



POLY-WHO?

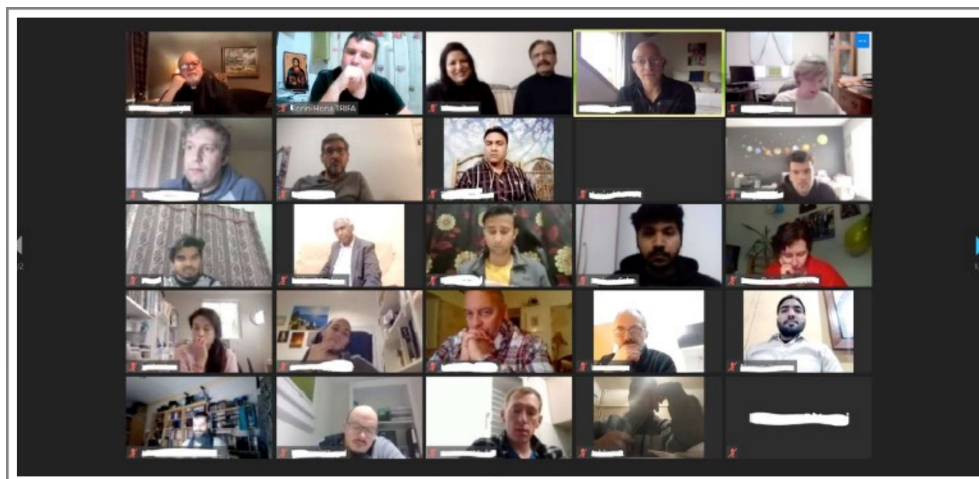
As I write this, I have just finished preparing my lecture on the persecution of the early Christians by the Roman Empire. February 23 is just ahead and it is the commemoration of Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna who was martyred in 155 (the year is disputed) under Emperor Antoninus Pius. Polycarp's story is told in an ancient Christian writing, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Polycarp lived from c. 65-155. He is reputed to have known the Apostle John. Betrayed and arrested, Polycarp was taken to the arena and ordered to denounce Christ or be burned. The aged bishop replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

He died confessing Jesus.

Some of my students face persecution where they live. The record of the martyrs are powerful to them. As historian Kevin Miller reminds us, "Each time you meet a Christian, you are viewing a monument to the unknown early Christian martyrs."

Feb. 23 POLYCARP OF SMYRNA
Pastor and Martyr

Early Church History begins



Early Church History's "classroom"

Since January 25, every Monday night at 18:30 GMT+2* you will find some 33 individuals from across 14 time zones gathered like the "Hollywood Squares" in a "Zoom Room" taking *Early Church History*.

This is our first "for credit" course in the Studies-in-English Bachelor of Theology program of the Rīga Luther Academy. In addition to their regular jobs and my class, most of the same students are also attending another online course on Thursday evenings with the option of a free seminar on Tuesdays.

This first cohort of students has begun a journey that we pray will see many of them graduate with an accredited degree for the purpose of presenting themselves for ordination for pastoral ministry, as deaconesses, or other church workers in their home countries.

We use Zoom to meet and give presentations; a typical 2-hour evening class includes two lectures accompanied by a live chat and then questions and discussions. The students are also engaged in readings between class meetings and a research paper.

Since this is a new course for me, I spend a *lot* of time researching and preparing the powerpoint presentations that undergird the lectures. Students can access all the presentations, reading selections, and other related materials on our "Learning Management System" [LMS], Canvas. Email also keeps us connected.

The students pay a tuition of only 50 euros (= \$60 USD) per course. The cost is minimal; some of our students receive assistance where there is need.

Fall 2021 will be the formal opening of the program. God willing, the fall semester will include our first "intensive week" where students will gather for face-to-face instruction and encouragement. My colleague, Dr. John Bombaro, is working on these longer range plans, interacting with the students during the class's chat and discussions, as well as offering the free seminar on Tuesdays.

Monday's coming up...I'd better get back to getting ready! Thanks for reading and for your support.

-Charles Cortright

(* = 6:30 pm; Rīga is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time)



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Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Verse for Lent
Joel 2:13

As we enter the season of Lent please add to your prayers of repentance and renewal:

Prayers for God's mercy in ending the isolation and confinements of the current pandemic.

Prayers for God's continued blessing on the Word and sacrament ministry of our churches and missions.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the faithful support and prayers of God's people despite the hardships of the present time.

Prayers for blessing on the students of the RTga Luther Academy's various programs.

Prayers for healing and consolation for Patrick, and for all who suffer illness this Lententide.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

WITNESS ALWAYS



Cold Lockdown Winter

We've been in Latvia over a year now, having moved here in early February last year. I was disappointed that we didn't have any snow last year at all. I like snow as long as I don't have to shovel it.

So, this year I'm thrilled that we are watching it snow through our windows often. I don't even mind taking a walk in the new fallen snow once in a while. However, this year we also have the complication of the lockdown which makes things a bit depressing.



My view of the church by us

We found out last week that our current regulations - everything closed except grocery stores, pharmacies, and liquor stores - have been extended to April 6. That leaves us nothing to do here except sit in our apartment and watch it snow. Since our apartment is on the fourth floor, that means that I look out my window and see the snow blowing around on the church roof across the street.

Since Charles works about 10-12 hours most days, that's a lot of time for me to sit and watch out the window. I have gotten myself more involved with our International Women's Club by helping out with communications. It's good to learn new computer programs such as Wordpress and Canva to write newsletters and Facebook posts. I'm also the chair of the book club which keeps me busy reading the book of the month and getting ready to moderate the book discussions.

It's so hard to tell people about Jesus when I can only see them on Zoom. It's much easier to get to know them and converse over a cup of coffee. I pray that I can do that again soon.

I do have to venture out to do our grocery shopping. Now when I grow old, I can tell my grandchildren that I walked half a mile in snowing, 10-degree weather carrying fourteen pounds of groceries with an eleven-pound backpack full of other necessities. Oh wait, I already have grandchildren to tell that story to. But it will never be as good a story as my dad or mom told me when they walked to school as kids.
-Connie Cortright

UPDATE ON OUR SON...

Last month we reported that our son Patrick (39) has been diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. Pat has started chemo treatments which have already reduced a cough caused by his condition. Because of the effects of the chemo on his immune system, he has been vaccinated against COVID; the second dose was rough, but he is doing OK. Between treatments when he is feeling better he is able to work from his home in his role as principal of Divine Shepherd Lutheran School. Your continued prayers for him are most appreciated!



To support the LCMS through the work of Charles and Connie Cortright, you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

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