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Ministry updates



Winter Traditions in Latvia

“Christmas in the ancient annual rites are mainly connected to the winter solstice. The impact of Christianity has turned it into a quiet and calm celebration, yet some of the old heathen traditions are still alive as well. One of them is the mummery – disguised people go to the neighbouring houses trying to scare the evil spirits away. The table is richly set – there have to be at least nine dishes on it. A Christmas-tree is decorated in every house.”¹

The translation of “mummery” in the above passage refers to the tradition of *ķekatas* (or *budēji* or *kaļādas*, depending on the region of Latvia). The disguises mentioned often involve masks, which are handmade, often using household items like baskets as part of the costume. Sometimes, these masks are animals (like bears, sheep, or wolves) people (such as fortune tellers or the elderly), or supernatural creatures (like death or the devil). The procession of people in disguise is believed to bring luck to the households they visit and scare off evil spirits. Each household will usually greet them with a warm welcome, food, and sometimes small gifts.²

Keep in mind that not everyone celebrates these solstice traditions, even those who are nonreligious. However, it is a historic part of the culture!

¹Kalns, Guntis. *The Passport of Latvia*. 2nd Ed. Bārbala Simšone (trans.). Rīga, Latvia: Apgāds Zvaigzne ABC, 2019.

²Izleze. *Winter Solstice Traditions in Latvia*. Let the Journey Begin, 20 Dec 2017.



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A fantastic Christmas concert titled “Tik Klusa un Svēta” (“So Quiet and Holy”) at St. John Lutheran Church in Old Rīga.

Dear friends in Christ,

“There was no mention of Christ!” That was the utterance of one of the missionary family members here with us after a cultural Christmas event. There was a Christmas concert in one of the churches here in Riga where the performers also sang some secular Christmas songs. I share this because it is the state of things in Europe. I’m not overselling it by saying that this is a culture sitting in the ruins of Christianity.

There are beautiful churches that are older than the United States that sit empty or mostly empty. There are remnants and facsimiles of Christian ethics and morality, but they are fading. In the parish in the United States, I had the opportunity to learn from some immigrants from Europe about the state of things here, which is what got me first interested in missionary service. And what I am seeing here in Europe *I have also seen growing in the United States*. The malaise of Western civilization is apparent here in Europe. In much of Western Europe, things are very much like the US or even further along than where the US is now.

Eastern Europe does have its similarities, yet the situation is different. In post-Soviet countries, in particular, it is clear that the Church is still hurting from the oppression it experienced under Communism. But what has been left culturally is a blank space. It isn’t that there is necessarily a hatred for the things of God, but an apathy. And apathy is worse. Anger and hate eventually cool and crystalize into

apathy, which is hard to dispel. And so many churches in Europe try to make peace with the changing morals and ideas of the world.

But the more this happens, the more other Christians wish to stand firm upon the Word of God. There are people in many different countries, including places where the LCMS has not been for many years, reaching out to us for help, guidance, and education. They want to remain faithful to the true, inerrant Word of God. Even in the darkness of the world, the light of the Gospel is shining, and some people are being drawn to its light once more. That is the work we are doing here in Eurasia, and I want to thank you for supporting this work.

It is through the faithful efforts of Christians like you that we can work to prepare and train new workers for these fields. Future Lutheran congregations all over Europe will have pastors of their own people leading them. This is the goal that we are striving toward. Through the theological education given at Riga Luther Academy, the mission efforts of the LCMS are multiplied a hundred-fold because we are able to train men who can take this message of the Gospel to many more. Thank you for being a part of this work over the past year, and I hope you will continue to be a part of it with us over the coming year!

In Christ’s Service,
Pastor Cundiff



PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- The health of our families and friends in the United States.
- The students, instructors, and staff of Lutera Akadēmija as we prepare for the Spring Semester.
- All the missionaries living and working across the globe.

PRAISE GOD FOR:

- The rest taken during Christmas Break for all three Cundiffs on the field!
- YOU - our generous donors and prayer warriors, and the steadfast workers of Mission Central and Mission Advancement, without whom this mission would be impossible.

A greener option?

If you would like to help us save on paper and postage by getting our newsletters in digital form, please email Lindsay at Lindsay.Cundiff@lcmsintl.org. We would be happy to make that quick and simple change for you. Thank you!

Finishing out the year and looking toward the future



The Cundiffs celebrate Christ-Mass at the English service at St. John Lutheran Church in Old Riga.

December brought the end of semesters for all three members of the Cundiff family. Lutera Akadēmija (Luther Academy) ended courses on December 15th, while Christmas Break started for Carter on December 20th. The conclusion of courses at the Academy means that the administrators (including Quintin) and their assistant (Lindsay) comb through all the assignments to make sure everything is completed. In Latvia, it is required that every single assignment (quizzes, papers, etc.) is completed and passed with the minimum passing grade for the course to be marked "Complete." This is a rather large job, considering the semester included around 25 students (in two levels of study), 12 courses, 6 instructors, 13 weekly quizzes in most courses, numerous papers (essays, book reviews, exegeticals, and exams, all of which must be reviewed for academic honesty by Lindsay), and a partridge in a pear tree.

Administrators have also been working to approve syllabi for the 14 Spring Semester courses (though three of those are ongoing from the Fall Semester). Once those are approved,

Lindsay sets up the courses online for the instructors to complete before the students begin courses on January 15th.

The manner of courses at the Academy has shifted; previously, all the instruction would happen during the 1-to-2-hour meeting times with the students. However, this was difficult for students who live quite far east of Latvia, where courses would be going on during very late hours of the night. Instead, the instructors have been recording much of their lectures for the students to watch when they have time, then the students and instructors meet for a shorter amount of time together to discuss the lectures and materials, answering any questions they may have. This way has been much more palatable to our students, who often have families, work other jobs, and are caring for their own congregations simultaneously.

This year, 2023, has drawn to a close, but we are looking toward the future: Quintin returns to Fort Wayne in January 2024 for Symposia and another round of intensive courses for his Ph.D. in Missiology. He will have additional classes in Fort Wayne in April, but Lindsay and Carter will join him to go to the US in June and July 2024 for Home Service. During this time, we will be visiting our supporters and their churches in the Midwest, specifically Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. If you would like to be considered for one of these visits, please contact us via email – we would love to chat with you about it!

Be sure to follow our Facebook page, "The Cundiffs in Latvia", for even more photos and stories of the Lord's work in this beautiful country!

Carter's Corner

Sveiki (hello)! This December, I had my first basketball game of the season (we beat them by roughly 30 points!), and I got to chat with an old friend of mine. I also celebrated my friend's birthday! I went over to a friend's house because I had not seen him in a while.

I hope that you were all able to celebrate Christ's birthday and the New Year with "good tidings"!

- Carter (age 12)



There are many opportunities to serve as short-term or GEO missionaries. Check out the current list and download an application at lcms.org/service. Click on "Service Opportunities."

Prayerfully consider partnering with the LCMS to support the work of Quintin Cundiff and his family. Make checks payable to:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
P.O. Box 66861
St. Louis, MO 63166-6861

OR

Mission Central
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Mapleton, IA 51034

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