

the talon

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from the Head

There are times when travel is necessary, structured, or even unwelcome, such as travel for work. At other times, travel is relaxing and full of enjoyment; we usually call that a vacation. Then there is another kind of travel: nonstop, exploratory, and often outside one's comfort zone, inviting the traveler to encounter new and challenging experiences. This last kind of travel is what our students experienced as they journeyed through six different countries in just ten days.

A group of twenty-nine students and family members, along with four chaperones, began their tour of France, Switzerland, and Germany on the Thursday before Spring Break. At least, that is what the itinerary said before we left. Yet travel has a way of taking unexpected turns. Yes, many of the places we visited were exactly as planned: the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, the Alps, and Marienplatz. But many of our most memorable moments were not listed on the itinerary at all.

One of those meaningful and unexpected experiences for me was meeting and forming a friendship with our Tour Director, G. She was a passionate and thoughtful woman from San Francisco who now lives in Berlin. G was a constant source of positivity, helping our group remain focused and grateful even when circumstances were less than ideal or the trip content was hard, such as Dachau. Much of the success of the trip belongs to her. Through her planning and dedication, she ensured that twenty-nine travelers from the small city of Cleveland, Tennessee, had a wonderful journey, one that challenged us through what we saw, tasted, and experienced.

Getting to know G will be what I treasure most from our travels. At dinners, we often asked one another difficult questions about theology and social issues. We both understood that we fundamentally disagreed about spiritual truth, yet our conversations were deep, respectful, meaningful, and caring. As I write at the conclusion of our trip, I am left with an important question: How can we, as Christians, have these heartfelt conversations and disagreements with love? How can we gather around the same table with family and still love one another despite political and religious differences? The answer is clear, yet we often ignore or forget it. Sometimes we are too busy being Jonah when we should be striving to be like Christ. Too often we try to prove a point rather than listen to the concerns of others. If that is the case, we as Christians must reevaluate how we respond to opinions that differ from our own. During this travel experience, G challenged me, supported me, and helped me see more clearly the beauty of God's creation. Thank you, G.



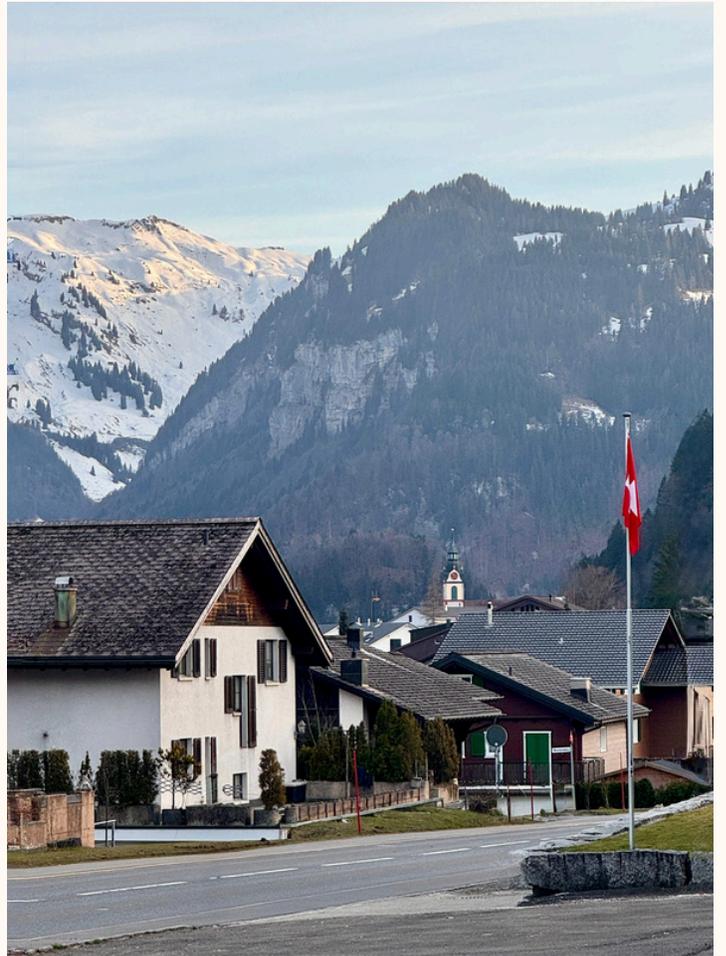
In Christ,

Jared D. Tilley



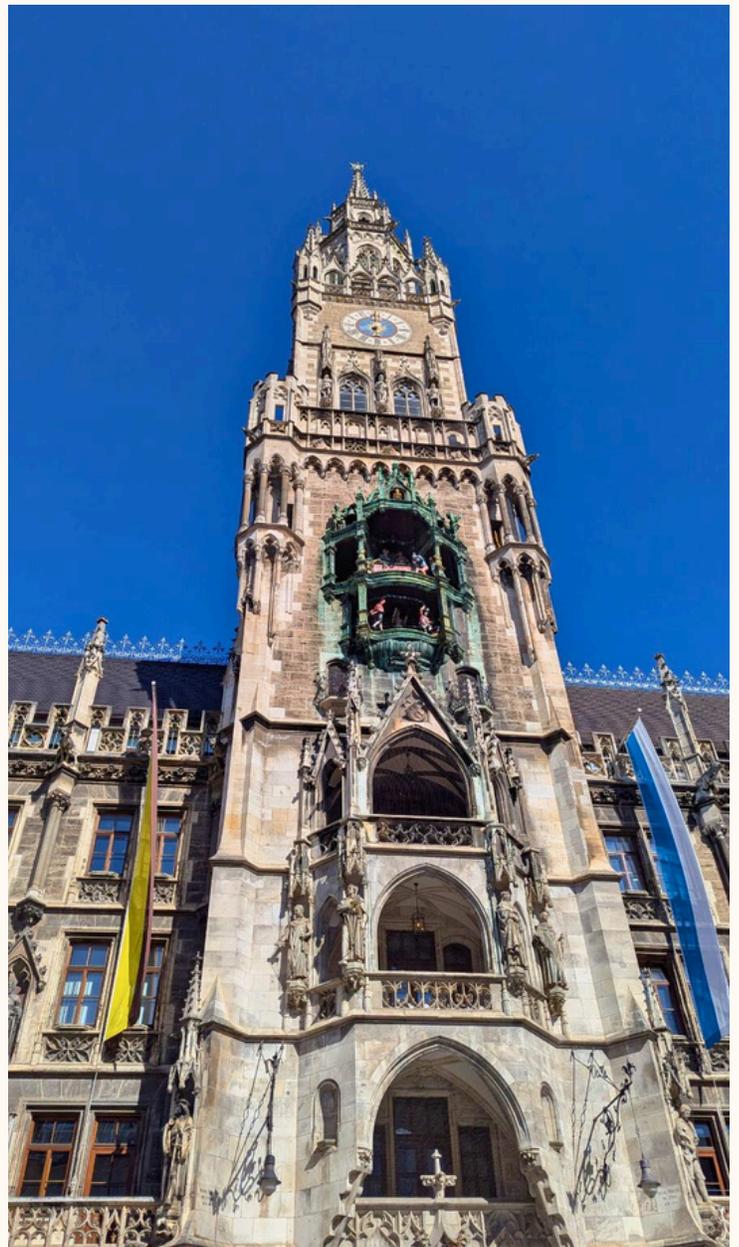
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JUNE 15-19: CHEER CAMP

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