



The Johnsons in Sweden...



October 1, 2010

Greetings from Alingsås, Sweden, where fall comes early. As we enter October the leaves are showing their peak colors. It was 18 years ago this week that Linda and I were married in Alingsås. Now we are enjoying the wonder of our 11th healthy baby. This is the first time in 10 years that we have stayed in Sweden but outside of Tranås. It has renewed our perspective that there is a Sweden outside our hometown. This perspective is timely as we have moved out of our home and church in Tranås.

Hello David Josiah- September 16, 9lbs., 22 in.

We moved out of our apartment home in Tranås to Linda's hometown in Alingsås in late August. Soon after, we began to realize all the things we had forgotten (like passports) in storage in Tranås. Linda was already more than a week overdue, but we grew restless and decided to do an overnight trip... on September 15!



David impresses his sisters with a ballet pose

It felt cozy to be back in our storage apartment with all our recognizable furniture and our own bed. At around midnight Linda realized that something was happening but waited until around 2 a.m. to break the news. We had six kids with us and no childcare plan. For the first time, the kids went with us to the hospital. For seven hours they sat patiently in the waiting room. Within 15 minutes after birth they met their new brother face-to-face!

SWEDISH GOVERNMENT BANS HOME SCHOOLING

Sweden took a dramatic turn toward totalitarianism in education with the adoption of a sweeping new school reform law that essentially prohibits home schooling and requires all schools to teach the same pluralistic government curriculum. The new school law was approved by Parliament in June amidst strong criticism and opposition. When it goes into effect next year, the entire educational system will be transformed. It is certain that the Swedish schools have been in constant decline in quality over the last 15 years, but the reform puts clamps on resourceful educational solutions by parents and local communities, and grants more power to the National School Board (Skolverket) to solve the nation's current education crisis.

Independent, or "free schools" which are already financed with vouchers and largely controlled by government, will have to further submit to the same regulatory framework as regular government schools. They will also be required to follow state-issued syllabi and curricula. "[Religious schools] can't make any children pray or confess to God, but they will still be allowed [to exist]," Education Ministry press secretary Anna Neuman told *The New American* in a telephone interview. Essentially, there will no longer be a marked difference between "free" schools and government schools, she explained. And there will be no other option. In addition to abolishing remaining distinctions among schools, the new education act also prohibits home schooling for religious or philosophical reasons.

We were approved for home school our first six years by the local Tranås school board. We were enjoying good progress and convinced that we could raise our covenant family in the Swedish secular environment. Then in 2008, when three other families in our church also applied for home school, the National School Board scolded the Tranås board for being too lax in approving us and warned of an investigation and penalties. We were denied, but won appeals in court over the next two years. This process wore us thin as it is difficult enough to educate and raise the large family. With the new law, the right to appeal has been essentially taken away. You can follow the latest developments in Swedish education at: <http://www.hslda.org/hs/international/Sweden/default.asp>

Naturally, this has an impact on our family. With home education eliminated we face issues of conscience in how we will educate our children if registered in the Swedish system. There are creative solutions: *As Swedish citizens, we have the possibility to be in Sweden up to six months of the year, yet stay unregistered and without requirements not only to the educational system, but also the extremely high taxation system.* But how do we transport and house a family of 13 in two locations? Shall we look at two locations in Europe? Shall we divide time between the U.S. and Sweden? Needless to say, we have much to think about before entering the next term of service!



SWEDEN

Serving as an agency for reformation in the Church in Sweden by encouraging a Reformed and covenantal church-planting movement.



Gary & Linda Johnson

Daniel 16, Joel 14, Rebekah 13
Jan-Mikael 11, Benjamin 10,
Sarah 8, Nathanael Baillie 6,
Elisabeth 4, Leah 3, Jeremiah 1,
David Josiah 1 month

garyjohnson63@gmail.com

tel. 334 224-2756



1616 South Hull St.
Montgomery, Alabama
36104

MTW Account #13605



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Our traditional community development activities program, “Nya Stoeryds Fritidsförening” was our introduction to the city when we moved to Tranås in 2000. It has grown to a seven week program including baseball, street basketball, American Girls Club, music (piano and strings), ballet, and swimming. Tranås, with a population of 20,000, is a leading county for progressive business growth environment. Our program has been grafted into the city’s official parks and recreation program and I am considered a profile in the tourist and children’s activities realm of the city. We made front-page headlines twice due to the acceptance of this program as a part of their “Tranås After Work” image promotion. As we move to a new site, I plan to take this concept with me.

Our baseball section, the ANGELS, had another good year.

Our cadets (12-15 years old) have won the Swedish Championship (SM) two of the last three years. This year it was the junior’s (15-17 years) turn as they took the silver medal at the Junior National Championships. Our teams played in the finals of the four most important baseball tournaments for youth.

I enjoyed an unofficial role with the youth Swedish national baseball program as they played in Holland, Slovakia, and hosted the European Qualifier in Baseball for Cadets. Our oldest son Daniel (16) was a surprise starter for the Junior National Team as he got on base 11 of 15 times. Joel (14) was chosen as Most Valuable Player, best hitter, and top pitcher (three wins) in the Cadet EC Tournament. I travelled to the tournaments and helped mostly in practical ways for the teams. It was nice to support the Swedish leaders that I am usually coaching against in Sweden.



Joel: European Cadet MVP



Daniel playing with the men

How do you measure success in sports ministry?

Is it victories and championships? Conversions? Numbers?

At an August youth tournament in Stockholm (right) I had a late-night talk at the hotel with one of the coaches. He had left his wife in January and was trying to start anew. In passing I told him he had made a mistake and needed to get back home. We discussed this in more detail the next morning at breakfast. Low and behold, at our final tournament I came to find out that he had taken me up on my advice and moved home and was trying again. It is not very Swedish to give an opinion on such, but I am not Swedish!

A few years ago several Muslim refugee families from Afghanistan were placed in Tranås. Karin, a lady in our church, informed me that one of the sons was an accomplished cricket player. Cricket has batting, throwing, and catching, which puts him ahead of most Swedish beginners, so we sought him out. Safi (left) bunts cricket-style. We quit trying to change his throw. It is a joy to watch Safi make barehanded catches when the glove feels too cumbersome. As a refugee outsider, Safi needs baseball more than baseball needs Safi. But for our baseball missionaries, the table is set for Muslim ministry as well as sports ministry.



No matter our future location, my ministry will remain the same. Paul instructed in 2 Timothy 2 to “Be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Find faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Whether it is on the sports field, the concert hall, or in my own home, I believe God has called me to find faithful men who will in turn be faithful in the church, in their homes, and in society. Sports are a vehicle for glorifying God with our bodies, locating and training men to be “strong in the grace of our Lord.” If these things happen in sports we can begin to measure success.

One method for reaching Sweden is certain: while Stateside I pray to locate Christian host families willing to host Swedish youth for a school year as exchange students. The pluralistic, secular indoctrination is strong in Sweden. I am convinced that we need to get Swedes out of Sweden for a period of time. *Care to conduct missions in the comfort of your own home?*