only those who have faith, who have remained in his word, and whose sins are forgiven are ready for the party!

Then there's the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22 and Luke 14). Here, those invited to the wedding of the king's son are too busy or can't be bothered to accept the invitation. The Jews, God's chosen people, on the whole,



rejected Christ. So the king invites “anyone and everyone” to come instead – signifying the inclusion of the Gentiles into this great banquet of the kingdom. But proper attire is required! You must be clothed in wedding garments (which the host provided). Anyone who is not so dressed is thrown outside. Likewise, without the garb of Christ's righteousness, we don't belong at the wedding. We are only a part of the celebration by his grace, and through our faith in him.

*Through toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace forevermore  
Till with the vision glorious  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great church victorious  
Shall be the church at rest.*

LSB 644 “The Church's One Foundation”, v4



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## Vocations in Life – Parenting/Grand Parenting Series:

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There are many vocations throughout our life. Only recently, say in the last 75 years, has the family vocation changed from survival to that of seeking life's pleasures. Think about it. For the most part, we do not worry about what we will eat. Today, society/culture is focused on seeking pleasure and not basic survival. This change has impacted our families significantly. Families spend much less time together working toward a common goal. This impacts our vocation in life to spread the Good Word.

We are going to focus on spreading the Good Word right at home. This series of articles will focus on raising our children in the faith. We will present an overall view at a high-level with some ideas and then dig into some details on practical ways to do this. The prayerful intent is: to cause us to hit the pause button on our busy lives and to share some ideas.

So, you want to be a parent or you are already a parent. As James

Dobson has said, “Parenting is not for cowards.” It is the toughest vocation you will ever have. So, you have a child or children. What has God told us we should do? Well, care for their physical and mental needs. And there are many secular entities in the world that focus on this. Important as these are, God certainly wants a parent to also care for their child's spiritual needs. We might ask when does this begin? Is it when they reach confirmation age (12 – 16)? Well the life of a child begins at conception. So, our parenthood vocation starts then. We might say, really? But, God says to train up your child in the faith. And the Bible indicates this is a life-long process. Just think of the prodigal son. Certainly in the culture at that time the son was not a child.

Then when and how would parents really train their child? Part of “how” depends on the “when” and another depends on the goal. So, the goal / hope / faith is my child will die in the Christian faith. Our human nature would recoil at such a statement. Even as a Christian this is a heavy

weight to carry. The good news is the Holy Spirit does this work through us and others. But, our vocation as a parent is to be diligent in raising the child in the faith. Grandparents you can play a very supportive role in this training, too.

There is plenty of media that is not appropriate for children to see, hear or read until the child reaches an appropriate level of maturity. Our natural self-centered focus has to be controlled which is a sacrifice we should make for the sake of the child. This means there will be “media” that cannot be consumed in the presence of a child. There will be times you just cannot watch that TV show until later. It also means you will watch age appropriate shows for the child even if it is not your desire to.

Simply put, this is hard work!  
(to be continued)

-from the Board of Elders

# ***Lutheran Heritage Tour Report*** by Pastor Huebel

Four couples from Messiah Lutheran joined with more than 40 members and friends of Advent Lutheran Church, Zionsville, Indiana, on a Lutheran Heritage tour to Germany from June 6 -12. We attempted to gather a Messiah group for a tour, but when it became evident that we would not have sufficient numbers to justify a bus, we were invited to join with the tour Advent had already planned. We deeply appreciate the kind invitation and loving welcome we received from our sister congregation. Members of Messiah who attended were the Laras, the Huebels, the Leechs, and the Lemmons.

I will use this article to give a few highlights of the trip. Obviously, we all did a lot of walking and stair climbing, beer and wine drinking, and bread and ice cream eating. We learned a lot of German and Lutheran history, and developed some good relationships with new friends. Pastor John Fiene, our trip leader, used this trip to focus our attention on the relationship of government and church. He especially wanted his youth to see the detrimental effects of socialism and communism upon the Christian Church. I gave a short presentation on Aristotle and government with a concise report on Aristotle's book, *Politics*. Pastor Daniel Brandt from Sweden gave a very sobering review of the devastating effects of even a "friendly" socialist government. The Lutheran state church of Sweden was spiritually undermined by the social engineering and political correctness of the government during the past century especially. Pastor Hinrich Brandt of Germany (no relation) made a presentation on the life of Lutherans in East Germany during the communist reign (the GDR). We were able to ask questions and hear testimonies from Lutherans in his congregation who labored under the communist regime. It was a humbling experience to hear about the sufferings and trials of fellow Lutherans who have lived in very different conditions than we. It gave us deep appreciation for our freedoms but made us a bit ashamed of our silly complaints and our foolish indifference to the

blessings God has so richly provided us.

We spent the first four days in the North staying in a little village called Greifswald. There we visited local sites and enjoyed a trip to the Island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea. We greatly enjoyed a day in the sun in a resort town on the Sea. The water was very cold and the temperature fairly cool, which made the seaside restaurants and local shops more inviting than a swim, but the youth were brave enough to take a plunge.

After a few days of recuperation from the flight, we began our journey to the south through the beautiful countryside, visiting little towns in East Germany. We entered several old churches which had been converted in the Reformation period from Roman Catholic to Lutheran. A few in our group were a bit surprised that that churches still looked very Roman Catholic rather than Lutheran. We did, however, visit a large church, Marienkirche, in Wolfenbüttel which is reported to be the first church building constructed as a Lutheran Church. It was noticeably different in style and decoration from the old Roman churches we were seeing. We also visited an ornate Lutheran chapel in an old city hall facility, built during the baroque age. The artwork in this church depicted a series of Bible stories from old and new Testaments that clearly manifested a Lutheran emphasis. We learned from the pastor, however, that this Church was built only for the Duke and his administrators. The common people were not welcomed there. Furthermore, the seating was designed to separate the most important people from the lesser administrators. As you might imagine, we were not impressed by that Pharisaic snobbery.

In addition to churches, we visited several important historical sites, including the building in which Lutheran theologians in 1580 gathered to create the document we now call "The Formula of Concord." This document is the last of our six Lutheran Confessions, created to unite scattered Lutherans across the land. We visited the town Eisleben



*Stralsund Old Market Square*



*The resort town, Binz, on Rügen Island on the Baltic*



*A special dinner awaited us at Gutshaus Kubbelkow on Rügen Island*



*Pastor Hinrich Brandt of the SELK church in Greifswald*





*Tangermünde*



*Schloss Wolmirstedt, where the Formula of Concord was written.*



*Marienkirche, in Wolfenbüttel*



*Marienkirche, in Wolfenbüttel—interior*



*Imperial Palace: Kaiserpfalz Goslar*

where Luther was born, and where, by sheer coincidence, he also died. We did not enter the birth or death houses, but we were able to enter the Church and saw the pulpit where Luther preached his final sermon the day before he died. In the city of Erfurt, we entered the church where Luther was ordained and where he consecrated the elements for the first time. This Church was under construction for repair, but its beauty and majesty were quite evident. We could fully understand why Luther was so awestruck during his first mass. We ascended the heights to tour the Wartburg Castle where Luther was hidden for a year to prevent his arrest by Emperor and Pope. We saw the room in which he translated the New Testament into German. In Wittenberg we saw the most famous Lutheran historical sites, the door on which the 95 theses had been posted on October 31, 1517. We had a brief time inside the church to see Luther's burial place under the pulpit. Melancthon's tomb is also in that church. We toured the monastery Luther entered before his conversion (which also became his house after the Reformation) and passed the house of Philip Melancthon, author of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lucas Cranach's house and studio, and St. Mary's Church (Stadtkirche) where Luther usually preached. We passed by The Old Latin School, now an international Lutheran Center maintained by the LC-MS, SELK, and CPH, but we did not enter this house as a group. We learned a great deal of history during a 2 hour walk through the monastery and the city under our German tour guide, a local young school teacher who looked rather ominous but had a great sense of humor. He told us stories of what it was like to grow up in Wittenberg as a child, seeing Soviet soldiers each day as he walked to Kindergarten. He now teaches grades 5-12, and I am sure he is a very popular teacher.

After our tour of Luther-land, we returned to Berlin to attend a very special Lutheran Church on Sunday morning, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde* (Trinity Lutheran Church). The State Church

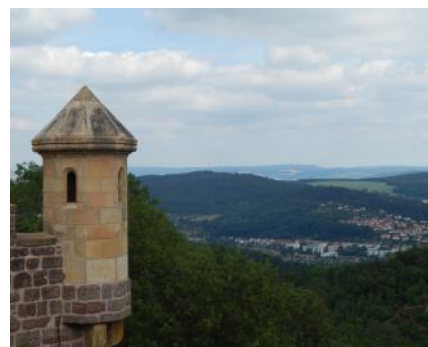
in Germany is not really "Lutheran" anymore. It is a politically forced union of all protestants. In fact, the forced union was the main cause for the founders of the Missouri Synod to immigrate to America. The Churches we attended were "free Lutheran Churches" not supported or governed by the State. The Missouri Synod is in fellowship with this small group of free churches, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK). We were "warned" that the service in the Berlin Church was about 3 hours long- which raised a few eyebrows – but that it was truly a unique and vibrant community and that we would be glad we went. I believe that we can say with unanimity that this Sunday was the highlight of the trip. It was an amazing experience, really beyond description. After ten days of seeing huge and beautiful cathedrals and churches that were now used mostly as museums and mausoleums, we stepped into a humble, plain, rather small church that was filled to overflowing, not with Germans, but with young immigrants from Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq. After two weeks of witnessing spiritual desolation in the land from which Lutheranism sprang, we felt and heard and witnessed the tremendous energy of new Christians who were drinking from the well of salvation as hungry and thirsty people coming in from the desert. Indeed, they had been brought up as Muslims and are awed by Jesus Christ and the Gospel. The room was absolutely packed, like American churches used to be on Christmas Eve and Easter. Small pews were strategically placed using every square inch possible. The joy and energy in the room was contagious. I know that sounds suspicious to the traditional Lutheran, but the service was as Lutheran as Lutheran can possibly be. Pastor Gottfried Martens is no hipster dynamo with a type A, charismatic personality. He appears to be a simple, humble man who loves the Lord and loves his people. He wore a traditional robe with chasuble. His middle eastern assistants were also robed. The service began with an hour pre-service of confession and absolution, similar in format to the one we have on Holy Saturday, where every person comes to the altar to

receive individual absolution. Germans were absolved in German, Americans in English, and immigrants in Farsi (the pastor knows all three languages.) The service proper began with the processional crucifix just as we normally do. The order of service was basically our Divine Service III, page 184, with chanting throughout, but the “high church” pageantry was not done in any kind of showy, pretentious way. It was so ordinary and truly humble that some might not even realize it was “high church.” The liturgy and most of the hymns were in German, as was the sermon, but a few hymns were in Farsi. These Farsi hymns were sung with great gusto and heartfelt joy. When we were kneeling at the communion rail, a Farsi hymn was being sung by the congregation. We thought we were in heaven when we were receiving the body and blood of Jesus with Germans, Iranians, Afghans and fellow Americans, hearing the distribution words to us in English, to our neighbors in Farsi and German, and the background hymn in Farsi. No offering was taken, but two laymen stood at the back after the service rather inconspicuously holding little boxes to receive gifts from those who wanted to give. We WANTED to give!

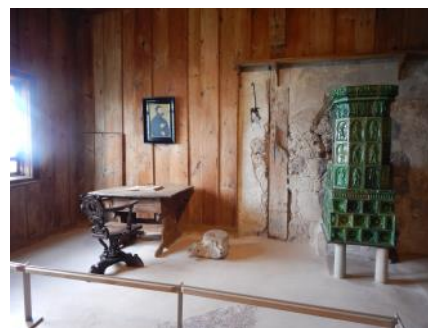
After the service, the congregation gathered together for a quick lunch of Iranian food, which is their practice each week. We enjoyed the food and the fellowship. That evening, we went back as invited guests for a sit-down dinner of Afghani food, prepared by the refugees at the church. We were blessed to hear the story of how this congregation came to be what it now is, a refuge for Muslim immigrants who want to learn of Christ. The pastor humbly told us that he did nothing. It began with two Iranian Christians who attended and invited friends. It seems the whole community of immigrants is spiritually hungry, for they are all very eager to invite their friends to learn of Christ. The pastor told us that his first “baptism class” (our pastors’ class) was filled with 250 people.

After instruction the pastor interviewed each person who wanted to be baptized to be sure they understood the Gospel and were coming for the right reason. To his surprise the second class was also filled with 250 people. They just keep coming. Currently, Trinity has over 1400 Farsi and Dari speaking members. It is the fastest growing Lutheran Church in Germany. The pastor said it is hard to imagine for Germans and Americans, but these middle Eastern Christians think they should be in church EVERY Sunday. It appears they are inwardly compelled to come to receive the gifts of God as often as they can. It occurred to me that Messiah, Keller would also be packed every Sunday if even our members had such an attitude. Sadly, American culture tends to be trending more toward the rest of Germany than this spiritual oasis in the midst of the desert.

I am proud to recommend Trinity Lutheran Church, Berlin, as a mission worthy of our generous support. Please remember these Christians in your prayers and include the many immigrants who are seeking not only physical, but spiritual refuge in this violent and unstable world.



*View from Wartburg Castle*



*Luther's room in Wartburg Castle*



*Wartburg Castle*





## Messiah Lutheran Church & School

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Church Office: (817) 431-2345

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Sunday Worship: 8:00 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.

Sunday School & Adult Bible Class: 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Glenn Huebel, Senior Pastor

Rev. Thomas Chryst, Associate Pastor

[www.messiahkeller.org](http://www.messiahkeller.org)

## Germany cont.



*St Andrew's in Eisleben, where Luther preached his last sermon.*



*Former monastery is Wittenberg where Luther and his family lived.*

Immigration has always proven to be a field ready to be harvested by the church. The Missouri Synod is a prime example of that, since our greatest growth occurred during the massive German immigration to America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Messiah, Keller, experienced this years ago as we were able to gather, teach, and baptize a group of Laotian immigrants in the early years of our history. Today, Muslims from many middle Eastern countries are seeking refuge and coming to Christ. Even in the midst of Iran, Christianity is growing by leaps and bounds among the young, disillusioned population. Our VBS will support this German church with its mission collection. We collected about \$1,200 on Sunday, June 24, and will continue to gather free-will gifts throughout July. A basket will be provided at the door of the fellowship hall every Sunday.

This German trip was a wonderful experience for all our members who attended. We bonded together and we made friends with many other Lutheran Christians. Such trips as this help a congregation to grow inwardly. Please consider joining the next trip.



*Castle Church Door-Wittenberg*



*Site of Luther's "Table Talks"*



*St. Mary's Stadtkirche, where Luther preached, with original Cranach altarpiece.*



*Pulpit of Castle Church, where Luther is buried*



*L-R: Sunday morning worship at Trinity Lutheran, Berlin; Lining up for the noon meal; Pastor Martens addressing our group in the evening, with our Afghan cooks.*