



German Lutheran *Pastor Helge Voigt*, his wife Anke and their daughters Hannah and Marie, join the Minneapolis Area Synod for seven months; he is based at Christ Church Lutheran, but is visiting and speaking throughout the synod. He comes with fifteen years of experience serving as a pastor; for the last five years he has been the senior pastor of five regional churches in Leipzig with 3,000 members. There he oversees fourteen church employees including cemetery keepers, secretaries, teachers, and church musicians.

Before that he served in rural Röderau, Saxony where he was ordained in 2001. After high school Pastor Voigt had to serve in the East German Army in 1989–90.

The experiences during the Peaceful Revolution led him to the decision to refuse to use a gun, so he was transferred to the status of civilian soldier, working in hospital maintenance and with senior citizens. For one year he taught students who are mentally handicapped, and worked a year as a cabinetmaker. In 1991 Helge followed his heart and enrolled in the seminary to study theology, continuing his studies at the University of Leipzig.

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## The Leipzig Connection

During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, contact between Lutherans in Leipzig, Germany, and in Minneapolis were established through pilgrimages to the Luther lands. Several congregational partnerships developed. In 1998 the partnership between the Leipzig Church Districts and the Minneapolis Area Synod was newly revived. Visits have often been between similar dimensions of ministry and church life: pastors and musicians to discuss worship; youth to youth; social service agencies to look at services for persons with disabilities, homeless shelters, services for seniors; discussions on the nature of the church's public voice in today's climate. The goal is that we learn about each other's work and ministry knowing we share similar challenges in the life of the church. A covenant was signed in Leipzig in 2006 and was renewed in Minneapolis in 2011. It is the base of the recent pastoral exchange

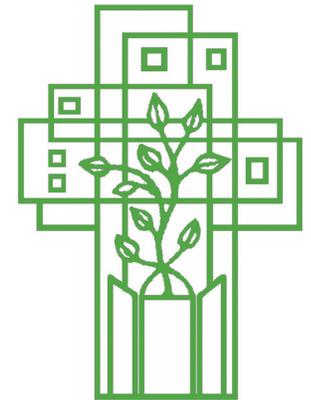


between *Pastor Helge Voigt* from the *Sophia Parish, Leipzig*, and *Pastor Morris Wee* from *Christ Church Lutheran in Minneapolis*. Plans are being made for visits from Minneapolis to Leipzig next year, for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. 2017 could be an important milestone: Experiencing the global Church within the Lutheran communion can be celebrated with thankfulness.

For more information about how to become involved with the Leipzig Connection, contact Pastor **Bill Russell**, Minneapolis Area Synod Coordinator  
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# LEIPZIG CONNECTION PASTORAL EXCHANGE 2015 - 2016

## Themes



EVANGELISCH - LUTHERISCHER  
 KIRCHENBEZIRK LEIPZIG

**Minneapolis Area Synod**  
 of the ELCA

Theme 1: What does a German pastor learn in Minneapolis, or an American in Leipzig? Experiences of the first pastoral exchange between Leipzig and Minneapolis.

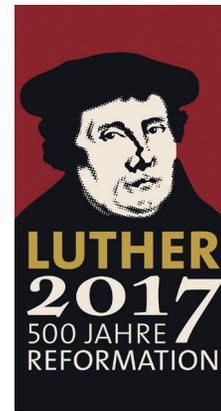
Thinking of the first experiences of the pastoral exchange that began August 2015, Pastor Voigt talks about church life in Minneapolis and Leipzig. What is different, what is quite similar? He describes personal encounters and fascinating experiences, and he raises critical questions about the life and ministry of Lutheran churches in Germany and the US.



*Pastor Morris Wee (Minneapolis) and Pastor Helge Voigt (Leipzig) in Leipzig-Lindenthal*

Theme 2: On the way to the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation 2017

How do German Lutheran churches prepare for this celebration? Was does it mean for congregational life in the homeland of Martin Luther? How can we celebrate it in the Lutheran world but also commemorate it together with Roman-catholic congregations? Pastor Voigt also introduces a project from Leipzig citizens, the Luther-Melanchthon memorial.



Theme 3: Reconciliation – How do the wounds of the Second World War heal?

Pastor Voigt talks about experiences of his ancestors in World War II, the Peaceful Revolution in Leipzig in the 80's, the fascinating project of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, and the work of reconciliation through the Community of the Cross of Nails from Coventry Cathedral in the UK.



Theme 4: "Leipzig remains bright" – about the recent situation related to refugees in Germany.

Pastor Voigt talks about the role of church and citizen engagement in the recent refugee crisis. It is about politics and fears, but also about an enrichment to the society. In reference to recent news in Saxony concerning violence against refugees, Pastor Voigt quotes scholars, about why right-wing thoughts occur in the former East Bloc countries. He also connects it to his own perspectives and experiences.



Theme 5: The church in Leipzig within an atheistic milieu.

Pastor Voigt talks about life in Leipzig beginning with his own experiences. Born in 1971, he grew up atheistic, was baptized in 1991, studied Lutheran theology and serves as a pastor in a big congregation in suburban Leipzig. How do congregations interact in the atheistic milieu? How can they be effective in social work and mission?

