

Study Abroad Story

Ethan Stoppenhagen '18

“When I was in Wittenburg, my boss, my internship supervisor and I would drive to Leipzig each Sunday for church and Leipzig had become a or has become sort of a, a city of refuge for refugees from, from the Middle East. And what that meant then was that this congregation that we were, had more or less become members of for even just for my short time that I was there, was a like a multiethnic congregation.

And well, the majority of the service was still done in German. One of the, the pivotal moments that really shifted the way I understand the universality of the church is when it came for holy communion and the distribution of holy communion, the pastor would say “Take, eat” in the mother tongue of whoever was receiving. So, he would be saying it in Arabic and Farsi, in German, in English.

And I guess for me that was just such a profound moment in which somehow all of these people are coming together from around the world and figuring out ways to create community, and specifically then in the church setting as well, just how the church is this worldwide church...and how that at certain moments there, it's where everything can converge at once. That moment had a really profound impact on me.

The way I carry that with me then especially as I consider as I, as I intend to go to seminary and become a pastor, from a pastoral perspective. Having Pastor Fisher as an example of someone who clearly knows his congregation really well, and the people with whom he's interacting. And too, that knowing too, that he's, he's even dedicated to learning Farsi. He's been learning Farsi in order to be able to have these interactions with these people who are fleeing to Germany, to Europe for many reasons some of them are religious. And so that he then, as a pastor, is able to offer that that peace, and reassurance and then to be able to hear that in their own language, I think is a beautiful thing.

So being for me then understanding that as a pastor, to be able to be so interconnected with the members of the congregation, that even to the point where I should even be learning their language and their mother tongue, to be able to communicate these truths to them is, yeah, it's just a beautiful thing.”