

# Ministering to Asylum Seekers in Germany

**W**ater splashed over Sebastian's head as the Rev. Dr. Gottfried Martens said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Moments before, in his native tongue of Farsi, Sebastian renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways. He also renounced "Islam, Muhammad and the 12 imams, including Jamal Ali."

Martens is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin-Steglitz, Germany. Of Trinity's 1,600 members, 80% have migrated from Persian countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. The Shia branch of Islam, from which Sebastian and many of the men at Trinity converted, lacks any assurance of salvation. "They could never be certain of salvation," Martens said, which is why they love Lutheran worship.

Around 30 attendees live in temporary "church asylum" in Trinity's basement. When faced with possible deportation back to their home countries after living in Europe for a decade or more, many Persians flee to Germany where they have to wait six months to apply for asylum again. For those who have converted to Christianity, it's a life-or-death matter, since apostasy is punishable by death for men and life imprisonment for women in Afghanistan.

At Trinity, the asylum seekers find a home and a community in which to live and learn about Lutheranism while they wait to claim asylum in Germany. They eat together, worship together, learn German together, wash their laundry together.

For the time being, the German government allows church asylum. Martens has "sent a lot of papers about every person to the state." Trinity member Sandra Preuett explained: "The church asylum program takes these people in, and out of respect for the church body, the police will not enter the building to remove those people [to] return them to the country they came from."



The Rev. Dr. Gottfried Martens baptizes Sebastian on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin-Steglitz, Germany.

This ministry in Germany, especially Berlin, is exploding. When asked about his strategy, Martens said: "We don't have any strategy. We don't have any method. I always say our method is just Word and Sacrament and nothing else. When these people hear the Gospel, they can't be silent. They invite their friends."

And so it is. The church gathers for the Divine Service: in Farsi on Friday night, Saturday morning and Saturday evening; in German on Sunday morning; and again in Farsi on Sunday afternoon. At the heart of the congregation's work is the desire to preach and proclaim God's Word, to baptize with water and the Word, and to feed God's people with Christ's body and blood.

Read more at [engage.lcms.org/persian-project-winter-2025](https://engage.lcms.org/persian-project-winter-2025).

## Give God Glory ...

... for the newest (and ninth!) Project 24 site, located in Wamba, Samburu, Kenya. Project 24 is a joint program of the LCMS and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) that provides education, food, shelter, medical care and the Gospel to vulnerable Kenyan children. The Wamba site officially opened its doors in August, welcoming its first 28 residents who were identified by ELCK leaders as requiring some extra support. Read more at [international.lcms.org/celebrating-the-completion-of-project-24-wamba](https://international.lcms.org/celebrating-the-completion-of-project-24-wamba).



... for the Rev. Jason and Emily Groth, LCMS missionaries serving in Belize. In this role, they help plant Lutheran churches and coordinate the operations of Camp Concordia in Belmopan, Belize. In addition to these

responsibilities, the Groths support short-term mission teams and facilitate acts of mercy. Learn more at [lcms.org/groth](https://lcms.org/groth).

... for Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW), Mequon, Wis., and its new Hesed Transition Program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In fall 2024, the CUW program launched with its first cohort of nine students. Hesed students take some courses alongside traditional undergraduates, and they also receive instruction and individual coaching on goal setting, effective communication and interpersonal skills. CUW leaders are intentional about integrating faith growth opportunities and ensuring that, above all, students regularly hear God's Word and are reminded of the Gospel. The name Hesed reinforces this as it can mean "steadfast love," "loyalty," "mercy" or "kindness." Learn more at [reporter.lcms.org/2025/cuw-hesed-program/](https://reporter.lcms.org/2025/cuw-hesed-program/).

One of the priorities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith. This is accomplished under the familiar name of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which the Synod uses to describe the mercy work directed by the policies of the Boards for National and International Mission and implemented through the programs of the Offices of National and International Mission.

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### You Make the Difference through LCMS World Relief and Human Care

You make the ministry described in this newsletter possible! Your prayers and contributions to World Relief and Human Care "Where Needed Most" help deliver our Savior's mercy to people in need. You bolster tightly restricted donations from others to help fully fund important mercy projects, allowing us to report here the impact you are making in Christ's name. The courtesy envelope in this issue allows you to send a future contribution as the Holy Spirit leads, when He leads.



# Proclaiming the Gospel to Those Who Are Behind Bars

**O**n a Thursday evening in September, the Rev. Rodney Blomquist arrived at the Taylorville Correctional Center in Taylorville, Ill., to lead his weekly Bible study. He chatted with the prison staff before being escorted to the room where the Bible study would be held. Soon, the room was filled with incarcerated men dressed in blue.

Blomquist has served as a volunteer prison chaplain for 34 years, and he also is the LCMS Central Illinois District's Prison Ministry coordinator. "Here is a population that needs to hear the Law and Gospel distinctively divided," he said. "They, too, need to hear the Word of God for their salvation and the strengthening of their faith."

During the Bible study, Blomquist's demeanor was warm and calm. He moved slowly but assuredly. Some men commented on the study, while others only sang along to the hymns. At the end of the hour, following the Common Doxology, most of the incarcerated men filed out, although a few lingered to talk with Blomquist.

"Many a man in the Bible study who studies Paul's Epistles is greatly appreciative to hear that salvation, God's forgiveness and the change of heart comes from outside of themselves. It comes because of Christ's life, death and resurrection," Blomquist said. "For them, it is a great joy to hear that because of Christ, they are accepted by the Father and receive the blessings Christ has won for them."

The Rev. Dr. Brian Heller, manager of LCMS Specialized Spiritual Care Ministry, said that church workers serving in prison ministry "answer our Lord's call to bring His message of salvation to all nations, including to the darkest of places to those who are often forgotten. These church workers bring the Word of God and the love of Christ to the least of these, a testament to the truth that Christ died for all people, including those who are behind bars. The work of these servants shows

that no one is beyond the reach of Christ's unending love." Blomquist encourages other pastors to consider prison chaplaincy and to take advantage of the training available from the Synod and their LCMS district. "Those incarcerated spend the day in cells and fenced-in areas, thus being reminded of the Law and their violation of it. ... Prison ministry is just one of many opportunities to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ."



The Rev. Rodney Blomquist leads Bible study on Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024, at Taylorville Correctional Center in Taylorville, Ill.

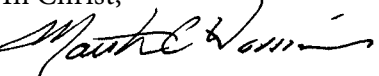
## Following Jesus' Command and Example

**I've been reading the Gospels** intensely in my Greek New Testament during the past month or two. All four are delightful and different, yet together they give the whole, wonderful picture of Jesus' life and ministry. Mark is the shortest and moves quickly. The word "immediately" occurs repeatedly. When Jesus was baptized, "He immediately came up out of the water and saw the heavens ripped open." Luther commented on this, saying that in Baptism heaven is nothing but doors and windows!

"A voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son!'" And "immediately the Spirit cast Him into the wilderness" to be tempted by the devil. Then Jesus "came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, saying, 'The time is fulfilled! Repent and believe the gospel!'" He called the disciples, and "immediately they left their nets and followed Him." "He went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He went into the synagogue and began to teach." They were amazed that He preached with such authority. And then, "immediately there was a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit." Jesus healed him. "Immediately He came out of the synagogue" and healed Peter's mother, who had a high fever. "He healed many having all kinds of diseases."

Soon after, Jesus says, "Let's go! This is why I came, to preach!" "And He came preaching in all the synagogues of Galilee and casting out demons." A leper came to Him and pleaded with Him, "If you will it, I can be clean!" The text then says, "having compassion on him He stretched out His hand and touched him and said, 'I will it. Be clean.'" Jesus came to preach the Gospel and have compassion upon the least, the last, the small, the great, the hurting, the sick, the deaf, the mute and more. Jesus' miracles demonstrated above all who He is: the divine, suffering Son of God, come to "give His life as a ransom for many."

The church follows Jesus' command and example. We proclaim the Gospel, and we touch and care for those in need. The two belong together. Jesus is unimaginable without both. So is His church. And like Jesus, we act — sure we plan, we prepare, we call, we send, we organize — and we do it immediately.

In Christ,  
  
Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



Photos: LCMS Communications/Erik M. Lunsford