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A Historic Day in Rīga



Latvia

The picture above is an outline of the country of Latvia with the colors of Latvia's flag embedded in it.

Did you know that St. John the Baptist Day (June 24th) is the largest celebrated day in the Latvia? That's right, St. John the Baptist Day is even bigger than Christmas! While those inside the church recognize and remember how John the Baptist was the forerunner for Christ, those outside the church celebrate the day along with the summer solstice. It is a tradition in Latvia to sing and dance while wearing flower and wreath laurels on one's head. And, for Latvians, the celebration continues all night long!



St. Peter's Church in Old Town, Rīga.

If you know the history of Rīga, to say that it recently had another historic day is saying quite a lot. Yet, this past June 15th was truly historic for both the city of Rīga, Latvia and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church (LELC). On that day, historic St. Peter's Church in Old Town, Rīga celebrated the 500th anniversary of Reformation in Latvia. What made this celebration particularly special was the fact that the LELC was now the undisputed owner of this historic and culturally significant building. All of this came about because back in March 2022, St. Peter's Church was officially transferred from the possession of the Rīga City Council to the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church and

its foundation. It took over 80 years, but St. Peter's was finally given back to its rightful owner.

Why did it take so long? Toward the end of World War II, the Russians continued to occupy massive territory in an attempt to set up the Soviet Union. As part of the occupation, one controlling government – first socialist and later evolving into communism – was established as the state gained greater control over the means of production. However, in 1989, as Soviet communism began to fail, the people of the Baltic region (including Latvia) saw their opportunity to declare their independence. After the Soviet's failed attempt to stop the revolution, Latvia regained its independence in 1991.



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A Historic Day in Rīga, cont.

Now with their independence once again secured, the question of what to do with the property which had been controlled by the government under Soviet communism arose? The hope was to seize the property taken by the Soviets and return it back to the original owners, including the religious organizations. As you can imagine, this task was massive as proof of prior ownership had to be established by every entity laying claim on property throughout Latvia. And, for the most part, everything went well with the exception of two particularly important cultural monuments (which also happen to be Lutheran churches) – the Rīga Dome Church and St. Peter's Church. While the LELC owned these buildings prior to the Soviet occupation, these

properties were also deemed culturally significant. In order to resolve this problem, special laws had to be established which could return them back to the church. Therefore, the decision to transfer ownership was postponed until the Latvian government could build a new legal system to handle such matters. As time would tell, the transfer of the Rīga Dome to the LELC proved less complicated than St. Peter's Church. On June 22, 2005, by rule of special law, the Rīga Dome Church and monastery was returned to its rightful owner. Since that time, the Rīga Dome has been used for Sunday morning services, special services, and as a culturally historic site.

St. Peter's, on the other hand, was a different story. This church with its late Gothic and Baroque architecture along with being recognized as the birthplace of the Lutheran Reformation in Latvia is rich in both beauty and history. However, after long discussions, extensive consultations and thorough analytical work, the governing body passed a law in March 2022 resolving the legal affiliation and entrusting the National Cultural Heritage Board to transfer the ownership to the LELC. While maintaining her cultural



The towers of St. Peter's (foreground) and the Riga Dome (background).

significance, St. Peter's Church would finally be brought back to her rightful owners and be used for her intended purpose of receiving God's gifts.

The process of returning Latvian churches to their rightful owners, which has taken decades to complete, has now been completed. With the transfer of St. Peter's Church in Rīga, Latvia closes another dreadful chapter in its long and storied history while also looking ahead to a bright future. There's a lot of work that remains as atheism, the preferred teaching during the Soviet occupation, has become the dominant worldview of this once majority Lutheran nation. But the transfer of St. Peter's back to the LELC was one small step in reclaiming Latvia's Lutheran heritage. That's why, June 15th will always be a historic day for the Latvian people.



Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Rom. 12:12 ESV)

PLEASE PRAY:

- For everyone suffering from loss of loved ones and their homes by the war in Ukraine.
- That the war between Ukraine and Russia does not expand into other countries.
- That the students and faculty of Luther Academy that they have a relaxing and safe summer.
- For my family as we enter into the final phase of the visa process.

GIVE THANKS:

- For the support staff at OIM who continue to do wonderful work on behalf of the LCMS and her missionaries across the world.
- For the ability to travel without all the restrictions caused by Covid-19.

PRAISE GOD:

- For the many congregations and individuals who pray for us, encourage and support us in this important mission.

Ministry and Family Update



L to R: Lexi, Emiley, Jenny and Cory

Ministry Update

This last month has been mostly filled with year-end tasks like grading papers. Not only was I responsible for grading the assignments from my class on mission and evangelism, but I am also responsible for running plagiarism checks on the assignments from all the other classes. Additionally, I've begun planning for my fall semester class titled "Overview of Lutheran Dogmatics."

Family Update

Two major developments have arisen since my last newsletter. The first one has to do with my daughter, Emiley, who celebrated her birthday after moving to Latvia. Since she turned 18, the government of Latvia now recognizes her as an adult and, therefore, no longer my dependent. (By the way, this wouldn't have been a problem had Covid not delayed our arrival to Latvia). Since she is no longer considered a dependent, the Latvian government rejected our request for a visa. Currently, we are appealing this decision and should hear something in July.

The second major development has to do with our pets. Again, due to Covid, our pets were not allowed to travel with us to Latvia. Thankfully, a kind family from Pierre, SD agreed to care for them until we could retrieve them. Well, as I write this, Jenny and Lexi are on their way back from Pierre, SD with our dogs.

I would like to sincerely thank you for your support of the Lord's mission in Eurasia. We could not be touching peoples' lives with the message of Jesus Christ without you. Please prayerfully consider sharing this mission with others. Tell them of the good that God is doing throughout this exciting mission.

Once again, from the bottom of my heart, thank you and the Lord be with you.

~Cory J. Rajek



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Prayerfully consider partnering with the LCMS to support the work of Rev. Dr. Cory J. Rajek. Make checks payable to:

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