

EASTER UPDATE

Dear friends in Christ,

Introduction

For many of you, this is the first Newsletter you've ever received from us; for the rest it is the first official Newsletter you've received since *last* Easter. I know that many of you have been following Gretchen's ongoing battle with cancer through the "Gretchen Trinklein" journal page I've set up at CaringBridge.org, but I'm also aware that many of you wonderful people just aren't "computer types." So for *everybody's* sake, I'm sending this "Special" newsletter out—I want to make sure that everyone on our list of family, friends, and supporters is as up-to-date as possible on our situation.

"Well, why did it take so long for you to get a Newsletter out??" I hear you ask. A fine question!

The truth is that when we got aboard that Medical Evacuation flight out of South Korea last April, neither Gretchen nor I anticipated being in the U.S. for more than four to six months at the most (things were looking very promising at that time). I therefore did not pack all my files (electronic or otherwise) any more than we packed winter clothes! Who could have foreseen the twists and turns in the road?

The most problematic thing that I left behind in South Korea was our **SUPPORTERS MASTER LIST**...the current version of email and snail-mail addresses (including the direct requests to subscribe/unsubscribe that we've received over the years). So for the past 3+ weeks I've been trying to *reconstruct* that Master List from *alllll* the emails and reports I've received since 2015. Those things (mostly) reside on the laptop I DID bring with me, and they formed the basis of the "new" list I completed (fittingly?) on Good Friday.

Now, this brings me to an important point for all of you:

I am certain that this new Master List contains some errors. Please, please forgive me! If:

- 1) You previously asked to have your name removed, or
- 2) You're getting a hard copy of this Newsletter and would rather get it by email, or
- 3) You're getting an email copy of this Newsletter and would rather get a hard copy in the mail, or
- 4) There's something wrong with the address (or the person(s) to whom it's addressed!), or
- 5) There's anything else at all that you want to correct or say...

then please let me know and I'll be more than happy to attend to it. We are so thankful for all of you!

Okay?

That being said, I'd like to give everyone a "Reader's Digest" version of what's been happening:

1) Who we are, and Gretchen's cancer challenge

(I know that long-time supporters will be familiar with these things, but I think it's worth including this section for those who have not received our Newsletters before.)

My family and I have been living and serving in South Korea since the autumn of 2016. I am a "theological educator"—meaning I teach at Luther University & Seminary in Yongin, a million-person suburb (!) of Seoul. It has been very demanding AND very rewarding, and the friendships we have formed through the years are rich and precious.

As you can imagine, moving to Korea with four young-adult children (ages 14-21) was fraught with challenges. Aside from learning the language, there were cultural differences and societal expectations to master; and all the while Gretchen carried the burden of homeschooling our two youngest children. But by the time 2021 rolled around, the youngest (Johnny) had completed his high school studies and we were all looking heavenward and wondering what God had in store for us next. HooBoy...

It was in January 2021 that Gretchen first started experiencing health problems—headaches, difficulty spelling, reading, doing math. An MRI revealed tumors in her brain, and Gretchen underwent a craniotomy on March 24, 2021. The pathology report on the excised tumors showed them to be metastatic melanoma, and the doctors in Korea advised us to return to the U.S. for follow-up treatment, since melanoma is not at all a common thing in South Korea. So it was that Gretchen and I boarded a flight back to the States at the end of April, 2021, and since that time we have been engaged in exploring treatment options and receiving medical care (including another emergency craniotomy in August of 2021; CyberKnife radiation surgeries to deal with new tumors; hospitalization; physical/occupational/speech therapy; and high-dose intravenous infusions of Vitamin C and Quercetin). We chose Phoenix, Arizona as our base of operations—it is home to:

- Mayo Clinic,
- Barrow Brain & Spine Institute,
- Gretchen's parents & siblings, AND
- her home congregation (Christ Church Lutheran, or "CCL"), where her father has pastored for more than forty years.

Talk about having a wonderful support group ready and waiting for us!

Current Status

At the end of December 2021 Gretchen had an MRI to assess her condition. The good news was that all the tumors previously treated by CyberKnife had either shrunk or disappeared completely. The bad news was that eleven *new* tumors had formed! 🤯 These new tumors were fast-growing and had already begun to have some effect on Gretchen's "executive functions" (the doctors' term, not mine). She underwent another round of CyberKnife radiosurgery, but in February her thinking became really muddled and her left hand/arm were not working right. Another MRI showed that two of the tumors had begun hemorrhaging, and that the pocket of blood that formed around each of them was putting damaging pressure on her brain (hence the symptoms). Steroids were administered to reduce the swelling, and subsequent MRIs have shown that the tumor "pockets" have shrunk, thank the Lord. In addition, weekly infusions of high-dose vitamin C and Quercetin have done wonders for Gretchen's overall health, vitality, and attitude. She has (re)gained fifteen or twenty pounds and is very cheerful and upbeat.

Unfortunately, her memory, left hand/arm dexterity, and executive functions (including names, events, and word choice) are still lagging. Her most recent MRI shows that the eleven treated tumors have not grown (that's good) and that (as noted above) their hemorrhagic envelopes are shrinking. **But** at least two new tumors have formed, and they're bleeding as well. That means that even though (we believe that) the Vitamin C/Quercetin infusions have slowed the cancer's progression **and** have strengthened Gretchen's immune system, these naturopathic infusions aren't "enough" to stop the cancer in its tracks. This has brought us to another fork in the road as we must decide whether to continue with naturopathic treatment alone, or begin immunotherapy treatments—and if so, whether it ought to be in conjunction with the Vitamin C/Quercetin, or in place of it. This decision needs to be made in the next week or two, and we would appreciate your prayers for wisdom!

2) Other aspects of life and ministry in the midst of it all

+ + + Life + + +

Our four children have all been involved in this challenging journey to varying degrees. Our oldest daughter, Jael, married Levi Karth in 2018 and they live in Colorado with the two cutest grandchildren in the country. (Sorry, folks, but it's the unbiased truth. Really.)

Our other three (Abigail, now 24; Mike, now 22; Johnny, now 20) have lived with us the entire time: first in Korea, and now in Phoenix...except that Johnny is now at Concordia University, Irvine, CA studying Biblical Languages in the PreSem program. The three of them have been a tremendous help and encouragement and support to us both. The ordeal has put them through the wringer, emotionally, and provided a real crucible to test their faith. Abi and Mike are staying with us at the rental house in Phoenix; Abi is doing online art commissions, while Mike works in music ministry, A/V, and maintenance at Christ Church Lutheran.

Occasionally (and not often enough, for my taste 😊) Mike, Abi and Johnny do special music for services at CCL. Now, if only we could persuade Jael & family to come and visit, we'd be able to get the old quartet back together again! Or am I just being selfish and sentimental dad? Nahhh...

+ + + Ministry + + +

As you can imagine, being halfway around the world from our “mission station” has made it pretty difficult to keep up with the work there. This is all the more true since South Korean law prohibits professors from teaching classes online unless they are physically present in South Korea itself. I found this to be quite disappointing, since all my classes at Luther University have been exclusively online since shortly after the pandemic began. I was getting to be a real pro at Zoom pedagogy! 😊

I have been able to help out at CCL, and even do a little “pulpit supply” for area pastors, but honestly—as the team leaders at OIM (Synod's **Office of International Missions**) put it—right now my primary mission and ministry is caring for my wife. And I'm very, very grateful that they have that perspective, because it truly has been a full-time job...emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually! The administration at Luther University has been extremely understanding and encouraging, as well. They granted me a sabbatical for the first semester when Gretchen's ordeal began, and are just as eager for me to return as I am!

Exactly when will be, only our Savior knows. What the outcome of the next month's treatments will be is anyone's guess. We certainly have had no lack of advisors over the last year, and Scripture does say that “in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Proverbs 24:6, NRSV)! I also keep holding on to verses like James 1:5 (“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” [ESV]) as well as Isaiah 30:20-21 (“Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” [NIV])

We surely do need God's grace, mercy, strength, and guidance to face the days ahead. But by His power we'll persevere, and according to His purposes I believe we'll bring Him glory back “in the field” before long. Still we are doing our best to bear witness to the risen Lord with everyone we meet. We unquestionably have interacted with a *lot* of folks we wouldn't ever have met, without this cancer trial! It's been delightful to be able to share the hope we have in Christ despite medical circumstances, and *live out* the reality of Nehemiah 8:10, which proclaims that “The joy of the LORD is your strength!”

Honestly, it doesn't make human sense to rejoice and give thanks in the middle of a cancer fight. But that is God's command, right? → “Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). And besides, nobody ever said that God's ways always “make sense” to human reason. Gretchen and I are just so thankful that God is good, and that His plans for us really are for the best...even if we don't see or understand it at the time!

Of course, it really helps to have good, solid, Christian support and encouragement in the midst of it—including the prayers and love and support of friends like you, who have taken a personal interest in our ministry. Thank you for being channels of God's blessing!

I also need to tell you that God has blessed us beyond measure through the LC-MS Office of International Mission. What an *awesome* team of dedicated AND skilled people we have! I know that some (many?) missionaries are either largely ‘on their own’ OR they're connected with organizations that can't provide much logistical support when problems arise. Not so with us! From our dear missionary friends “in-country” (Matt Wasmund and his family; Pastor Carl Hanson and his family) to the Asia Regional team (Pastor Charles Ferry and Co.) to Mission Central in Iowa, to the *amazing* group at OIM headquarters in St. Louis, we have never felt alone in our trials. How good God is to set us in a mission-minded “family”!

Conclusion

Well, how's *that* for a “quick update?” 😊 Thanks for enduring with me through the details; I wanted to make sure everybody had enough information to fuel their prayers! Please intercede before the throne of grace

on our behalf—that Gretchen would be completely healed, according to His will; that we would be able to return to the field soon; that God would provide a way for us to serve Him more fully even while we are in the States; that He would provide good paths for our children to take as they launch out on their own.

Christ is risen! Above everything else, that truth remains, and it puts a completely different ‘spin’ on whatever we have to endure in this life. We can’t even imagine the wonders in store for us once our race here on earth is run (1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; and a host of others besides). He’s our faithful God and Savior. If He was willing to endure scourging and crucifixion to bring us to His side in glory, do you think He’ll let us be overcome by earthly trials in the meantime? Not a chance! So rejoice with us in the middle of the storm—our God is with us like a mighty warrior (Jeremiah 20:11)!

One more thing: if you know anyone who would like to be kept informed about our ministry, tell them to contact me at Hans.Trinklein@LCMS.org and ask to subscribe to our Newsletter. They won’t all be this long, I promise! The normal format is only one sheet of paper (both sides!) and includes a column by one of the kids, a column by Gretchen, and some pictures. 😊 Of course, if they want the medical nitty-gritty too, they can go to CaringBridge.org, search for “Gretchen Trinklein,” and subscribe to *that* news source as well.

God bless you!! We love you all so much, and are so very grateful for YOUR love and support through the years. Until next time, I (we!) remain,

With you in His service, *Hans*



- 1 - Where it all began
- 2 - With newborn Esperanza Karth
- 3 - Ezzie likes his Korean *hanbok*!
- 4 - Abi gets her 2nd degree black belt in TaeKwonDo from 9th Dan Grand Master Kim

- 5 - Gretchen and (most of) her siblings at a wedding in July
- 6 - Post-surgery, August 2021: “I’m picking up the BBC!”
- 7 - Johnny’s first day at Irvine
- 8 - At my Aunt Mary’s 100th birthday party; my mom’s the spring chicken at only 96! 😊
- 9 - (Most of) the Trinkleins at a family reunion
- 10 - Jael & Levi Karth celebrate Easter with Ezequiel and Esperanza
- 11 - Our Trinklein clan, with the Extended Frank Family Support Network of Arizona (or E.F.F.S.N.o.A., which really isn’t much shorter, is it?)
- 12 - My beloved ❤️

Thank you for praying for us!