



The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society



С Рождеством! Merry Christmas from SELC

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Siberian Lutheran Mission Society

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We thank Wheat Ridge Evangelical
Lutheran Church—Arvada, CO for financial
assistance and clerical assistance in
the printing of this newsletter.



By Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin

Brothers and Sisters,

The Feast of the Nativity - one of the most *Church* of holidays.

I emphasize the word "Church" - because real Christmas is impossible without the Church.

We come here, like the shepherds, who hurried to the manger of Bethlehem and like the Magi who followed the guiding star, and we find here the incarnate God.

It is impossible to find Christ, bypassing the Church. You cannot be saved without the Church. Here, there is the font from which, together with the Holy Spirit, the water of baptism is poured out upon us. Here you get the forgiveness of sins and you hear the Word of God, "full of grace and truth."

Here the Eucharist is celebrated - the main sacrament of God's presence on earth.

My beloved parishioners, I congratulate you on this Christmas and approaching New Year. Let the coming year be better than the outgoing. It is my prayer that this year brings your life less suffering and misery, but more joy and the Church.

We wish you all God's blessings during this holy time of Christmas! ✠

Raskin ordained deacon for St. James, Novokuznetsk

From Faith & Hope newsletter #245

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently our Bishop gave the ordination into deaconship to Mr. Vadim Raskin, subdeacon of our parish of Saint James (Novokuznetsk, Siberia). After the ordination, in his speech Bishop told that "of course it could be better to ordain this man during the festival of Saint Luke -- beloved physician and Evangelist", because Vadim Raskin is also the medical doctor and (now) the preacher.



Deacon Vadim Raskin

So our Church welcomes new clergyman, and we asked him to tell us little bit about himself.

I became a member of Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2009 after being the member of Pentecostal group for twenty years. For long time I was not just a member, but a leader of Pentecostal congregation. While studying at "Bible College", I started to read theological books, books on Church history, including history of Reformation. I came across with a few Luther's works that made me to ask questions. Basically it might be summarized as follows: "If we call ourselves Protestants and Luther's heirs, why does our confession of faith differ so much from the Luther's one?" The key question was the understanding of the Sacraments.

Of course, I asked my pastors and professors and saw that they cannot answer clearly. Finally, when they tired of me, they said: "Do not think so much, and believe as you are taught." This answer pushed me further to study the history of Reformation, Luther's works and Lutheran confession. For two years I tried to combine Lutheran faith with attending a Pentecostal congregation. Finally I realized that it's an absurd. And I found a phone number of a Lutheran Church and called. A man answered. It was Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin.

After a little while, in October of 2009 I received the confirmation in the parish of Saint James (Novokuznetsk). In 2012 Bishop blessed me to serve as a subdeacon (or reader). I prayed and asked God if He wants me to be a minister in the Church. I talked to the priest of our parish, Rev. Dmitri Dotsenko and to Bishop Vsevolod. They told me to study at the Biblical School (pre-seminary program in our Church), and to continue to pray and serve as subdeacon.

A year after graduation from the Biblical School I talked to Bishop again. He pointed to some of my flaws and asked to work on them. Then the Consistory decided to ordain me, so I passed exam and was ordained as deacon on December, 4, in the second Sunday of Advent.

Now, as I am "rightly called" [Augsburg Confession, XIV] I can preach in my parish and help to distribute the Sacraments. Also I want to continue dialog with and mission among so called "evangelicals." I was there for twenty years; I know their teaching, arguments, and their doubts, so, I can really bring the pure Gospel to them.

I am a doctor, neurologist. My specialty is spine disorders. I run a small clinic, organized in 2003. I am married to Yelena for 25 years. My son Mark studies for master's degree. I am fond of cats. I have five at my home, all of them we found on the street, vetted and gave them home at our place. Right now we are organizing an animal shelter for such cats. Please pray for the newly ordained Deacon and for all clergymen and laymen in Siberia. ✕

Yurga: Bishop Visits “Volga Lutherans”



Left to Right: Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin, Deacon Ruslan Zinnurov,
The Rev. Daniel S. Johnson

From Faith and Hope Newsletter #248

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently our Bishop Vsevolod visited Yurga. Let us tell you again about this town and our congregation [previous Newsletters about Yurga: Faith and Hope Newsletters # 136 and # 169].

The Lutherans live in Yurga because of our tragic history of deportation of the Volga Germans from their settlements by Josef Stalin. In the Soviet Union, millions of people and full nations were sent into GULAGs [see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag>] or exiled into Siberia just because of the desire of the cruel dictator.

The first Lutherans came into Russia immediately after the Reformation, and at the end of the 18th century because of an invitation by Catherine the Great (the Russian Queen) many Germans came into Russia for residence. They created their towns and farms, and schools, and churches, and lived there for over a century and a half.

Seventy-five years ago, August 28, 1941, Josef Stalin made the “final solution” on ethnic Germans. “After the house search, tell everyone who is scheduled to be deported that, according to the government’s decision, they are being sent to other regions of the USSR. Transport the entire family in one car until the train station, but at the station, heads of families [read: men] must be loaded into a separate train car prepared especially for them. Their families are deported for special settlements in the far away regions of the Union. [Family members] must not know about the forthcoming separation from the head of the family” [see more: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volga_Germans].

Every August 28, we celebrate Day of remembrance of victims of political repressions.

Volga Germans were sent into Siberia and North Kazakhstan. A lot of people died during the transportation in the railroad freight cars. Many people were frozen to death.

People who survived (adults with children) were put into concentration camps where they were forced to work in the beastly conditions. Thousands of them died because of hard work, because of hunger and absence of medicines.

In the camp in Yurga, if somebody was sick or injured nobody gave him (or her) any medicines, but the soldiers put him (or her) into a collective grave. This is a grave where several thousands (!) of Volga Germans were buried, located in the edge of Yurga. Now it is a memorial cemetery.



The Gulag at Yurga

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Today, young and old parishioners of the parish of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Yurga gather to receive the body and blood of Jesus and to hear the proclamation of the Gospel in the preaching of the Word

Nobody knows the full number of victims of Stalin's regime. Recently the Russian government decides to keep NKVD [see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NKVD>] archives closed till 2045. Just imagine what atrocities NKVD committed if our government still fears that the people will know about it!

At the beginning of the 60s in Yurga, the Germans were released from the camp. Some of them were trying to go back to the Volga. It was very difficult, almost impossible, because they did not have internal passports and to travel without a passport even within the Soviet Union was illegal. Still, some reached their former settlements on the Volga, and saw that for a long time other people had been living in their homes. The same was with their farms. And all the churches were destroyed.

So those who were liberated from the concentration camps continued to live in Yurga and were moved into the so-called "German village" (wooden barracks without running water and toilets; the toilet was only one -- big dirty building in the center of the village). But for those who were in a concentration camp, it was happiness to live not inside the barbed wire, even in such conditions.

For many years, Lutherans gathered in a wooden house on the outskirts of Yurga, and then in 2007 (thanks to the help of our Brothers and Sisters from the Bethany Lutheran Church, Naperville, IL) an apartment for the congregation was purchased in the "German village."

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Tuim: Family Camp at Transfiguration Parish

From Faith and Hope Newsletter #247

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In Tuim (Khakassia) the “Family camp” was held in the SELC parish of Transfiguration. The first such camp pastor Pavel Zayakin organized in 2013. He explained that he saw many Christian parents wanted their children to participate in such activity, but the program of the camps was designed for teenagers. Thus he with the team of volunteers worked out a new “format” where the smaller kids would fit in. Children and parents were excited about the first two camps in 2013 and 2014. Thus, pastor Pavel Zayakin, after the break for the big Jamboree camp in 2015, initiated the third family camp in 2016.

The program was named “Treasure hunters.” For a week children and their parents were studying the Bible passages, which uncover the meaning of the gifts of the Three Kings. “What kind of a king is Christ? How is His kingship revealed in our lives? What does it mean that He is High Priest? How does He serve His people now? Why did He go to the Cross? Why do we call it victory?” -- Participants were exploring the Scripture to answer these and other questions. However, they were looking for the treasure not only on the pages of the Book. Three field trips were undertaken to find gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That’s wasn’t easy! It took long walking, climbing up the hills, going down to the cave. From one hand it was a game, kids had fun, and thus they remember Bible story better. From another hand it helped to build a character, when they overcame their weariness, when they pursued the goal. Though these hardships were not so hard, it was very good to be in it with the parents. Surely these camps build up families, when kids and parents live together in the tents, study Bible, talk, meet different challenges, have fun.

Mrs. Tatiana Strukova, who came to this camp from Novosibirsk with her daughter Varvara, says, “It was a great opportunity to be together with brothers and sisters from different parishes of our Church, to talk informally, to discuss theology. I also want my daughter to meet Christian children from others places. I like very

much how teachers in these camps conduct Bible classes for kids. They add many activities, like painting, playing, and singing. Obviously, children like it. Also, I see as very important daily matins and vespers. It really frames our life here. This year we had field trips every day, in contrast to the camps held last years. I think it was better for kids.”

This year pastor Pavel Zayakin intentionally was involved less in preparation and carrying the camp. He wanted parishioners from Tuim to take more responsibility. With his help and with the help of Mrs. Oksana Lapkovskaya (Sunday school teacher of the parish in Sayanogorsk), who was a director of the similar event in 2014, pastor Vitali Gavrilov and his wife Anna did a great job! Together with parishioners they prepared the venue and the program.

Pastor Jaanus Noormagi from Estonia, who visited the camp, said, “Everything was not only very well organized (spiritual program and technical things), but the people were happy. All participants felt not as guests, but as one family members. I came from a long travel, and I was just from the road, but immediately felt it. We, the Europeans, feel such things very easily. In Europe, usually individuals are very polite to one another, but they are strangers to each other. But here we all were like one family.”

People from the parish of Transfiguration were involved on different levels. Liudmila Kotova was the cook for the whole camp, Olessya Bebyakina helped with smaller kids, Valeri Gillyazutdinov was in charge of all technical issues. Other parishioners helped with preparation the church building and territory around before the camp and cleaning it afterwards. Finally, the parish in Tuim saw the truth of the words “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Being involved in all this work they realized that they are not just small and unimportant parish in the small town. They are members of Christ’s body, having their place and role in increasing and edifying of the church body (Eph. 4:16).

Please pray for the Lutherans in Siberia, and for developing of the Christian education for children. ✠

Yurga: Bishop Visits

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When the local authorities decided to demolish the “German village”, we were offered another apartment, and the parish moved there. There we have a chapel, and people come to hear the Word and to receive the sacraments. The room needs to be repaired, but the parishioners can’t do it because of the poverty.

But the most important thing is that we are free. You cannot imagine what it means -- to be free -- for those who grew up in the Soviet Union.



Memorial to the victims of the Yurga death camp



Deacon Ruslan in the pulpit: St. Lukes - Yurga

Now there is a resident minister in Yurga -- Rev. Ruslan Zinnurov [about him in Faith and Hope Newsletter # 245]. Ruslan graduated from the university in Novosibirsk, then he graduated from our Lutheran Theological Seminary. On May 2016, he was ordained as deacon, and serves in the parish in Yurga. As the Church does not have funds to pay salary to him, he works as a teacher in a secondary school.

Deacon Ruslan’s wife Natalia is from the family of Volga Germans. Ruslan and Natalia are blessed with a son, Arthur.

Please pray for Deacon Ruslan and his family and for the parishioners in Yurga. ✠

Thank You, Mrs. Valerie Kister!

Valerie has faithfully edited the SLMS newsletter for 11 years (Co-editor 2005-2011, Editor 2012-2016) and has done an exemplary job! We are all grateful for her ongoing devotion to our brothers and sisters in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society! I hope to continue her tradition of excellence as the new editor, and pray for the Lord to bless the work of our brethren in Siberia and all who support them!

~ Rev. Larry Beane, Editor

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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