



STUDENT IN FOCUS

Josias Fischer

When I was 17 years old, I discovered that I had a passion for pastoral ministry. Upon graduating from high school, I did a year of civil service at a counseling center run by the Lutheran Church.

After that I started my studies at the Giessen School of Theology because they combine a bible-centered curriculum with high academic standards. Through my experience at the counseling center and many good friends in the Lutheran Church I learned that it was possible to live out a vibrant Christian faith there in spite of the crisis in the Church. I could see myself becoming a Lutheran pastor, but that goal will be very hard to reach. That's because at present, the Lutheran church won't recognize my GST education, even though it is equivalent and accredited, because it's too evangelical. I would have to repeat all or part of it in a Lutheran theology department at a state university.

I hope and pray that the Lutheran Church can play a positive role in Germany again. Five hundred years have passed since the Reformation, and a lot has changed. Germany has become a secular country, and most people here have no interest in God, much less the church. I feel called to Eastern Germany, where I grew up. I have a heart for that region, where so few people have heard the Gospel, and I want to be part of a "New Reformation" there.



ALUMNI IN FOCUS

Daniel Steffen Schwarz

My name is Daniel Steffen Schwarz, and I graduated from the Giessen School of Theology in 2005. After that I completed a master's degree at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium. During my time in Leuven, I felt God leading me to become a pastor in the Lutheran Church of Germany. That meant another four years of study at the Protestant faculty of the University of Heidelberg. After that I served as a pastoral intern in a church on Lake Constance in the South of Germany. Because my wife comes from the Franconia region in central Germany, we looked for a pastorate there. I was ordained as a pastor in 2013 and since 2016 I have been serving as pastor in a small town called Redwitz about 60 miles north of Nuremberg. My tasks include preaching, counselling, religious instruction in the local schools, administration, and leading regular ecumenical services. The Lutheran Church with its long history in Germany offers me many opportunities to proclaim the love of Jesus in word and deed, and that fills me with great joy. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest" (Matt 9:37-38). Would you pray that God would call workers to minister in the state church? The need for them is great.



Dear friends of Giessen School of Theology,

You know Germany as the land of beautiful churches, but recent statistics demonstrate how thoroughly Germany has turned its back on God. In 1990, 75% of all Germans were members of a Christian church. Today that figure has sunk to 48%. During this time, the state-supported Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches lost some 18 million members. The free churches- Protestant denominations that receive no state support – are very small; they are not in decline, but they aren't growing either. On an average Sunday, only about 4% of Germans attend a church service. In 1985 there were 12,000 students in Germany's theological universities; today, there are less than 2000.

These numbers could easily lead to despair, but Christians only need to remember their roots to find cause for hope. 2000 years ago, a small group of Jesus' followers gathered in Jerusalem after their leader died, and with him their dreams. They were distraught and saw no future for their movement. They had nothing to look forward to except derision, perhaps even persecution.



Dr. Stephan Holthaus

Suddenly, there was reason for confidence. Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them. He poured out his Spirit on them and directed them to go out into the world and be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). And that's what they did: They preached the Gospel, spreading a message of hope and salvation, ministering to the needy, praying, and living lives of simple faith. Out of this small group of discouraged believers a world-wide Church emerged.

At the GST we are convinced that God has not forgotten Germany, even if most Germans have forgotten God. Against all the trends, we are experiencing healthy growth. Just this fall, close to 70 young people began their studies here, bringing the total to 230. We have never had that many students before.

In these difficult days, we have only one goal: We want to be faithful witnesses to our Lord and King. He hasn't forgotten us, and he can revive this land.

Thank you for all your prayers for Germany and for the GST

Dr. Stephan Holthaus, President

Passion for Theology



If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please send an email with "Unsubscribe Focus" in the subject line to FocusGermany@fthgiessen.de, and we will remove you from our mailing list.

I wish to make a donation to the Giessen School of Theology (GST)

I want to make a ☐ one-time ☐ monthly ☐ annual
gift of ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ other amount \$_____

☐ check enclosed (Make your check payable to "Friends of Giessen School of Theology")

NAME: ADDRESS:

CITY, STATE, ZIPCODE:

☐ I would prefer an email receipt.

EMAIL ADDRESS:

All contributions are tax deductible.
Please print legibly for receipting purposes.



Please make donations at:

Friends of Giessen
School of Theology
Bank of America
Account Number: 8981 2619 1380
Routing Number: 063100277

Or send a check to:

Friends of Giessen
School of Theology
c/o Suzan Hicks, Treasurer
300 Yorkshire Circle
Nashville, TN 37211
USA

Dr. Joel White



40 years ago, when I first came to Europe as a missionary, Christians in America had a hard time believing that Europe was a mission field. They are now much more aware of the advanced state of secularization throughout the continent. In Germany, most people stopped going to church decades ago, though until recently they retained their membership in the state-supported Roman Catholic and Protestant churches out of habit. In the last decade that has changed dramatically. Millions of Germans have left those churches and have joined the ranks of almost half the population that claims no religious affiliation. Those who still go to the mainline churches often hear a message that has little resemblance to the Gospel. I recently attended a service at a Lutheran church on the occasion of the German version of Thanksgiving. In a twenty-minute sermon, the pastor did not mention Jesus or God one time. She stressed the importance of being thankful, but she seemed to have forgotten who it is who deserves our thanks for his inestimable gift (2Cor 9:15). We need to pray for the revival of the Church in Germany!



WHY STAY IN A LIBERAL DENOMINATION?

Henrik Schleicher, a recent graduate of the Giessen School of Theology, explains why he hasn't given up on the Lutheran Church in Germany

Henrik, you are a member of a Lutheran church in Giessen. Are there evangelicals in the church?

The term "evangelical" is more appropriate in the American context, but if you're talking about born-again Christians with a vibrant faith and a high level of engagement in and for the Church, the answer is: Yes! Even if the denomination as a whole is theologically liberal, there are many congregations like mine where the Bible is preached, and people are coming to faith in Jesus.

If, as you say, the Lutheran Church has become very liberal, why do you remain in the Lutheran Church?

It is true that nowadays you do not see much of Luther's legacy – the Gospel of salvation through faith alone. My reason for staying in the



Henrik Schleicher



Lutheran Church is congregations like mine. In Germany, people don't trust the free churches and often see them as cults. The Lutheran Church is well known among Germans. For some, it is less of an obstacle to attend a service there.

The Lutheran Church has been losing literally tens of thousands of members every month for the last few years. Why?

In my opinion, Germans have been inwardly moving away from the Church for long ago. Until recently they remained in the Church out of respect for tradition. In our secular age, this last mooring has given way,

and people see no reason to maintain their membership.

Would you encourage GST students to consider becoming pastors in the Lutheran church?

In general, I would love to see more students from the GST in the Lutheran Church. As long as there are vibrant congregations – and they do exist – there are many opportunities for trained pastors who are passionate about their faith in Jesus. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to become ordained in the Lutheran Church with a master's degree from the GST. There are ways to do it, but it is not an easy road to take.

THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN GERMANY

Dr. Meiken Buchholz, Associate Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Theology

To understand recent developments in Germany, it helps to grasp the special nature of the "Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland" (or "EKD"), one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world. English speakers often refer to it as the "Lutheran Church in Germany", but it is really an umbrella organization of Lutheran, Reformed and mixed churches. It would be better to call it the "Protestant Church in Germany". It has its origins in the time when Germany consisted of many small states, each of which had its own state church (in German "Landeskirche"). Today, the EKD is a pluralistic organization made up of a variety of local congregations, which are quite diverse, depending on their pastors and presbytery/elders. Of course, many of them are very liberal, but some are evangelical, bible-centered, dynamic churches, like the one I belong to.

Although there are no longer official state churches in Germany, the EKD (and Roman Catholic) churches still enjoy special privileges from the state. For example, the theological education of EKD-pastors is provided by state universities. The state also collects a church tax from the wages of everyone whose birth certificate identifies them "Protestant". For a long time, the vast majority of Germans were registered as Catholic or Protestant, and therefore the EKD-membership numbers were always many times higher than the number of active church members. Most were born into the church and found it advantageous to remain due to the traditional trappings the Church had to offer: services on Christmas and Easter, weddings, baptisms, funerals etc. Today, many Germans no longer feel any connection to the Church, so they are canceling their membership in droves. They no longer see any social benefit in identifying as a church member, because Christianity is now viewed negatively in large parts of society.

Against this background, the high numbers of people leaving the church bring the statistics more into line with reality and serve as necessary wake-up call to German Christians not to depend on the structural privileges of an established church.



Dr. Meiken Buchholz

FRIENDS' CORNER



New Reformation Tour 2024 was a great success

Nine Christians from Florida, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, and Georgia joined the New Reformation Tour this year. From September 14th to 22nd they learned about church planting and missions in Germany, toured the most important Luther sites, and helped out behind the scenes at the 50th anniversary celebration at the Giessen School of Theology. All went away with greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing believers and the strategic role the GST plays here.



Join us for the New Reformation Tour 2025

To paraphrase a German saying: "After the New Reformation Tour is before the New Reformation Tour. Please make plans to join us next year from June 21st to June 29th, 2025. Participants will follow the footsteps of Luther, meet GST students and alumni, and take part in a fundraiser for the GST. Let us know if you're interested in coming. You won't regret it!"

Giving Tuesday is on December 3

This year Giving Tuesday can serve as a reminder to remember the Giessen School of Theology in your year-end giving. You can do this easily by using the QR-code to the right or going to <https://mailchi.mp/1b65a889286c/friends-of-giessen-school-of-theology>. While you're there, you can also sign up for email communiques, if you wish.

Contact us at friends@fthgiessen.de

