



February 2025

Bundled up with hats, coats, and gloves, backpacks packed with books, pencil cases, and lunchboxes, we step out of the stairwell of our apartment building into the predawn darkness and chill of Germany in January. As parents, Chelsea and I have braced for these moments that have been looming over us for over a year: the first few weeks of our kids attending the local public school here in Hannover. Time and time again, we've asked congregations to join us in prayer for our children, that they would be able to make friends and adjust well to doing school in a new language. This is where the rubber meets the road.

We walk a couple of blocks as the traffic flows by, wait at the intersection for a tram to cross, watch for the little red man on the light to turn green. A part of me wants him to stay red, to keep the kids on our side of the street, close to the little English-speaking nest of our apartment where they feel confident, expressive, joyful, and safe. But, the light turns green, and we continue on.

As we walk, my mind drifts back to a few weeks earlier. We did our final "big move" here to Hannover just a few weeks ago, just a week before Christmas. My parents came with us to help us get settled in and to see for themselves just where their son and daughter-in-law had brought their beloved grandkids. Members of Chelsea's family followed ten days later. They each discovered a place which was very different from home, but also filled with excitingly different opportunities. We said our goodbyes to them at the end of their trips at the airport, waving at the security checkpoint.

As the kids and I continue our chilly walk to school through the dark, I realize that my anxiety for my kids' well-being at school was probably the same feeling our parents felt for us. There comes a point where you have to say your goodbyes and give final hugs and trust them to God's loving hands.

As we walk, we begin to notice that we're no longer walking alone. A couple of girls and their mom march along in similar hats, coats, and backpacks a few yards ahead. A dad and his son follow along behind us. Children zoom along on scooters, shouting out greetings to their friends as they pass. Soon we find ourselves in a group of a couple dozen elementary school kids and their parents, all streaming to the school ahead.

I feel a wave of solidarity with these other moms and dads: in a few minutes, we'll all bring our children to the entrance to the school, give a squeeze and a word of encouragement, and send them off to be challenged and cheered by teachers and classmates, to wrestle their way through Deutsch and math, to navigate their way through friendships and playground politics as they each begin to discover themselves.

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We get to the gate and I give them each a hug and send them on their way. As they walk through, I say a silent prayer that those teachers and kids will love them at least a fraction as much as I do. And then I turn, heading to catch the tram that will bring me to my office.

As pastors of the English-speaking RELISH community (Reformed English Language International Service of Hannover), we are a bit like teachers ourselves. Just as we entrust our children into the care of the teachers at school, brothers and sisters in Christ from abroad have been entrusted into our care. We have been given the opportunity to challenge and cheer believers from around the world who have found themselves in Hannover for a time, sent by families and communities who love them and who pray for their welfare. Chelsea and I get to walk alongside them as they wrestle with God, as they seek to follow Jesus faithfully, as they deal with the pressures of work and family and culture in a place that is often far from home. Just like our kids' teachers, we want to build these believers up, strengthening their minds and hearts so that they can not only survive in this world, but thrive as they follow the call of Jesus Christ to be salt and light.

A few hours from now, either Chelsea or I will walk back to school and gather our kids back at the schoolyard gate. And just as I pray that my kids will emerge a bit wiser, a bit kinder, a bit more confident and resilient, so I also pray for our RELISH community, that whenever they will leave us, God will have worked in their hearts to prepare them for the journeys ahead—planting fruits of the Spirit that will grow into a harvest that will bring glory to Jesus Christ over and over again.

P.S. If you would like to personally see what church planting in Europe looks like up close, we would like to invite you to attend the European Church Planting Retreat in May 2025, where participants can visit a church planting site—including with the Lampen family in Hannover—to discover the challenges and opportunities that God has provided in various places throughout Europe. Following these church plant visits, participants will come together at the Emmaus Centre in the Netherlands to discuss their experiences and to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit as they consider how to apply their learnings in their own churches and communities. For more information, including a review of previous years' trips, please visit <https://www.europartnership.org/>.