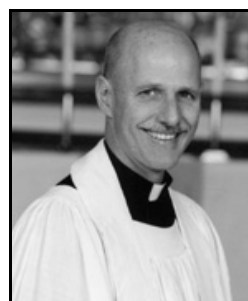




A cold Siberian night

by Rev. John Fiene

It was a cold Siberian night. I was sitting in the apartment of Pastor Vsevolod and Daria Lytkin.



Rev. John Fiene

My son, Jake, a 17-year-old high school student, was also there. He had joined me for a two-week sabbatical trip through Siberia.

The intention was to learn more about the Lutheran people and culture of Russia. I was determined to get a glimpse of the spiritual life of Lutherans out in the vast wilds of Siberia. Earlier that fall arrangements had been made to have Mr. Igor Andreuk, the business manager of Novosibirsk's Bible Lutheran Church, serve as our travel guide and translator. Jake and I flew to Moscow, then to the city of Irkutsk on the north side of Lake Baikal, where we met Igor. The next day we gathered with a small group of Lutherans in a small apartment just outside the old part of the city. Deacon

FOR THESE PEOPLE IT WAS A JOYFUL EVENT WHEN ONE PERSON—JUST ONE— WAS ADDED TO THE FAITHFUL. I FELT AS THOUGH I WERE A WITNESS TO FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY.

Plyaskin told us about how they came to be as a congregation. He also spoke about the evangelistic and humanitarian work that was being done by the congregation at the local women's prison. The number of parishioners was not great by American standards, but in a land blinded to God and true religion since the

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. (Back issues of SLMS newsletters are available upon request.) ☩

Bolshevik revolution, it was a miraculous beginning. Evangelism was done by all, but confirmation instruction was conducted solely by ordained pastors, who, up till that point, had to travel from Novosibirsk, over one thousand miles away. For these people it was a joyful event when one person—just one—was added to the faithful. I felt as though I were a witness to First Century Christianity.

Deacon Plyaskin brought us to the place in the old city where a great Lutheran Church had once stood. Irkutsk's government and Orthodox Church had, at the zenith of Russian influence, ruled over a territory that extended as far as the Russian settlements of California. The years of Soviet industrialization had not diminished the beauty of Irkutsk's ancient buildings and churches. The only thing missing, amputated from the landscape, was a magnificent Swedish Lutheran Church. It had been replaced with a park and a massive statue of Lenin. How sad it was to see the legacy that Lutheranism

Continued on page 3

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A special thank you to Redeemer Lutheran Church - Marshalltown, Iowa who financed the printing of this newsletter.

Faith and Hope in Tomsk

by Olga Netaeva

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It has already been a year since Deacon Alexander Hahn has been living in Tomsk. It is a very beautiful old town with the wooden architecture that has remained undamaged until



the present time. In the beginning of September the town celebrated its 400th anniversary. Many of its citizens are students due to the fact that there are several universities in the town. The town can be considered a "blessed field" for the preaching of the Gospel among young people. There are many visitors in our church, including young people, who were members of new strange religious movements. They have become disappointed with the Baptist or Pentecostal teaching, and now look for a traditional church. Thanks to the last summer seminar, newcomers constantly keep coming there. The reason for this fact is that their aspiration for the Holy Church, Holy Communion, and Liturgy have changed. Elena Salova says: "Previously, it never came to my mind that, in the first place, God wants to bring the message to me through His Word, and it is not about what I have to do for Him, but what He has done to me through Christ ... I have discovered the world, full of forgiveness, which is given to me and to all the believers by God in His Son through the sermon, the Word and the Sacrament". The parish has the historic name St. Mary's Lutheran church. It used to be the name of the Lutheran cathedral of Tomsk before the Russian revolution. The cathedral was destroyed by communists at 1930s. During the time of anniversary of Tomsk it is great to see that the Lutheran community in the city is being restored. We ask you to pray for the growth of the Lutheran congregation in Tomsk, and for the ministry of the deacon, Alexander, and for the opportunity of people to learn about grace and love of God.✠

Editor's note: This article is reprinted from "Faith and Hope"—an email newsletter of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). To be placed on this email list contact Olga Netaeva at "children@mail.nsk.ru" The web page for the SELC can be found at www.lutheran.ru/en.shtml

SLMS financial report

by Elizabeth Meyer

SLMS SECRETARY/TREASURER

Dear friends,

I am happy to report that because of the faithful support of many individuals and congregations, the SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY'S Financial Status for 2004 is sound. There are just a couple of matters I want to bring to your attention. Several men completed their studies at the Seminary in Novosibirsk in June. We had expected that they would continue to receive stipends until the end of August. That was not the case, however, so we have had to include their salaries and living expenses beginning in July, rather than September. Expenses for July and August were met with a separate, one-time payment after I met with Pastors Lytkin and Streltsov in Wittenburg in late August and we discussed these issues.

That has meant that as of September we are officially sending \$9,500 each month to the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church to meet its general operating expenses and an additional \$400 a month to Rev. Olav Panchu, a graduate of Concordia – Fort Wayne, who serves a congregation in the city of Saratow, located on the Volga River. Because of God's good grace and the generosity of congregations and individuals, it appears that the program (see financial report, page 6) should be able to support our projected annual budget of \$120,000. There will not be any graduates of the Novosibirsk Seminary in 2005. I expect that in June, 2006, several men will graduate and we will again need to increase our budget and fundraising efforts. We are maintaining reserves more than equal to one quarter's expenses. At the Board of Director's meeting last January, the board suggested that we try to maintain a reserve of six month's expenses. We have not been able to do so, but have kept up with expenses and have paid off significant debt during the past year.

The number of donors continue to increase. For the past 24 months, (from Sept. 2002 - Sept. 2004), the SLMS has received donations from 76 different individuals and 44 congregations. New donors since July (through Sept 30) include 40 individuals and 14 congregations. A total of 185 different individuals and congregations have donated from January through September 2004.

With our next newsletter, I will provide a financial report for the entire year. I thank each of you for your generous and faithful support and I know that I speak on behalf of the clergy and members of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church who are able to do so much because of our care for our Lutheran brethren in Russia. May God bless you all. ✠



See Financial report on page 6

A child's garden of stories

Continued from page 1

once had in Siberia. But how wonderful to see a renewed Lutheran sapling emerging out of that old Lutheran stump! The following day the three less-than-wise men boarded an overnight train for Ulan-Ude, then traveled by taxi to



A view of Chita

the village of Petropavlovka. It was dangerous. Igor did not permit us to speak as we arrived at Ulan-Ude, not in the train station, not even in the presence of our driver. Foreigners had money. Best not to let them hear our English. For four hours we sat in silence until we stepped out of the car, a few kilometers from the border of Mongolia. Every once in a while we would pass a huge factory in the middle of nowhere. Most had been closed, so the locals had no jobs. Alcoholism appeared epidemic. Malnutrition was stamped upon the faces of the people. Yet despite all their heavy trials, the Lutherans of the village welcomed us, and the smiles of dirty-faced children

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warmed us as we gathered in the church. We talked about their faith and our faith. When it came time for questions, I found myself speechless when they asked: "Are your children believers?" Why would they ask that? For many of them, the world, the devil and their flesh were

such formidable foes that nothing was to be taken for granted, even when it came to their own children.

The next day we traveled south by jeep to visit two remote preaching stations. Off to the left in the distance was a mine, and to the right a mountain of green stones. "What do they mine here?", I asked. "Uranium" they answered, so rich that the rocks were forest green. The problem was that the mining turned the uranium into dust and the dust killed the workers at an early age. All who lived in the region also experienced shortened life spans. In Russia, a job is a job.

It was fortunate that we arrived at the southernmost preaching station when we did. The day before one of the parishioners had died. He had been the father of 10—six of them girls. The youngest daughter arrived on horseback when we drove up to the house. The local Russian missionary immediately conducted a funeral service. We gathered at the family table while the widow served us the "Lutheran" dinner. Big bones stuck out of the stew pot. The cow had just been butchered. I offered my sympathies and my hope of the resurrection for her husband. She cried and said thank you in Russian.

On the way back we stopped at a huge Buddhist temple, the largest Buddhist shrine in Russia, though only a few people seemed to live in the region. Off in the distance were the sacred hills of the ancient Buriats, the people of Genghis Khan, "Mongols" that long before had descended out of the steps of Asia to conquer much of the habitable world. The Buriatian religion was a mixture of



Children in Vlsevo

Buddhism and Shamanism. It had been the predominant religion in Buriatia until the time the communists arrived and built their factories and military outposts.

Soon thereafter we stopped to visit another Lutheran family. Their 12-year-old son was lame and could not walk and the family could not afford a wheelchair. They did not get to church very often. As we walked in, the young man pulled himself over to us, his legs dragging behind on the wood-plank floor. He proudly showed us his book,

Continued on page 6

A Christmas Story

by Tatyana Gorbacheva

I am Tatyana Gorbacheva, a member of the Lutheran Church of the Apostle Andrew in Novosibirsk. I also would like to tell about Christmas in my life. What is it that remains in my memory about Christmas in times when it wasn't



Christmas pageant at St. Andrew Lutheran Church - Novosibirsk

acceptable to talk about Christmas? The tradition of observing religious holidays came to post-Soviet Russia rather unnoticeably. Today few are afraid to acknowledge that they were baptized by their parents, and even that they attend church. I was born in Angarsk, a city in the Irkutsk region. My father was a military pilot, and my mother a medical worker. They weren't believers, but my mother's

parents were true believers. I was baptized as an infant in the Roman Catholic Church. I remember myself as a very little girl, when my mother took me to the Siberian village where her parents lived. I saw icons for the first time in the home of my grandfather and grandmother. For hours I would sit near the icons and stare at them. It seemed to me that all the faces there were alive and watching me. In school I was active with social work. At that time we all followed one law: to do everything for the good of our country. Atheism was the norm. But a time came when I began to need faith. One Christmas Eve, when I was in Moscow, I went to a service at an Orthodox church. I liked it. My childhood came back to me. Yes, Christmas brings me back to my childhood when as a 3-year-old girl I pointed at the faces of icons and asking my grandmother, "Who is this, and who is this?" In answer I hear a soft voice telling me about God and Jesus' birth. The tradition of celebrating Christmas came to my family only in 1999, after I became a Lutheran. Christmas is the brightest holiday of all. My family really loves this holiday. I prepare myself for it. Advent helps me concentrate more on the spiritual side of my life. I read Christian literature, try to go to church more, and pay attention to my family and to my spiritual development. I buy gifts for my family, friends, and children. I will always remember my first Christmas in our church in 1999. I remember candles in everyone's hands, beautiful hymns, a sermon, and the Eucharist. It was wonderful. It's a pity that the Communist regime deprived the Russian people of such a bright and beautiful holiday. It's a pleasure to see that Christian traditions are returning to our Russia. I send greetings to all at this time of Christmas! ✕

History of Christmas in Russia

by Olga Netaeva

In Russia Christmas is traditionally celebrated on Jan. 7. This is because the state religion in Russia is Orthodoxy. The lack of correspondence in Christmas celebrations of different churches is due to the fact that the Orthodox Church still uses the Gregorian (old-style) calendar, where Jan. 7 corresponds to Dec. 25 in the Julian calendar.

The Julian (new-style) calendar was introduced to Russia in 1918, but the Russian Church continues to use the Gregorian calendar. In the twentieth century the difference between the old and new calendars was 13 days.

The first Christmas tree came to Russia in 1700, on New Year's Eve, by order of Peter the Great in honor of the New Year. But after the revolution, the tradition of placing Christmas trees in homes ceased. The authorities decided that decorated trees were a feature of the religious holiday of Christmas. Consequently, it was necessary to fight against this custom, just as against religion in general.

This tradition returned only after 1935. Christmas was completely replaced with greeting the New Year, an official holiday of the country. The fir tree became associated only

with the New Year celebration.

Welcoming in the New Year – the chief holiday of the country – crowded out celebrating Christmas. New Year was celebrated with trees, presents, and rich feasts. Jan. 7 (Orthodox Christmas) was considered to be a continuation of the New Year's celebration. ✕



Christmas, a time of freedom

by Nataliya Malih

Christmas is a time of freedom, it is a celebration of the moment of release from all concerns. This is the time when you can rejoice and when you know that one more year is coming. My name is Nataliya Malih. I'm 50-years-old, and my son is 28-years-old. We are parishioners of St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk.

It will soon be Christmas and I am glad that I can



Christmas in Ekaterinburg

prepare everything for this holiday, together with my son. Unfortunately, in my Soviet childhood there were no celebrations of Christmas. It was dangerous at that time to reveal that you were a believer in Jesus. If the Soviets saw you near a church, they could use that as a reason to expel your parents from their work or refuse a good job to you. If there was not physical persecution for being a Christian, there could be emotional.

I was born in the middle of Russia in the city of Kaluga. My father was born in a village not far from Kaluga and my mother grew up in Kaluga. After graduating from pharmaceutical college I came to Novosibirsk for work. Like many people of their generation, my parents were not believers. But they grew up in Christian families. My grandmothers were believers. Usually, those who lived in villages were not big bosses and they were not atheists and therefore they were not afraid to celebrate the Christian festivals. My grandmother lived in a village. She remembered by heart many works of Pushkin and each day she read the Bible. I remember that both grandmothers went to the Orthodox church on Sundays. But all of this was incomprehensible and a little mysterious for me at that time.

I remember there were three orthodox churches in Kaluga during the Soviet time. Parishioners of the churches were people who were at least 50. My grandmother took me to the church for the first time when I was 5-years-old. It was an evening festival service. People held candles. Suddenly, the clothing of an old lady caught on fire, from her candle. Panic began! My grandmother

quickly took me out of the church. Since that time I was afraid of everything that was connected with the church.

When I was in college we had a class on "scientific atheism." Our professor was a very interesting and educated man. He told us about the Christian festivals. He left us with a high respect for the religious holidays. I still remember the textbook on atheism, where it was written with large letters, names of the holidays: "Easter, Christmas ... Christian legends."

This may sound strange, but I heard about Christmas for the first time at the classes on "atheism." There the professor described to us all about Christmas. At my parent's house we never celebrated this holiday. But I liked to visit my grandmother. To me it was a continuation of the New Year celebration. [See, History, page 4.] She cleaned her house; there was always good dinner, silence, and peace. Today Christmas for me is associated with a time of silence, peace, cleanliness, and melancholy.

Even now my relatives and I try to get together for the Christmas festival. We come for the solemn service at our church. The service is very beautiful. Everyone congratulates each other with sincere happiness and love. All the people are happy. I see smiling faces and the atmosphere of joy and peace stays with me for a very long time. However, I also feel a little sadness. It is because many people are still ignoring the church and think church is for old people. I am very glad to see young people in our church. I am glad that God brought them to the church and they have opportunity to celebrate Christmas many years of their life. I am very happy that I can share my joy with my son and friends. We gather around the dinner table, give presents and talk a lot. Christmas is the time to think more about our dear ones.

Christmas, first of all is a time for the special feelings of the soul. This is a very special sincere affection which can



Christmas in Abakan

not be broken by the temptations, and changes in the country. Christmas is about what is firm and eternal. I congratulate everyone with this wonderful celebration of the birth of our Savior.

Peace be with you and your families! ✕

Fiene

Continued from page 3

A *Child's Garden of Stories*, translated into Russian by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation. I opened the book and saw the name of my congregation inscribed on the front page, the result of a donation made by our Vacation Bible School the year before. It made me rethink my usual gripe, that we don't "see" our mission dollars at work.

Sometimes we just need to do what we can and leave the rest to God's providential care and workings. A few more miles and we stopped at a preaching station in a village that used to be a prisoner-of-war camp for German soldiers. When the nearby river would flood, no one was

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permitted to leave the camp. So the prisoners lived in half-flooded houses throughout the war, the same houses that these people now lived in. Dogs and horned cattle roamed the streets. The house-church had a nice bathroom. Behind the fence was a hole with a board across the center. Oh, how easy it is to take God's blessings for granted! Inside the faithful gathered and sang the liturgy.

This was only the beginning of our trip, but these and many similar experiences were fresh in my mind as I sat and talked with Pastor Lytkin about the needs and problems facing the ministry of the Word in Russia. Siberia as a mission field was especially difficult to handle because of its geographic size. The distances between the congregations of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church are staggering—their mission field is larger than the United States. The poverty of the Russian people makes the battle for the Gospel incredibly difficult. Both

pastor and parishioners are in constant warfare against the social ills of depression and substance abuse, vice and corruption, to say nothing of the total spiritual bankruptcy that 80 years of war and communism inflicted upon the people. Few people understand right and wrong as principles of life. Principles of right and wrong are only abstract ideals when life is bent on mere survival. How



The road to Borets

does one bring hope out of such despair? The only answer is Christ, the Christ who gave us hope upon His own cross, the Christ of the empty tomb. Pastor Lytkin wants to see the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church feed the souls of Russians. The pastors and the Lutheran laity of Siberia need our help. ☒

SLMS Financial Report

Contributions 2004

Quarter 1	36,032.20
Quarter 2	67,886.30
Quarter 3	40,392.21
Quarter 4	-----
Subtotal	\$144,310.71

3rd Qtr. 2004

Disbursements

General Funds (Lytkin)	27,028.00
Saratov Ministry (Panchu)	1,200.00
Misc. Missions	0.00
Touim/Abakan	<u>5,383.00</u>
Total	\$33,611.00

2004 Year to date

Disbursements (Jan. 1- Sept. 30)

\$123,416.57

Ending Balance (as of Sept 30, 2004)

\$55,245.92

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