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231-228-7260
robertwurst@tslms.org

Contributions may be sent to: SLMS

1460 University Ave. San Jose, CA 95126

The newsletter for THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY is edited by Rev. Daniel S. Johnson, and Mrs. Valerie Kister Redeemer Lutheran Church, 1600 S. Center St., Marshalltown, lowa 50158 641/753-9565 (fax) 641/753-5516 danieljohnson@tslms.org

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THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



Looking at the Family Album.

By Albina Davidovna Vazhenina Becker translated by Alexei Streltsov

part 1 of 3

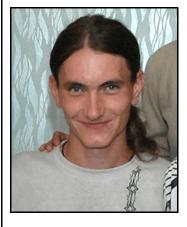
It was unsafe to keep family pictures in the Soviet times; therefore much has not been preserved. I remember how I myself tore and threw away many of them. But something was preserved. So here in this story (and the next parts) I will show you the photos I have. I have a photo of my maternal grandmother and grandfather. It was 125 years ago. The photo is dated 1884. [Ed. Note: See photo on page 3] My grandfather's name was Gotfriedt Schultz. He was a priest. [Ed. Note: Lutheran clergy in Russia are generally



called priests] He served on the Volga river. He was executed by being shot. Thus, my grandmother Anna widowed early. She was left alone with three daughters.

My father, David, he was the son of my grandmother's second husband. The name of the second grandfather was Christian. He was imprisoned in 1932 for the "language" and was shot. [Ed. Note: He was shot for speaking German.] So my childhood began this way. I was born in 1932. In 1941 we were exiled to Siberia for being German. Prior to this my grandparents lived on Volga, in the Stalingrad Region town of Treischpitz.

My sister was named the same name as my mother. Her name is, Emma. It was a custom to name children in honor of their parents. So it is not uncommon for both father and son to be named David. Or in my case, for my **continued on page 3**



A Lutheran soul. By Vladimir Gordeev

Une âme luthérienne Une âme luthérienne vagabonde
Seule tristement dans le monde
Une âme luthérienne veut comprendre
Pourquoi elle est si triste
Pourquoi elle est si seule
Pourquoi elle est toujours aux cendres

My name is Vladimir Gordeev, I am a student of the Lutheran theological seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia. I am from a little town in the Ural Region of

The Russian Federation. I was born on March 1,1986, in the province of Mordoviya. My parents have never been Christians; I was the second son of my parents. I had never thought about the Christ during my school time. I was not a good pupil at all; I was a rare one at school, because I had to study in two different schools at the same time. One of them was a normal secondary school, another was a school for children with outstanding talents, and I was also a runner – I dreamt about being a well-known sportsman.

From early childhood, I heard from my father that God did not exist. I had never asked myself about who God is, because it was so unimportant in my family. As a result of the personal views of my parents I was not baptized as a child.

The first time I encountered Christ was at the ninth grade of school. But there were questions about what Christ they taught. The people who taught this were from the Jehovah's witnesses -- yeah, they were very numerous in **continued on page 4**

My way to the Lutheran Church, 15 years long. By Veronika Prasolova

By Veronika Prasolova translated by Alexei Streltsov

I was born in 1969 in a family of atheists. Therefore we had no custom to talk about God in the family. But already in my childhood years the Lord had placed a high interest in my heart to



all things related to Him. My first encounter happened when I was 9 years old. There were many caricature images of God, such as the judge holding the scales of justice, Adam and Eve, paradise, hell, Satan – all these in the "Atheist's Calender" book. And while looking at them, I felt fear in my heart: what if there would be more evil works in my life than good ones, and I would go to hell? Well, no, I calmed down later; I was told there was no God... But I really wished for the paradise to exist and for me to be there... I remember asking my mother a question, why we often say, "Glory be to God," [translator: it is a typical Russian saying], if He is not there? But she did not know how to answer this.

In my student years while going to exams, I unintentionally prayed to God to pass them with good marks. With His help, I always passed. But I forgot about Him right away, that I should thank Him. My interest to Christianity arose when we started studying the subject that was called "Scientific Atheism." Thus that which was supposed to convince me in the contrary, actually made me to be all the more interested in knowing about God.

In 1989-90 perestroika and freedom of religion started. Russian Orthodox books for children started appearing on the store shelves, and I read those biblical stories with interest. My older sister and I were baptized in the Orthodox church in 1991, which caused my mother's discontent and wrath.

After getting married I went to my husband's motherland, Kazakhstan. However, things in marriage did not work out the way I thought they would. Humiliation, rudeness, thoughtlessness of my husband only increased my desire to be closer to God. I exchanged letters with my sister and often reflected on God in the letters. Soon my sister wrote to me that she had repented in the Baptist Church and that, if I want to be with God, I also need repentance. She sent me a copy of the Gospel of Luke. How glad I was that I could read the real Gospel! God was creating faith in me, and I was happy that God had forgiven me and that now I am under his protection. I began to forgive insults to my husband and I felt that I could love him now and accept him with all his shortcomings. I listened to the Christian radio for the whole year, and it strengthened

me, as there were no like-minded people around me, there was no church. It turned out that I found out about the existence of a Baptist congregation of CC ECB [translator: Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists – the so called "unregistered" or "underground" Baptists in Soviet times]. They responded to my inquiry, and I began to travel to their meetings and was baptized by full water immersion in 1993. How happy I was. But my husband was not. Dissatisfaction and even blackmail followed – either you give up your faith or I divorce you. I answered him that I love him but would not renounce God.

I became a very zealous Christian according to the Baptist teaching, and I rejoiced that God led me into the true church. This is how I was taught at the time. I learned to die to the world and to deny myself and all pleasure. I wore loose blouses with long sleeves and long skirts and a head covering. I took off my wedding ring and other jewelry, as the Baptists taught me that it was sin. I wore no make-up, at all. My relatives were in shock. I read only a Children's Bible and children's Christian stories to my daughter. I threw away all fairy tales as I was taught that there was so many demonic things in them! They burnt children's toys and Barbie doll as demonic toys on a fire at the children's Christian camp in view of all the children.

There was much that I now remember as if it were a nightmare. How many mistakes were made then! But I

thought that I was pleasing God, and I strove to it very jealously. I did not notice how I had become a proud Pharisee who condemned others and tried to be pleasing to God by my own efforts. I cried a lot, observing my inadequacy and I did not see the way out from that dead end. Still, the Lord was merciful to me! I began to think more profoundly about what I heard in the sermons. While



Veronika with Pastors Igor Kizyaev (I) and Vladislov Ivanov

reading Scripture, I soon began to understand it differently from how it was taught by the Baptists. I began to pray, and God confronted me with my pride, and I grieved once again with tears. Questions to the presbyter followed. I expressed my concerns and said that we talk all about love, but it is not there, only hypocrisy. The result of it was misunderstanding. I was dismissed from the music ministry and finally excommunication from the church under the charge of being continued on page 6

Under the Lord's protection

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mother and sister to be named, Emma. However, I don't know exactly concerning myself. Some said that I was not their own daughter, but adopted from a Russian family. But I couldn't find any documentation to prove this.

The first two daughters of my parents died before the age of three. Then my step-sister Emma was born in 1927. She was about three years old when my real mother died and my father left. So my step-parents, David and Emma took me in and accepted me into their family. Thus I know practically nothing about my real parents. Even my name was specified differently in the documents: in some it was Alvina, in others Alla, in still others Albina. Documents were not preserved from those years. They did not provide us with documents. Almost nothing was preserved from that time. I remember they gave us only 24 hours to get ready. And when we were evicted, they told us it was not a long time. Just for a little while. It happened when Hitler's troops approached Stalingrad, in 1941. We were told not to take anything with us. Just some food for a couple of days. We thought we would come back soon. So we did not take any documents, records or birth certificates. I remember that we went in what we were dressed at that time - all summer clothes. Just a bag with groceries and that was it. I have just turned nine by that time.

We were quite unlike present children then. We comprehended or knew little of what was going on. They kept silent about church in those times. As far as I remember those years, people like us, have always been persecuted. How could one pray to God then? I remember, my grandmother told us to get under the blanket quietly and pray there. We always hid that we believed in God, that we had faith, that we prayed. Many things were kept hidden and people did not talk indiscreetly. Especially

AS FAR AS I REMEMBER THOSE YEARS, PEOPLE LIKE US, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PERSECUTED. HOW COULD ONE PRAY TO GOD THEN?

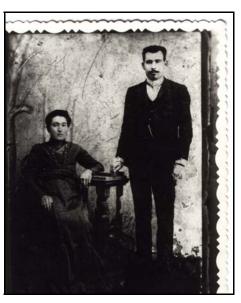
children did not know everything that was going on. And if there were talks about church, they must have been without us present. Without children. So that we would not let out a secret, everything was under cover lest anybody should suffer. It was secret.

When the Soviet authorities began to destroy churches my first grandfather, Gotfried, the priest, and my grandmother were raising their children: my mother and her sister were all small. Mother was the eldest child. Mother's sister Olinda is still alive, and now she lives in Germany. She is 97 years old. My grandmother Anna lived alone for a long time. Afterwards she got acquainted with Christian. He was also a widower. He has already had his son David. And imagine, my mother Emma (she was a daughter of Gotfried) married that David Christianovich.

Both my grandfathers were executed. Although at that time they never talked about it with children present. Christian's last name was Becker, so Becker was my virgin name also.

I turned nine years old on June 10, 1941, and the war started on June 22. The Soviets exiled us to Siberia in the fall. They made all of us work. Even though I was the

youngest, I was tall and slim. They sent both my sisters and me to harvest turnips. It was dirty and damp. They gave us knives so large that we weren't strong enough to work with them. I remember it was very cold. I got tired so much that once I fell asleep on the field in a ditch. and my sisters lost me. They went back and forth looking for me and cried, but could not find me



Albina's granparents, Anna and Rev. Gotfriedt Schultz, 1884

for a long time. They forced us to sort out everything that we previously gathered in the fall, so that the crop would not turn bad. They gave us frozen rotten potatoes for that work. Five potatoes. Hunger was terrifying. Sisters found horse's manure (probably, horses were fed with oats) and brought it home. Grandmother sorted it out with her hands and washed it. Then she fried everything that remained, and we ate that. We did not die. In the spring they gathered frozen potatoes from the fields. My sisters were caught one time doing that and severely beaten, despite the fact that they were children. At that time they scoffed at us often. Since we were Germans, we were considered Nazis to the authorities. It was in a time of war and the Nazis were the enemy. My aunt Olinda lived in Stalingrad in the beginning. They were exiled to Khazakhstan. There an attitude toward them was better, they even provided children with milk. But we were treated very badly in Siberia.

Later mother went to work at the milk factory. There they washed the equipment, and then they poured that water away. Mother collected that water and brought it home in a bucket from which the cows were fed. Hunger was just terrible. People were searching through manure and they ate whatever they could find. Many of our relatives and friends died there from hunger. But the Lord protected us. I remember we were living in some vacant house. Mother and sisters slept right on the wooden floor, and I slept at their feet. Father was taken away from us to some distant place, to the *trudarmiya* [translator: this is a special labor force in the military]

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From a culture of death to life continued from page 1

my little town. Some of my classmates were invited to their meetings and I decided to go there with my friend. It was very interesting for me. New people were talking about new things for me. I had never thought about sin before, and about hell or heaven. I knew from my parents that "everyone will die and worms will eat the dead body." The Jehovah's Witnesses tried to answer all my questions. But from our first meeting I had a strange sense; it seemed to me they were wrong, because they said that the God is not the Trinity. I grew up in Russia, where the Russian Orthodox Church was prominent. And my childhood was during the time of post-Soviet Russia, just after the fall of the Soviet Union, the time of the great restoration of Christianity in my country. And I saw the icons at museums, the icons which showed me the Triune God. But they said to me that God is only one person.... I gave up attending the Jehovah's Witnesses very soon after that. The question, "Who is Jesus?" continued to live in my heart from that time until my coming to the Lutheran Church, many years later.

After I left the Jehovah Witnesses I was invited to the Charismatic church. Oh, I was interested by their story about Jesus and especially about the Holy Spirit. But, I was not able to attend their church because I had to study and compete in sport contests.

I finished the secondary school at 17 and had to study in the other school an additional year. I tried to choose a university where I would like to study, but my parents chose for me. I went to study ecology because my father thought it would be best for me. But that year became the saddest one of my short life. When I had just begun to study at the university, my mother told me that my father was sick, he had cancer. It was hard for me, I gave up

I FELT SICK. MY DREAMS WERE FULL OF MONSTERS AND BLACK ANGELS; I WAS THINKING OF DEATH ...

studying and return to my small town. After 6 months of fighting the disease he was dead.

The death of my father was a hard blow to me. It seemed that my life turned back to me...I don't remember the funeral ceremony; it was very hard for me, to look at my father in a coffin, and later in a grave.

That year I finished the other school and became free to choose a career. I didn't know where to go, what to do, because my life was in conflict. I felt sick. My dreams were full of monsters and black angels; I was thinking of death, I was a real Goth. Yeah, this subculture dominated my life. I made my hair black for the second time in my life (I had dressed like a Goth before at the age of 16) I began to visit cemeteries and colored my hair into black. It was a very depressing and freightning time in my life.

It is very hard to say how I became Lutheran. That year when my father died was the saddest one in my life. I

tried to know why all these disasters happened to me; I needed someone to talk to. I remembered about the Lutheran Church, which I saw in Ekaterinburg (when I was a student I passed by that church often, but I had never visited). I

wrote a letter to the pastor. That was the beginning of my new churchly life. Very soon I received an answer and an invitation to a seminar in my town. There I heard the Word of God and understood that in this Church I had found my place. This seminar was in November 2004.



Vladimir baptized on Dec. 26 2004 by Rev. Sergei Glushkov

In December I was invited to Ekaterinburg to a bible school, and I said I wanted to be baptized. But before that it was required from me to learn by heart the Small Catechism in Russian and in English. (Of course, as a joke, I was told to memorize the Catechism in English, because they knew I speak English. But I didn't know it was a joke. So, I did it.) And on St. Stephen Day, on the 26 of December 2004, I was baptized in the parish of Saints Peter and Paul, in Ekaterinburg.

My new life in Christ began with both joy and sadness. My eyes were sick and very soon after my baptism I became almost blind. I really do not know what it was, but I was not able to look at bright light, because it hurt me. I welcomed the New Year with closed eyes. I could not open them. My Christian life was only at the beginning and it was a great temptation for me to accuse God. I asked God, why this has happened to me. But He was deaf and accusing to me. Really, He was not, however! But it seemed so, to me. I went to the hospital and stayed there for a month. I was not even able to read the Bible. But I remembered the Small Catechism by heart in both English and Russian. I prayed to Him and He heard my prayer. I was healed. But another blow waited for me that year.

In March I was told I had a problem with my health and needed surgery. In April I went to the hospital for the second time in that year. I was afraid because of the risk of death. But the Lord was with me and everything passed all right

All these things I wrote in order to say that I had to go through suffering as a newly converted person, even a new baptized person. The Lord opened my mind and my heart by His Word and helped me to survive all these problems. If I were not baptized, I do not know what would have happen to my life and faith. So the Church helped me. It became important in my life.

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Gordeev

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That summer, my pastor, Sergei Glushkov, invited me to become a student of the bible school and I agreed. That is how my church education began. I wanted to finish my bible school studies and to help my pastor in my town. I also became a church musician since I had studied music. But I was afraid to do it, and even now I am afraid.

I think I should mention something about my area where I am from and the small mission. I live in the suburb of the town of Shadrinsk, which is situated in the Kurgan region of Russia. It is 209 km south-east from the city of Ekaterinburg. Shadrinsk is a city with a population of about 90,000 people. It is situated in two natural zones, forest and steppe, which are divided by the river. I live in the forest suburb. My town is 347 years old. We do not have our own parish and that's why our parish is in Ekaterinburg. Our mission is not large. I can say that I was one of the first parishioners in my town. The church life was active at that time. We met, discussed the Bible, had a Sunday liturgy conducted by our group leader. But now, the activity is not so active, because we have no leader there. Our pastor must travel a long distance to visit us. Maybe that was one of the reasons why I decided to study at the seminary.

The decision I made was not easy, because I had never thought about the priesthood. Yes, I wanted to do some work at Church, maybe playing music, liturgy, or cleaning and washing. I wanted to be active, but not the priest. As I said earlier, I was afraid to play music at Church, and surely I was afraid of being a priest. I understand the work of being a priest to be a very difficult thing. It is not a simple job. It is a great responsibility. A priest or pastor is responsible for people's souls. I doubted I had any calling for that. But there were some events which forced me to make this decision. The absence of a church leader in my town was one of them. Also, I was thirsty for theological knowledge, which is necessary to be a priest.

I knew that studying at the seminary would not be easy. And I was right. But the knowledge of God's Word feeds me and gives me a hope for the future. I find studying very interesting and I feel that it is necessary to do it. Sometimes it seems to me that the academic requirements here at the seminary are very difficult. But the academic requirements must be difficult. For a pastor must be trained very well for his work. I know that the work of a pastor is necessary for the people, because a pastor is like a doctor. The only difference between a pastor and a doctor is that a doctor heals the body for this temporal life, but a pastor heals the soul for the eternal life. I had once wanted to be a doctor. At the seminary I learn how to be a doctor of people's souls. Also, in the seminary my other dream is realized - to study the biblical languages. I like languages, I feel that I have a skill to learn and study theology in the various theological

I don't know my future. For now I commit my life into the hand of God and am sure that He will show me the way I must go. ■

Albina

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We were not told where. Possibly to the woods somewhere to work. Later, when mother was also taken to that *trudarmiya*, grandmother thought that now we would all die for sure. Grandmother prayed for us to just stay alive, and seemingly the Lord helped us at that time also. Grandmother was around 60 years old at that time. So she stayed all by herself. She went outside and prayed there. The frost was strong at -45C, and there were many, many stars in the sky. Time passed and mother returned, and she once again began to work at the milk factory. The Lord helped. Father returned in 1944. He was all swollen and very sick with some terrible disease. Probably, they let him go back home to die.

This is what happened once in the summer time. Mother carried water from the river in a barrel for the cows. It was awfully hot. Insects tortured terribly both people and animals. An ox that was yoked in a cart with a barrel, jumped into that river like crazy, and it would have drowned in there. Then my mother would have been imprisoned for sure. I am thinking even now, that this was the Lord's help once again. There was a man there on the other side of the river. He saw all that had happened. He dove into the water with an axe and chopped the yoke off, and the ox came to the surface. Glory be to God! Otherwise Mother would have been place in prison for an act of sabotage of public property. I also remember how we usually went into the woods in the summer. We picked various herbs: stingingnettle, sorrel and so on. Then we boiled it in water without salt and without potatoes and ate.

I remember that I was different in my family, quiet, unlike the others. Once in a quarrel my sister yelled at me, "So you, Padr!" I think it was according to my real last name. You know, a mother is not the one who gives birth, but that one who raises you. My mother always told me to be clean, honest, decent in everything. And so I also instructed my daughter thus. She is now president of a company. She owns shoes and chicken stores. Now Nadia, my daughter, suffers often from her not being contemporary. She tells me smiling: "It is you who raised me this way." Now the time is different, not like before. Now one is supposed to be a different person and live in a different way. But she is very kind toward people. And she says often when her workers are stealing: "If not people, the Lord will give me my due."

Now, parents let children do anything! On the opposite, our father was strict with us. I remember I could not say anything contrary to my parents. But when I was 14, I became bold once and intruded into my parent's conversation: "One can do anything, only one can not get into heaven." I remember my father strictly punished me for that. I feared him. My father, David Christianovich, died in 1961. It was an accident. He fell off the car, and the vehicle rolled over his head.

So this is how life was. I didn't think it could be interesting to anybody. Much was not preserved. I think sometimes, it would be better to simply forget it, as a nightmare. Who needs those terrible stories?

God brought me here

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disobedient. It was a severe blow for me. Not only was there dissension in my family and the betrayal of my husband, but also those whom I considered to be brothers in Christ, whom I sincerely loved, did not understand me and condemned me. God, however, gave me strength to

...HE WOULD LET ME KNOW OF THE SUMMER SEMINAR WHEN THERE WOULD BE ONE. I WAS INTERESTED IN THIS, AND I REALLY WANTED TO GO THERE. HE SHOWED LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM TO ME, AND I WROTE DOWN ITS EXPLANATIONS OF BAPTISM AND HOLY COMMUNION, WHICH AMAZED ME...

endure all this. I realized that He was with me! I feared losing God and His love the most, and I wanted to be with Him!

Soon I joined a small group of the Baptists, this time from ACECB [translator: All-Soviet Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists – so-called "registered" or official Baptists in the Soviet Union]. It was like a fresh water drink to me. There I did not see that strict soul control and those limiting frames, in which I was like a chicken in a shell for those 9 long years. I slowly began to escape from such a prison.

However, soon I started seeing and hearing from the pulpit, things that contradicted my perception of the Bible, even in this new congregation I had been attending. Threatening words of the Law sounded from the pulpit, words about works that we had to perform in order to keep our salvation. I left Sunday services feeling down and depressed. I did not get satisfactory answers to many of the questions that I addressed to the servants of the church. Then they began to scowl at me. I tried to find the teaching of the right doctrine in other congregations. I attended a Pentecostal church and the New-Apostolic Church a couple of times, but I realized that they had their own errors as well. Thus I came to the conclusion that

there was no church on earth with correct doctrine. So I resigned to the conclusion that one had to endure and make peace with this apparent reality.

I visited my sister in 2004 where I met a Lutheran for the first time. He was a doctor, and was visiting a local Baptist congregation. I was amazed at his understanding of faith and God. It seemed scary, but also very attractive. He said that there was a church where the truth was not damaged. And he would let me know of the summer seminar when there would be one. I was interested in this, and I really wanted to go. He showed Luther's Small Catechism to me, and I wrote down its explanations of Baptism and Holy Communion, which amazed me, as we were taught differently in the Baptist Church.

However, I was not able to get to the summer seminar until 2007. I very much liked the topics presented there. They were Islam, Apostle's Creed, Liturgy and Demonology. Some of these were taught by pastors from USA. I encountered such educated teachers of theology for the first time, and I listened with great attention to all they were talking about. I especially liked conversing with Pastor Vladislav Ivanov, pastor of Chelyabinsk parish, and his wife. He was the one who invited me to the Biblical School classes, since I had a number of questions. I

accepted that invitation with joy. Already the first session stunned me. The topic was "Law and Gospel." Everything fell in its proper place in my head, in my understanding, and I rejoiced that this is how I previously understood much of it, even thought it did not coincide with the teaching that I



Veronika's daugher is baptized, Feb. 2009

accepted 15 years ago. I realized that I wanted to be here, in this church, where the Word of God sounded so clearly for me, and that I no longer wish to be where there is so much confusion and lack of correspondence to the teaching of Christ. I was just "amazed" from discoveries that I made in the Biblical School, and I constantly thank God that He brought me here. I was confirmed and now am a member of Chelyabinsk parish of St John the Baptizer.

From the Editor: The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) continues to grow and be a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the Holy Sacraments provided for sinners seeking forgiveness and healing of body and soul. In the newsletters of THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY (SLMS) the members of the SELC reveal their faith and hopes. They are Russians seeking an answer to challenges and problems in their lives. They are a people who have been called by Christ in the healing waters of Holy Baptism and fed by the holy precious food of His body and blood. They may speak a different language but they are all baptized in the name of the same LORD and eat and drink the same Jesus. These are a people who know the mission of the Church – a mission which begins and finds its conclusion in the Word and Sacraments properly administered. We invite you to read this newsletter with a prayer of divine grace for our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Siberia. Their challenges in a land of pagan Buddhism, shamanism, and atheism is great. Your prayers and continuing support is appreciated.

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