



Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin Ten Years as Bishop of SELC

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By The Rev. Alexey Streltsov

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Global Lutheran community celebrates 500 anniversary of the Reformation throughout this year 2017. For the members of Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church this year also brings to memory a more local yet a very important event in the life of this Church. Ten years ago Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin was consecrated in Tallinn St Mary's Cathedral (Estonia). This was a very significant step in the life of Siberian Lutherans that marked the beginning of ecclesiastical self-governance for the SELC. To commemorate this occasion, the Church conducts a practical-theological Conference and a liturgical celebration on Cantate Sunday (May 14).

Instructors of the Theological Seminary of SELC and other theologians delivered presentations at the Conference on the topics of preaching, catechesis, prayer, and confessional education. The keynote address was on the subject of the hope in the Bible. It is with hope in the Lord that the Church moves along exercising her ministry in the midst of the hostile world.

Continued on page 6

An Interview with the President of SLMS: The Rev. Daniel S. Johnson

By The Rev. Larry Beane

I asked the Rev. Daniel S. Johnson a few questions concerning his many years of experience in the service of Christ Jesus to our brothers and sisters in Russia and the former USSR.

Pastor Beane: Hi Pastor Johnson, I'd like to chat with you and ask you a few questions.

Pastor Johnson: Sure!

How many times have you traveled to Russia?

I have been to Siberia about 25-30 times. I cannot remember!

When was your first trip?

January-February 2000 was my first trip to Siberia.

What was most memorable about your first visit?

The seriousness the Siberians have toward liturgy and the delivery and reception of the Word and Holy Sacraments was my most memorable impression from my first visit in 2000. Yet, from this attitude of the Church's liturgy, comes a very high regard and respect to the Pastoral Office. The Siberian Lutherans have a very high view of the Pastoral Office. This was most noticeable!

What was your biggest challenge on that first visit?

My first big challenge on my first visit was getting through customs in Moscow. I was very nervous because I had accepted two large boxes from a Russian pastor traveling with us back to Siberia. I did not know him but he asked if I could accept the boxes and check them to Siberia under my name. I was told that the boxes were full of library books. He could not check them since he had already checked his limit of boxes. When I arrived at the customs desk in Moscow, I was asked to open the boxes for inspection. I had an instant panic attack! What was I going to do if the boxes were filled with illegal drugs or something that would land me in a Russian prison for the rest of my life, never to see my wife or family again? But everything turned out fine! The boxes were filled with library books, as he had told me, and we were permitted to proceed into the country.

There was so much that was new and different on my first visit, that I do not know what gave me the "biggest challenge." I think it may have been the constant warning from my Siberian "keepers" to guard my belongings and watch out for thieves and not to talk when I was in a taxi, for fear that the driver may over-charge us (thinking that, if an American was in the car that we had financial means to pay a much higher fee) or even rob us, thinking we had large sums of cash on our bodies. I was constantly warned to be careful of unscrupulous taxi drivers.

What are the biggest changes that you've seen in Russian society over the years?

The "biggest change" is the western influence from American movies, regarding dress and behavior of youth, along with the economic expansion of western retail stores into Siberia. Western style grocery stores and shopping malls in the cities have almost completely replaced the older "Soviet-style" stores. There are some "old-style" markets, similar in appearance to the "farmer's market" we have in the States. When I visit a shopping mall in a Siberian city, except for the signs in the store windows and the language which is spoken, I would not know if I were in Siberia or America. Many youth in the cities go to the shopping mall and "hang out" just like in American malls. There is a mall in Tomsk called "The Emerald City Mall." The architecture and theme inside the mall is based on the Wizard of Oz stories. The Wizard of Oz stories read in Siberia are rewritten by a Russian author for a Russian reader. There is even an IKEA in Novosibirsk. It is identical to the IKEA in Hanau, Germany near where my wife and I lived and to the others I have visited in the States. There are McDonalds, Burger King and Subway restaurants in the Siberian cities. There is a new KFC in Tomsk I ate at last month. Many European retail stores have also moved into Siberia in recent years. My concern is that this western expansion of culture will begin to affect the conservative views the Siberians have toward morality and social issues. Unless the Church is permitted to teach a proper Christological view, the Siberians may find themselves overwhelmed by the rapid expansion of a secular western culture, which has no moral authority. This is another reason why the SLMS seeks to support SELC mission efforts in Siberia.

Continued on Page 4

The Rev. Prof. Alan Ludwig's Latest News from Siberia



Terrorism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Missions

If you follow American news at all, you have probably heard of two new laws that have been enacted in Russia. The first, approved toward the end of 2016, is an anti-terrorism law. It contains a section prohibiting extremism, including missionary activity. The second

founded upon this one, is the recent ban of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. In the Western press the cry is "Repression!" "A return to Stalinism!" or the like. As usual, the media show no understanding of Russian history and the Russian culture and mindset, nor do they care to. Nor do they grasp the nuances of the new laws. What is it they are missing?

No Absolute Religious Freedom Ever

In the more than 1000-year history of Christian Russia, no religion has been completely free except for Russian Orthodoxy, the official state religion. Lutherans appeared in Russia already at the time of the Reformation. For 500 years Lutherans have practiced their faith in this country. They enjoyed the favor, protection, and even financial support of some of the czars, including Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Catherine the Great. Peter the Great even attended Lutheran services, and it is said that Ivan the Terrible liked to discuss theology with Lutheran pastors. Even so, Lutherans were limited in their freedoms. Proselytizing others, especially Orthodox, was punishable by death. Children of mixed marriages couldn't be baptized as Lutherans, only into the Orthodox faith. Until the 19th century, the liturgy and prayers had to be in the ethnic languages, whether German, Finnish, Swedish, Estonian, or Latvian. The government regulated the worship and governance of the Lutheran and other churches. Only for a few years before the revolution of 1917 were some of these laws lifted. After the revolution, of course, there was no religious freedom at all. By contrast, today Lutherans and other religious confessions working in Russia have a great deal of freedom. The single government requirement is that a church be properly registered.

The government doesn't dictate to registered churches what they must preach or to whom they may preach it. The new anti-terrorism law doesn't apply to us, because we're a registered church and seminary. The only ones affected by the "anti-mission clause" are those missionaries and groups who try to work and worship in Russia without registration. This is something the American press has largely overlooked.

The Curious Case of the Witnesses

The Jehovah's Witness ban is still working its way through the appeals courts, but it looks rather hopeless. The main objection to Jehovah's witnesses is their stand on blood transfusions. The fire was sparked by the case of a little girl whose parents denied her a life-saving transfusion on religious grounds. Secondly, the extreme aggressiveness of this cult in one-to-one evangelism is contrary to the whole Russian ethos. Despite laws against going door-to-door, the Witnesses continued to do so.

What does this ban hold for other religious confessions in Russia? It's too soon to say. But probably it poses no threat. As far as I can tell, the outlawing of Jehovah's Witnesses isn't based at all on their message. It's based rather on their extreme tactics, which are not only offensive, but also (in the case of no blood transfusion) life-endangering. While this isn't the American way of doing things, neither does it spell the end of the world for the Lutheran Church in Russia.

The Practical Consequence for Missions

What does all this mean for my work? It means that it continues as it always has. No one has told me what I can or cannot teach, or to whom I may speak. Our church, being registered, has every right to preach the Word of God without censorship or limitation. Our clergy continue to preach Christ and Him crucified. They continue to present Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I go on equipping men to carry on the work of the ministry after me. For the right to do all this without government interference we thank our merciful God.

A Heads-up for You at Home

While the American news media are crying foul in Russia, they're ignoring the very real dangers to religious freedom in America. Already in some places there have been reports of local and state governments

Continued on Page 4

Latest News from Siberia

Continued from Page 3

trying to regulate sermons. Some want to force pastors to be silent even in their own churches on certain social issues that the church has always had the right to address. Merely saying what the Bible says about these things would be labeled hate speech. For now the attempt to regulate religious speech in America may be delayed, but it isn't derailed. Vigilance is needed on the home front more than ever.

Meanwhile, let us work and pray together in bringing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to as many as possible, both at home and abroad. Salvation is in Him alone. His death and resurrection are the only hope for a lost world.

Three Conferences In May

I am privileged to speak at three conferences. The first was our local conference here in Novosibirsk, on May 13. This conference commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and also the tenth anniversary of the consecration of the bishop of the SELC, Vsevolod Lytkin. The topic of my paper was "Christian Hope in the Bible." I demonstrated from Scripture how Christian hope is not uncertain, like our usual understanding of worldly hope. Rather it is sure and certain.

The second and third conferences will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, and Riga, Latvia. These conferences are also devoted to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. I will be speaking on the topic "Presenting the Gospel in an Unfriendly Environment." A number of seminary professors and pastors from the U.S. will also be presenting at these.

Reprinted with permission from the Rev. Professor Ludwig's newsletter: "How Shall They Hear...?" Issue Number 38. Professor Ludwig has served Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk since 1998. To support his ongoing missionary work as a theological educator with your tax-deductible gift, please visit www.lcms.org/ludwig, or send a check to: LCMS, PO Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-6861, payable to "LCMS". Mark check: "Support of Alan Ludwig." ✕

Interview with the Rev. Daniel Johnson

Continued from Page 2

The people must hear the preaching of the Gospel to prevent the devil, the world and the flesh from destroying their faith and trust in Christ and His atonement.

What are the biggest changes that you've seen in the SELC over the years?

The quality of education of the clergy and of the laity has continued to improve over the years. Of course, the growth in the number of congregations and their financial stability, has likewise improved since my first visit in January 2000. I think the theological education of the laity from a well-trained clergy has contributed to the increase in stewardship from the laity. I see this as a direct result of a quality indigenous seminary in Novosibirsk. The seminary has operated for over 20 years and has contributed dramatically to the welfare of the Lutheran Church in Siberia. The seminary is presently experiencing a financial crisis and without sufficient funding, will be forced to close. Without an indigenous seminary with such high confessional standards set for its graduates, it will become very difficult for the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church to continue to produce well educated and confessionally conscientious pastors for the Church. So, the biggest challenge, at this moment, is to find a way to fund the seminary today and into the future. Because of the economic situation in Russia, and especially Siberia, the SELC must continue to look to the LCMS for financial support. It is our prayer that the economic situation will eventually change and the SELC will no longer need SLMS help to support the pastors, congregations and seminary but rather invite us to partner with them to expand their mission activity into other regions in Central Asia and Siberia. The SELC has begun a partnership with the Ingrian Lutheran Church (located in western Russia), to train pastors. The Lutherans in Kazakhstan and Ukraine have asked the seminary in Novosibirsk to send professors to teach their clergy. So, perhaps this expansion of mission activity has already started.

To be continued...

Vacation Bible School in Novosibirsk

By The Rev. Pavel Khramov



A week in the middle of June is traditional time for Vacation Bible School in St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk. We do it for many years. This school took different forms – from the evening classes to the two-week camp outside the city. However, we try to keep three main qualities of this VBS – it should be Biblical, catechetical, and fun. This year the theme of the VBS was “St. Peter in the book of Acts”. It became a continuation of the last year theme, “St. Peter in the Gospels”. We thought it will be interesting to look how Peter changes while following Christ. Studying passages from the book of Acts, we saw Christ building His church through Peter’s proclamation of God’s word. Our kids understood, that the main focus of Apostle’s preaching is Christ crucified for our sins. Together we also noticed that church is the place of salvation. People were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they received Holy Spirit, joined the family of believers, where they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Thus, we started every day with morning prayer and ended it with evening prayer in the church, to remind children that omnipresent God is present “for us” in the church. Finally, we also encourage kids at VBS to keep learning Small Catechism, “as the Bible of the laity, wherein everything is comprised which is treated at greater length in Holy Scripture, and is necessary for a Christian man to know for his salvation.”

Studying the Bible and Catechism might be fun, though it is not so always. So, we wanted children to see and learn something else as well. We also wanted them to do something good for others. Thus, the second half of a day was dedicated to different

activities. We have visited a pond nearby, where we watched ducks, we’ve been at the ecological educational center with small, but nice zoological museum and pet corner. It was very interesting to attend the exhibition of “micro-miniatures”, very small objects created by a scientist from Novosibirsk. He has PhD in physics and works in one of the research institutes in Akademgorodok (“Academy town,” scientific cluster in Novosibirsk). He came to meet us and guide us through his exhibition. One of the days we have visited a ceramic manufactory.

Kids had a chance to produce their own masterpiece, painting a small ceramic tablet. Then we learn how potters lived and worked earlier. A man showed us the process of making a vase on a wheel. Another day we taught children to make pelmeni (meat dumplings). As it became tradition, altogether we worked on flower beds in the church yard. Finally, we cleaned the church building after a week of using it.

Rather unexpectedly, this year we had more participants than we usually had. A few friends of our children wanted to join us. We do not deceive ourselves that they immediately start to attend Sunday School or confirmation class. However, it is good for them to hear the Gospel, to be in a Christian fellowship. We pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work with them and within them. Together with those “un-churchy” kids we had a few children who have been baptized in our congregation, but their parents do not bring them to church often. We hope that the good time they had at VBS will encourage them to be at the liturgy regularly.

Another positive aspect is that families from other cities coming to Novosibirsk for this Vacation Bible School. Last year it was Oksana with her daughter Katya from Sayanogorsk. This year it was Svetlana with Sofia and Melissa from Chelyabinsk. These visits give our guests some experience of organizing VBS, but they also bring their skills and energy, helping us here.

We thank God for the great kids He gave us. We thank him for the great adults, who worked really hard preparing and leading this VBS. We thank Him for the parents, who raise their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Moreover, we thank God for His Son, Who redeemed us and gathered in His church. ✠

Ten Years as Bishop

Continued from page 1

It was very good to receive warm greetings from the fellow pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria and the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Participants came all the way from Moscow to Chita in Transbaikal Region. The conference was a great success, as it managed to combine theoretical and relevant pastoral and practical topics in a very insightful way.

After the conference we asked several people, "Why do you think it is appropriate to celebrate of the ten years of Bishop's consecration with conference?"

Rev. Daniel Johnson (Marshalltown, Iowa):

The Bishop is spiritual leader of the Church, the father of the Church. When we have a conference for the Church it is the opportunity to learn what is responsibility of the Bishop to the Church, and what is responsibility of Christians to the Bishop. It helps to educate, to catechize the Church what she is and how she behaves.

Dr. Daria Lytkin (Novosibirsk):

The conference is the most appropriate way to celebrate the jubilee of Bishop's consecration, as this celebration is not so much Bishop's, but it rather belongs to the Church. Any Church's celebration, festival should be theological, and not just fun. That's why the conference is really good way to mark this jubilee.

Rev. Ivan Chernyshev (Moscow):

The conference is the place of communication, of fellowship, of gathering. And for the Church is so natural to gather around altar and pulpit, around ministers, who preach and administer Sacraments, around Bishop. Thus, all together we gather around Christ.



Ms. Alla Shvetsova (Novosibirsk):

Lutheran Church stresses catechism and instruction. We thoroughly study our doctrines, so it is good to celebrate in the church with educational event, that is conference.

Rev. Sergei Glushkov (Ekaterinburg):

Lutheran faith is connected inseparably with education, with catechesis. Celebrating with conference, we stress it again, proclaiming that our faith is not vague or pure emotional, but firmly established on the Word of God.

Please pray for Bishop Vsevolod and for all Lutheran clergymen in Siberia!

Father Alexey serves the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church as the Rector of Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Novosibirsk

From Faith and Hope Newsletter #252 ✕

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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