

The Mennonite Experience in Poland History Tour 2026



Marienburg Castle – Photography by Mark Jantzen

July 10-21, 2026

Sponsored by the Mennonite-Polish Studies Association

mla.bethelks.edu/information/mpsa.php

Tour Leaders: Mark Jantzen, John D. Thiesen, and Richard Thiessen

Arrangements in Poland: Travopol Travel Agency, Warsaw

Tour Overview

Poland was the refuge and homeland for generations of Mennonites during years of intolerance after the Protestant Reformation. As a result, the history of Poland is part of the history of many Mennonites around the world. As early as the 1530s, Anabaptists from Holland and the lowlands of the Rhine and North Germany found a sanctuary in the Polish Commonwealth. Unlike Switzerland and the Holy Roman Empire, Poland rejected the brutal religious persecutions plaguing Western Europe. As a result, along with others seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, many Dutch and German Mennonites settled in Poland, and remained there until later migrations took some to Ukraine and others to the American Midwest and southern Manitoba. A large number of Mennonites remained along the Vistula River until the end of the Second World War. Surprisingly, most Mennonites have overlooked these centuries in their own history, even though the years of refuge in Poland constituted a much longer stay than the later years of residence in Ukraine.

This tour is designed to acquaint persons of Mennonite descent, and other interested persons, with the country that provided their ancestors a safe and secure homeland for so many years from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. We will visit the significant sites of both Polish and Mennonite history, discovering the quintessential beauty of Poland as seen through the lens of Anabaptist/Mennonite history and learning how the sojourn in Poland shaped Mennonites in North America. Get ready to experience the amazing beauty and the astonishing significance of Poland as the homeland of our Mennonite ancestors.

Itinerary

(Subject to minor changes based on participant interest and shifts in the tour schedule)

Day 1 – July 10, Friday - Arrival at Frederic Chopin International Airport in Warsaw, the capital city of Poland. Enjoy a “Welcome to Poland” dinner. Overnight stay in Warsaw.

Day 2 – July 11, Saturday – City tour of Warsaw including UNESCO Old Town and its lovely architecture, the Royal Route, Warsaw University, the Holy Cross Church where Chopin’s heart is kept, the Nicolas Copernicus monument, the foreign embassies district, Royal Łazienki Park, the former Warsaw Ghetto established by Nazis in 1940, and the modern part of the city. After lunch we will try to include a Chopin piano recital or similar cultural performance. Overnight stay in Warsaw. Lunch provided, dinner on your own.

Day 3 – July 12, Sunday – After breakfast, we leave Warsaw and drive through the scenic and picturesque countryside along the Vistula River. We visit the former Mennonite settlements of Deutsch Kasun and Deutsch Wymyschle, where Mennonite villagers lived

until the war. We also stop at the former Mennonite Church at Wielka Nieszawka (Obernessau) and will see the open-air museum, Olender Ethnographic Park, devoted to Mennonite heritage. We will stay overnight in the UNESCO city of Toruń, Copernicus' birthplace. Dinner provided, lunch on your own.

Day 4 – July 13, Monday – We will visit the cemetery of the Przechówko congregation and other associated villages. Lunch will be served in an arcaded farmhouse built in the eighteenth century in Chrystkówo, which is now part of the Lower Vistula River Park Complex. In the afternoon we will have a brief tour of Toruń with some free time to explore this well-preserved late medieval city on our own. Lunch provided, dinner on your own, overnight in Toruń.



Day 5 – July 14, Tuesday – We drive north today towards Gdańsk. We visit Culm, where Mennonites paid to build a military-training junior high school in 1776 as the price of maintaining their military exemption. We will also travel to other villages and hamlets where Mennonites formerly lived and attended church in the Vistula Valley and see the Nickelstein, the only monument Mennonites ever erected in Poland. As time permits, we may explore some other Mennonite cemeteries which still exist (Schönsee, Tragheimerweide). We arrive in Elbląg (Elbing) for dinner and overnight stay.

Day 6 - July 15, Wednesday – Brief tour of Elbląg, including the oldest existing Mennonite church building in Poland from 1590 and the church building that later replaced it. Visit to local Mennonite villages and cemeteries as time permits. Afternoon tour of Stutthof Concentration Camp. Lunch provided, dinner on your own, overnight stay in Elbląg.

Day 7 - July 16, Thursday – Explore the waterways and water works of the Vistula Delta region with a leisurely cruise on the canal boat through the grass from Elbląg to Buczyniec. Instead of locks, this canal was built with boat trailers on rails to lift boats from one waterway over the grass to the next. In the afternoon visits to the former church sites and cemeteries of Thiensdorf and Preussich Rosengart. We will drive on to Gdańsk for night, lunch provided, dinner there on your own.



Day 8 – July 17, Friday – After breakfast, city tour of Gdańsk including the Golden Gate, Town Hall, Neptune’s Fountain – symbol of Gdańsk, Artus’ Court, St. Mary’s Church, Long Market with Green Gate and the Crane along the Motława Canal, Three Crosses Monument – an homage to dockyard workers killed in anti-Communist protests, and the Westerplatte, the place where World War II started (if time permits, we may also see amber production today). We will also see the former Mennonite church building here in Gdańsk which was built in 1819. It is scheduled for renovations this summer, but there is a possibility we can still peek inside. After lunch, time in Gdańsk for exploring on your own. There are two world-class museums here, the Museum of the Second World War and the European Solidarity Centre, both right on the edge of the old town. Lunch provided, dinner on your own back in Gdańsk.



Day 9 – July 18, Saturday – Today we will visit the Werder Museum in Nowy Dwor (Tiegenhof) with an interesting exhibition of Mennonite history and other villages. Lunch at the Mały Holender in Tiegenhagen. Other important sites include the former church sites and cemeteries of the congregations of Orloffelfelde and Rosenort, as well as other locales where participants have ancestral ties. Dinner on your own, overnight stay in Gdańsk.

Day 10 – July 19, Sunday – After breakfast, we will tour the massive castle of the Teutonic Knights in Malbork (Marienburg), UNESCO site and the largest brick castle in the world. We will visit the important cemetery in Heubuden and additional villages in the southern

tip of the Vistula Delta. Meal in Mielenz/Miłoradz hosted by the club Dawna Wozownia (The Former Coach Shed). Overnight stay in Gdańsk.



Day 11 - July 20, Monday – A final tour of Vistula congregations and sites closer to Gdańsk, including the congregations of Fürstenwerder and Ladekopp, the windmill in Drewnica, a ferry ride, and a view of the mouth of the Vistula Delta. Closing dinner in Gdańsk.

Day 9 – July 21, Tuesday – After breakfast, we check out of our hotel. Departure transfer to Gdańsk Lech Wałęsa Airport to reach your flight home or other destination.

Tour Leaders

This tour is led by Mark Jantzen, Professor of History at Bethel College, John D. Thiesen, Co-Director of Libraries at Bethel and Archivist at the Mennonite Library and Archives, and Richard Thiessen, former Executive Director of the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, BC, Canada. Mark and John founded the Vistula Mennonite Studies Association in 2002 and have published extensively on the history of Mennonites in the Vistula River valley. Richard has been actively involved with the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) for the past twenty years. He has a keen interest in Mennonite genealogy and has been the creator and manager of the www.mennonitegenealogy.com website since its inception in 1995.

This tour carries on with gratitude the tradition established by Peter J. Klassen, the founder of the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and continued after his retirement by Alan Peters of the California Mennonite Historical Society. The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association and the Vistula Mennonite Studies Association at Bethel were combined in 2016 as the Mennonite-Polish Studies Association. This tour also incorporates Mark's experience leading student and other tours to Poland since 2003. Our

intention is to explore the Polish Mennonite roots of tour participants and to visit many of the villages where ancestors of tour participants once resided. To assist with finding the relevant places, John will prepare a genealogical report for each tour participant with roots in Poland.

The local Polish arrangements have been managed by the Travpol Travel Agency in Warsaw, directed by Andrzej Puchacz. His agency provides a wide range of excellent tours in Poland and is particularly experienced in arranging Mennonite tours. You can visit their website at: www.travpol.pl.

Tour Information

The cost of the tour is for the “land portion” only. Since most tour participants in the past have made this tour a part of a larger European experience, visiting other parts of Europe on their own either before or after the tour, we ask that tour participants make their own travel arrangements to arrive in Warsaw and depart from Gdańsk. If you need advice regarding your own arrangements, please let us know.

The tour will be limited to 34 persons due to bus, hotel, and restaurant limitations. Once the quota of 34 persons has been filled, any additional reservations will be placed on a waiting list, in the order received, in case of cancellations. The minimum number of participants required for the trip to take place is 20 persons.

Virtually all tour-related communications are made by email. If you do not have an email address yourself, please indicate the email of a nearby relative or friend that we can use to send tour newsletters and other correspondence to you.

Price List

Tour Costs – Mennonite Tour (July 10-21) (a minimum of 20 tour participants is required)

US \$3,400/CAD \$4,650 per person, double occupancy

US \$550/CAD \$750 single supplement

This price includes lodging for eleven nights, half board, travel by motor coach, entry fees where required, English-speaking Polish guides, and all gratuities for organized group activities. Any additional privately arranged excursions, and the gratuities associated with them, would be an additional personal expense.

As mentioned above, these costs do NOT include airfare to Warsaw and from Gdańsk. Also not included is any travel or cancellation insurance protection that you will want to secure on your own. Those are arrangements you will need to make on your own as we cannot provide refunds if you find you are unable to travel for any reason.

Schedule of Payment

Reservations can be made by emailing Mark Jantzen at mjantzen@bethelks.edu. A deposit of US \$300/CAD \$450 per person is due when you register to reserve your spot on the tour. Once the tour group maximum of 34 persons is complete, additional registrants will be placed on a waiting list in the order that their registrations and deposits are received.

Once Canadian participants have reserved a spot by email, Richard Thiessen will email them Canadian deposit payment information.

For US participants, checks for your deposit should be made out to Bethel College with Menno Tour 2026 in the memo line and mailed to Mark Jantzen, Bethel College, 300 E 27th St., North Newton, KS 67117.

The final payment is due March 2, 2026, with US and Canadian final payments following the same format as for the deposits. The final amount will be the total amount minus the deposit plus any single supplement.

Additional Information

Those traveling alone should be prepared to pay the appropriate costs for the "single supplement" portions of their tour costs or make arrangements to room with another person traveling alone to qualify for the "double occupancy" rate.

Once reservations have been made, and a deposit has been received, additional information, including a suggested reading list, informative maps, travel suggestions and information, genealogical assistance, and periodic newsletters will be sent by email to all tour participants by the tour leaders. If you have any questions, please contact Mark Jantzen at mjantzen@bethelks.edu or by phone at (316) 284-5354 or John Thiesen at jthiesen@bethelks.edu or by phone at (316) 284-5360 or Richard Thiessen at richard.thiessen@gmail.com or by phone at (604) 613-6356.

The tour does involve walking tours through a number of cities and the various sites visited. Many of the "old town" portions of ancient cities are not accessible by bus, with many streets and city squares reserved for pedestrians only. We also leave the bus to visit historical sites, remote old cemetery locations with potentially uneven ground, and other sites of interest. Tour participants should be able to manage a significant amount of walking.

Please note that slight modifications of this program might be necessary if unforeseen circumstances arise.