

Living as a Witness in **Germany**

By Justina McCandless

Only a 30-minute train ride from the metropolis of Hannover and nestled comfortably among acres of flowered springtime fields sits the small German city of Stadthagen. This is the place where 19-year-old Esther Graf grew up. It's a place where everything can be reached by foot or bicycle, where bakeries and ice-cream stores dot the streets, and where weekday markets fill the city square.

Stadthagen is also home to a thriving Latter-day Saint community.

Although the city is small, Stadthagen has a large ward—an anomaly for Germany, where there are fewer than five members for every 10,000 Germans. But for Esther it has been the perfect place to learn how to live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how to use those principles to serve and bless others.

When Esther was 14, she received her patriarchal blessing, which

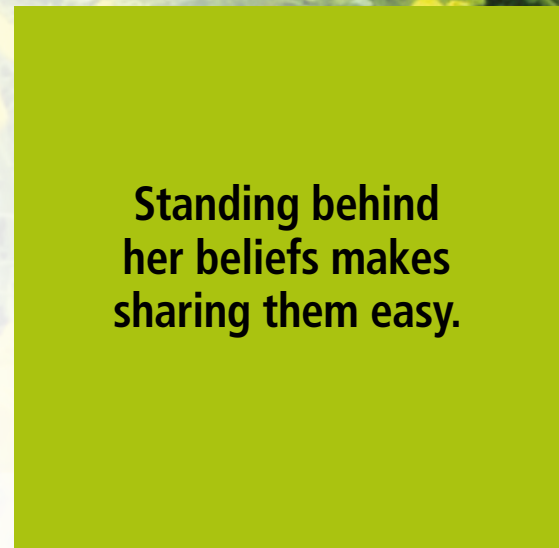
brought about an important realization. “It became clear to me how important I really am to Heavenly Father,” she says. “I learned how important all of us are to Him.”

She takes that knowledge and applies it to her relationships with others.

In her calling on the stake young single adult council, for example, she's responsible for making sure everyone feels included. “I'm learning not to be critical of others but to get to know them instead.”

She also keeps that in mind when she's at school. “I'm asked pretty often about my religion, but I don't find that bad in any way,” she says. “Somehow it always makes me happy because then I simply remind myself how much it helps me and how much it brings to my life. Through the gospel I just know so much.

“There's always going to be people who make fun of our faith and who



Standing behind her beliefs makes sharing them easy.

don't understand it,” she says, “but it's really not so bad when we stand behind what we believe.”

Esther's love for and trust in God is what helps her the most in living and sharing the gospel.

“Before you worry,” she said, “trust God first. When I do that and I have faith, everything else is simple. When we trust God, we can move forward in our lives with faith and confidence in the future. When we do that, we can live as witnesses of God.” ■

The author lives in Germany.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ESTHER GRAF



MORE ABOUT ESTHER

What do Germans like to eat?

Germans like to eat potato or noodle casseroles. My favorite food is potatoes with vegetables and sauce. I especially love peas and Brussels sprouts.

What do you do for fun?

I listen to music, sing, and play the piano or guitar. I like to bake. I'm teaching myself how to make fancy cakes.

What is dating like in Germany?

We don't go on dates. It'd be strange if a guy said, "Do you want to go on a date with me?" Here you get to know people in groups, and if you like someone, you talk on the phone and online. You meet now and then, and then you either start a relationship or you don't.

THE CHURCH IN GERMANY

- 39,401 Latter-day Saints
- 15 stakes
- 89 wards
- 85 branches
- 3 missions
- 2 temples

BY THE NUMBERS

- 80,995,685 people (estimate as of July 2014)
- 6,200 museums
- Over 400 zoos, the most in one country in the world

FACTS ABOUT GERMANY

Capital: Berlin

Language: German (Deutsch)