

21. Dezember

Dear Friends in Christ,

Advent is over and Christmas but a few days away. I send you warmest greetings from Hohenbruch--- May God's coming this Christmas once again be a sure reminder of his love and grace and peace!

Though most of you will have gotten my November newsletter, here is a bit of an update and look at life in these parts.

- Would you believe that my computer and I are still not getting along, but all is not lost, for a dear friend has helped me to get a new one. Hopefully, it will be up and running soon. The real problem has been email, but I'll spare you the details. This whole affair has pushed my envelope(an expression that I never really learned since it came into being after I left the USA, but I use it anyway!).
- I arrived in Germany on Oct. 18, was here in Hohenbruch (a big house with lots of room for guests) less than 48 hours before I was making birthday visits and writing the parish newsletter for the month of November(in the meantime, December and January have come out). As the days rolled by and I recovered from jet lag, I found myself unpacking the boxes I'd packed last May in Klaipeda, finding things I thought I'd thrown away and wondering where the things were I thought I'd decided to keep and bring to Germany(looks like the coffee machine is a distant memory). The first weeks then, were filled with borrowing a car twice from two different people, trying to unpack, grocery shopping, preaching, going with our choir to a neighboring village to practice with their choir for an Adventskonzert and worship service. My installation service as pastor was on November 7, and my godchild, Fransien, came all the way from Holland to celebrate the day with me!
- The installation service was a bigger deal than I anticipated, and over 170 people came-- about 50 from the neighboring villages, a lot of neighboring pastors(the service was in the afternoon), from Berlin, and of course, from this congregation. The choir sang, the brass choir played, and I preached...no one threw tomatoes, so I guess it was okay! Afterwards many came to the parish house(1/2 of which is my apartment) for coffee and cake (Kaffee und Kuchen)...and it was only after 8 that night that the last guest left!
- The folks in the congregation are wonderfully welcoming and just plain nice! There are lots of older people though, who are waiting for the pastor to visit them, so THAT will take up most of my time in the coming months. I have hopes to do something monthly with a few youth (there are at most 10 in the whole congregation) and maybe in the spring, start work with an evening Bible study for adults. This thing of a half-time job is going to be a juggling act. It would be very easy to work at least 40 hours a week just for the congregation.
- As for the rest of the moving in process, well, I've bought bookshelves, and they are still lying in the packages in the living room. A gift sofa arrives next week, and it's a Schalfsofa, so the inn will soon be open! The walls need pictures, the

windows curtains, I need more time in the day! This month has meant 6 worship services, and a Advent "meditation" for parish Advent Coffee (and Kuchen). I will preach then again 2x in January and then take two weeks to go see Dad. He is slowing down quite a bit, though he still sounds pretty chipper on the phone. I call about twice a week, just to say HI.

- I am barely at the starting point for the research project, but I gave myself 6 weeks to get settled, and now I must launch! SO many things to do, and the first is to plan, step by step what needs to happen. I'd tell you all about it, but it would probably put you to sleep! I am excited to get started, but even getting started has a prelude, which must be calculated and followed through!

Okay, so is that enough? I could write a whole 'nother page and tell you about the crows eating the apples in the backyard, the cats that live in the barn(I am NOT feeding them, but I can bet the barn is mouse-free!), the article that got in the local Oranienburg newspaper that means I don't have to introduce myself to just about anyone....they all say, yes, WE know who you are, or I could tell you about the visit to the doctor's a few weeks back. From 7-9 on Tuesdays, the doctor will see only patients from Hohenbruch (we are 700 in the locality)....the noise from the waiting room was so loud(everyone was talking to everyone....like half the town was there) that the receptionist had to ask us to quiet down so she could answer the phone! What a hoot! I get fresh bread just about everyday from a baker that drives a truck out here, though I can drive my own car to the bakery about 8 km away, now that I have one. I think I've gotten the bank stuff straightened out, and wish the dollar course would settle down(word here says I should forget it and just eat the 35% difference). The book store folks are helpful, the neighboring pastors(from other villages and towns...we are the only church here) are very friendly, the pussy willows on the graves in the churchyard(put on for the last Sunday in the church year) aren't the only white on the ground, for it has snowed twice already.

On last Sunday afternoon, four church choirs, some local dramatists, a small recorder orchestra with strings, and a few congregations from the district put on Orff's Christmas Story. Fantastic. The shepherds had the biggest speaking parts and they spoke the Berlin dialect; it was a stitch, and I understood it all, dialect and all! To frost the day, we emerged from the packed church to find it snowing....then a bit later, the sky cleared, and we were treated to a fine winter sunset(at 4 in the afternoon). Brandenburg is *beautiful*, and I get to live here for a while....

Thanks for listening, for praying, and I hope this fills in a few of the blanks, if even just a little bit!

Blessings for Advent and Christmas.

In Christ,

Jane Holslag