

2014 Asbury/Toccoa Falls Joint Spring Break Study Abroad Trip ~ Germany, Poland, Austria ~

On March 15th 36 students and professors from Asbury University and Toccoa Falls College descended upon Berlin, Germany with the objective of studying events related to the Holocaust across various locations in central Europe.

Our Berlin hostel was on what was previously East German soil – in the shadow of the famous TV tower specifically built by the German Democratic Republic to be near the wall (so as to be easily viewed from the west) and taller and, it was hoped, more impressive than any church steeple; a symbol of a new age for Germany. We were constantly confronted with this city's turbulent past.



Asbury and Toccoa Falls Students/Faculty in front of the Pergamon Museum

During the three days spent in Berlin students experienced the Topography of Terror display (near a remaining part of the wall), had a classroom interaction with a German professor and others (including a Jewish German refugee) regarding how Germans process the Holocaust and the state of human dignity in central Europe today, visited the Brandenburg Euthanasia Memorial, the Jewish Museum, the Anne Frank Museum, and Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. There was also free time to simply explore this historic and iconic city.

On day 4 we traveled to south central Poland and the beautiful city of Krakow; the cultural center of Polish life.



Students listening to Dr. Ralph Kappler from the Halo School in Berlin

On day 5 we awoke early and travelled to Auschwitz where we spent most of the morning and afternoon taking a guided tour through both Auschwitz I and II (Birkenau). This was the most emotionally challenging part of our trip. Walking under the "Arbeit Macht Frei" (work makes you free) sign and then later through the infamous train entrance to the extermination camp was an experience no one will ever forget. Later that evening we spent time as a group talking about the experience and contemplating the implications of these events for our understanding of the human condition and how we as Christians should respond.



Auschwitz-Birkenau iconic entrance



Asbury Students at Wawel Castle in Krakow, Poland

The following day many students visited the area that was the Jewish Ghetto, memorialized in the movie Schindler's List (a photo of a page from Schindler's actual list serves as the backdrop for this flier), and touring a museum that now inhabits Schindler's old enamel factory and which chronicles Jewish life in Krakow between World War I and the end of the Second World War. The rest of the day was spent experiencing local attractions like St. Mary's Basilica and Wawel Castle; what a majestic and impressive structure!

On day 7 we made our way to Salzburg, Austria where the following day we spent enjoying this beautiful resort city at the base of the Alps. The old town was so charming and full of history, including third century Roman Christian catacombs, St. Peter's Abbey, and Mozart's childhood home.



On day 9 we got up early and drove to Dachau Concentration Camp; the original camp formed by the SS and used to train most every other camp commandant. At each concentration camp we found an abundance of information and visual artifacts chronicling the atrocities of the Nazi regime on anyone who did not fit within their configuration of the Third Reich. It was encouraging to see how much history was there to be experienced by the visitor – and how many visitors there were. Tremendous efforts are being made to ensure that the events that occurred in these places will never be forgotten. This camp, perhaps more than the others, did provide the visitor with a sense of hope. At the back of the camp were several religious memorials (Jewish, Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Protestant) that served as places of prayer and contemplation. The protestant memorial was actually a functioning chapel with weekly services. The rest of the day was spent exploring the beautiful Bavarian city of Munich.



Gate at the Dachau Concentration Camp



St. Paul's Parish in Munich

On day 10 our trip was over and we made our way to the airport for our return; each one of us forever changed.