



# THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



## Meet Rev. Alexander Hahn - Tomsk

- translated by Olga Netaeva

I am Rev. Alexander Hahn, deacon of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran church in Tomsk. I was born in a small mining town, Andjero-Sudjensk. When I was 3, my family moved from Siberia to Kirgizia (part of the USSR at that time) where my grandparents lived.

I studied at a Soviet school and thought, how lucky I am that I was born in the USSR instead of in Germany or somewhere else where there are unemployment, debauchery, and other bad things I have heard about in school. My grandfather was very strict. He instilled in me a serious attitude to anything you start, and neatness. My parents were not religious, though my father was baptized in church in his childhood.

When I went to school, I had a friend who was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church. He proudly showed me his baptismal cross. I also begged my parents to baptize me, but they said that this was unnecessary and it would only hinder my life. Then I become a member of the Komsomol. The ideas of communism **Continued on page 4**



Rev. Hahn with family.

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Vitali Gavrilov at ordination

## The life story of Rev. Vitali Gavrilov

Translated by Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin

There was a time when I was a young man who didn't believe in God. I was uneducated, impolite, and opinionated. It seemed to me at that time nothing bad would happen in my life. It's foolish to think like that. The one who steals, fights with people, "dumps" his close ones, and doesn't live honestly is undoubtedly sentenced to all kinds of deprivations, including the right to be free. That's what actually happened to me.

I got married at the age of 18 and we had a son, Alexei. Our family life lasted only for a year. When I was 19, I was sentenced to three years of imprisonment. Prison was the first misfortune that I doomed myself to. The second hardship was the loss of my family. My wife left me alone together with my weaknesses.

The sentence was finally over, but not my foolishness. After release, I was able to stay a free person only for six months, which were wasted on a messy, crazy, criminal life, after which I was imprisoned for four more years. This time I lost not only my family, but all the rest as well. I blamed bad fortune, everybody else, but not myself. However, now I understand that, due to all these events and losses, I have gained much more than I ever had. I have found faith in Jesus Christ. **Continued on page 6**

# Lutheranism has deep roots in Tomsk soil

by Olga Netaeva



Tomsk was founded in 1604 on the Tom river by order of Tsar Boris. In the spring of 1604, 200 Cossacks came to Tomsk territory. The Cossacks built a stockaded town on the bank above the Tom River. More than once the Tomsk fortress repelled attacks from Kirghizes and other nations from the steppes.

In 1738, a trade route was opened along which goods could pass only through Tomsk. Thus the Moscow-Siberian route came into existence.

In the early 1800s, the first stone buildings appeared in this city made of wood: first churches and office buildings, then houses of prosperous people. In the middle of the 18th century there were about 50 stone houses and eight churches where people from nearby villages and settlements came to pray.

Thanks to donations of wealthy manufacturers and merchants, religious and educational institutions were built, and streets were well-furnished. Tomsk thrived especially in the 1830s when gold mines were intensively worked in the Tomsk region. The first bookstore and public library in Siberia were opened in Tomsk in 1873, and after that a printing house.

The Tomsk region was the chief producer of Siberian oil, which successfully competed with Danish and Dutch oil.

In the 1890s, the Siberian railroad was laid through the Tomsk region. It was very important for the development of the village of Novonikolaevsk (later to become Novosibirsk). The railway became a transport center for the region.

Despite fast economic development, the population of the Tomsk region grew mainly due to the number of people exiled there. In the first part of the 19th century, every fifth resident in Tomsk and its environs was an exile.

In 1888, Emperor Alexander III ordered the founding in Tomsk of the first Siberian university. The first technological university was opened in 1900, then pedagogical, medical, and architectural institutes. At the beginning of the 20th century, Tomsk held first place in Siberia for the number of educational institutions (there were 104). The cultural life of the town was rich: there were four newspapers, four theaters, five cinemas, seven libraries, and three amusement parks.

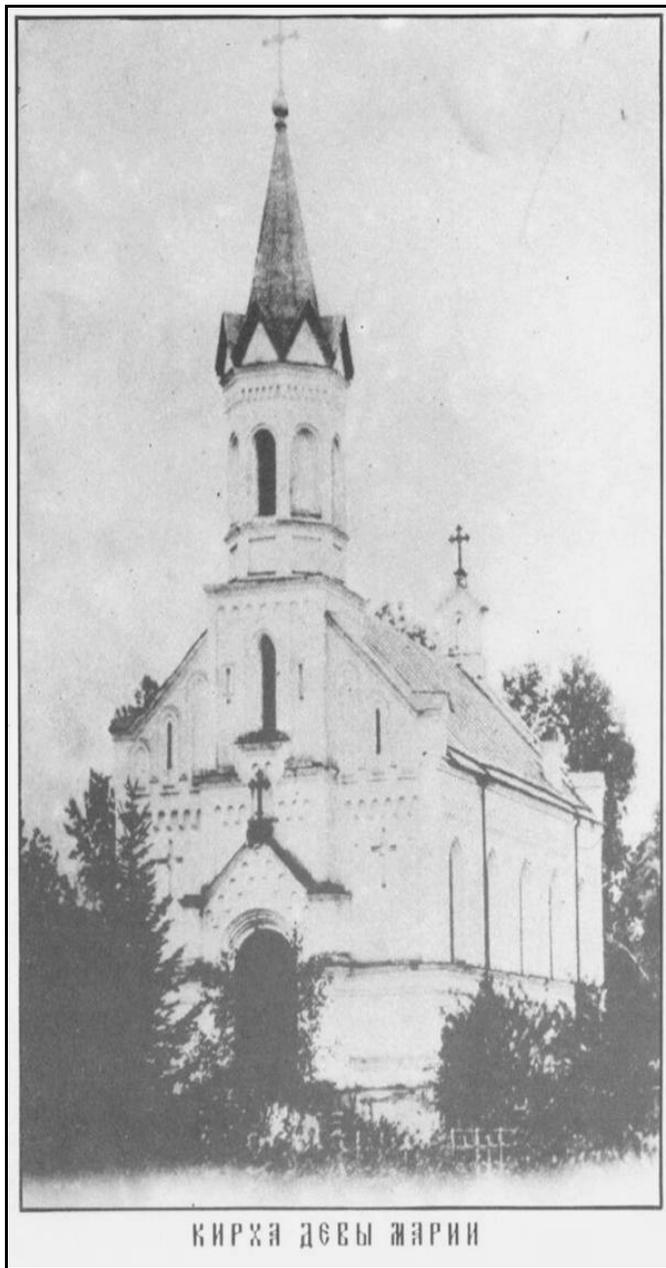
The present population of Tomsk is about 600,000. By Russian standards it is not a very big city.

In its 400 years Tomsk has risen in significance and in economic, social, and cultural development up to the level of the cities of Central Russia. The buildings of the city present a mixture of architectural styles, from different

historical epochs.

Lutheranism has been in Tomsk for more than 250 years. The first Lutheran pastor in Tomsk led a congregation from 1751 to 1763. But very little is known about this period.

**Continued on page 3**



**St. Mary's Lutheran Church - Tomsk prior to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917**

**To receive a packet of donation envelopes contact Elizabeth Meyer at [emeyer@tsims.org](mailto:emeyer@tsims.org)**

# TOMSK

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In the 19th century the large Lutheran congregation in Tomsk consisted mostly of scientists and businessmen. In the middle of the 19th century the leadership of the congregation asked the local authorities for permission to construct a building for the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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## LUTHERANS AND THEIR PRIESTS WERE PERSECUTED... THEY WERE SHOT, EXILED, OR THEY DISAPPEARED WITHOUT A TRACE.

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The building of St. Mary's Lutheran Church was finished on June 4, 1859. The church building was located in the city center. Now this land is a city park. In 1910 the street between the park and the Lutheran church began to be called Lutheran Lane.

After the revolution the building of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, like many orthodox churches in Tomsk, was destroyed. Lutherans and their priests were persecuted, as were many others of different confessions: they were shot, exiled, or they disappeared without a trace.

On March 18, 1930, the Communists decided to bring Rev. Ivan Lokkenberg to trial. He was the last pastor of the Lutheran church in Tomsk. The church property was given to the city, and the building was used for different needs. After 1936 the building was blown up. An amusement park now exists on the property with a Ferris Wheel (or, a Devil's Wheel as the residents of Tomsk call it) erected on the foundation of St. Mary's Evangelical Lutheran Church (In Ekaterinburg they have a monument of Lenin made of the altar of the Lutheran church.) In the autumn of 1941 the Germans from the Volga region were forcibly displaced to Tomsk. In the winter of 1946 Germans from Germany were deported there after the Second World War. At that time there was no Lutheran church in Tomsk. But members of German families, in keeping with their tradition, continued to study the Holy Scripture and the catechism of Martin Luther, and to celebrate religious holidays. Some Lutherans attended prayer meetings in the Baptist congregation.

In the beginning of the 1950s, brothers Ringgold and Bergheim Miller, who had been exiled from the Volga region, decided to start small prayer meetings in a barrack where factory workers lived. They were the first to revive the spiritual life among Lutheran Germans. Every Sunday people who lived in the barracks took turns making the biggest rooms available for services. In those years there were no ordained priests who could serve Holy Communion, baptize, and absolve sins.

In 1958 an elder-preacher of the Novosibirsk

Evangelical Lutheran congregation came to Tomsk and conducted a Divine Service with Holy Communion. On that same day he confirmed 80 people. The government started to forbid services in the barracks. People who attended the services were persecuted. So as not to jeopardize themselves and their families, believers began to gather in private homes. But even there the government soon began to disperse those who had come for the services.

In 1964 the Lutherans in Tomsk officially got permission to conduct worship in the prayer house of the Evangelical Christian Baptists. In 1972, after numerous requests and talks with local authorities, Lutherans finally succeeded in obtaining permission to buy a building for conducting services.

On April 19, 1973, a private wooden building was bought with donations of parishioners in Tomsk and Kazakhstan. The same building is still used today. The first Sunday divine service in the building of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tomsk was celebrated on August 12, 1973.

In about 1994, priests of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran church (SELC) started to work in Tomsk. A Russian Lutheran congregation was desirable because believers who are not of German nationality wanted to participate in the liturgy of the Lutheran church, study the Christian confession as expressed in the Book of Concord of 1580, and hear the Word of God in a language



**The "Devil's Wheel" built by Soviets where St. Mary's Lutheran Church - Tomsk once stood.**

understandable to them. On Dec. 15, 2003, the Russian-speaking Lutheran congregation was registered as "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Mary in Tomsk." ✕

To learn more about the work of the [SLMS](http://www.TSLMS.org), visit our website at [www.TSLMS.org](http://www.TSLMS.org)

## Hahn Continued from page 1

seemed so near; in fact, the people all around spoke only about this. All of this kept religion from us for a long time.

My childhood dream was to be in the military. After finishing school I tried to enter the Military Academy in the city of Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg), but did not succeed. After serving in the army for two years, I came to understand that the army is good training for men, but I would not like to devote all my life to it, and so I returned home to Kirghizia.

While I was in the army I served in the former GDR in the city of Weimar, near one of the concentration camps. We visited the concentration camp twice. This is a very horrible place. All that I saw there left a big impression. I understood that there is something higher than man, and that man can be evil to the point of insanity.

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CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED IN ALL TIMES. IN RUSSIA IT WAS ESPECIALLY ACUTE DURING THE SOVIET TIME. BUT IN OUR DAYS, DESPITE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, CHRISTIANS ARE STILL IN DANGER FROM UNBELIEVERS, AND UNFORTUNATELY THIS KIND OF SITUATION DOESN'T END WITH A CHANGE OF POLITICAL REGIME.

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In conversations with my wife, who had been baptized in childhood, I frequently asked her about God and about faith and more, but I disagreed with her most of the time. But in 1994, relatives of my wife in Kirghizia suggested that I be baptized in the Orthodox Church. I agreed. My childhood dream came true. There had never been a Lutheran church there. So, after my baptism I lived almost the same life as before, but something had changed.

After a while, my wife and I decided to find a Lutheran church in Bishkek (Kirgizaya), where we lived at that time. We found a German Lutheran church. Everyone was very nice to us. We studied the Small Catechism and were confirmed. Then we had our children baptized in this church.

After a while the preacher's assistant left for Germany. In a church meeting I was asked to take his place after taking a course for preachers. Studying Holy Scripture and the confession of our church, I was more and more convinced that this is "my" church.

A turning point for me was a seminar which was held in Bishkek by professors from the USA. In July 1999 Drs. Timothy Quill and Detlav Schultz came to us. I helped them in conducting the seminar. Dr. Schultz asked me if I would like to enter Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk (LTS). Then it was not a real option for me. I had a family, I was 31, and we had a lot of material difficulties.

The professors advised me to contact Rev. Alexei Streltsov, the rector of the seminary. After a lot of doubts I came to Novosibirsk and enrolled in LTS. It was important for me that during my study at the seminary my family be with me. In spite of hard times for my wife, she encouraged me a lot. It was a hard time for her because it was the first time in her life that she had left Kirgiziya, where she was born and raised. Plus it was Siberia - a completely different climate.

After my first year in seminary, I came to Tomsk for a practicum of two months. From conversations with parishioners of our church and the German congregation, I understood how imperfect my knowledge of theology and pastoral practice still was. This both saddened me and gave me a supply of strength for further studies. Gennadi Artin, our missionary in Tomsk, worked there. He worked not just with the members of the church, but also with those who wanted to know about Christ and His church. He understood the command "Love one another" literally, and he was an example of patience and love for many people.

One day in early February 2002, a man entered the church looking for money. Gennadi was there. He was killed by this man. The death of Gennadi changed the life of the congregation in Tomsk. People had a lot of questions and did not understand why this death had to be. Of course, there has always been a danger in being a Christian. Christians have been persecuted in all times. In Russia it was especially acute during the Soviet time. But in our days, despite religious freedom, Christians are still in danger from unbelievers, and unfortunately this kind of situation doesn't end with a change of political regime.

After the tragic death of Gennadi Artin, I asked Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin to let me work as a missionary in the Tomsk parish. Each weekend during my fourth year at the seminary I went to Tomsk to work. We were meeting in the building of the German Lutheran church. After graduation my family and I moved to Tomsk to serve as a full-time pastor to the people there. We miss Gennadi, but we know that we will continue to meet him in the Kingdom of God

I pray that the Lord will keep all our parishioners, my family, and all believers in Christ all over the world, and lead us to eternal life. As we sing in the Holy Liturgy: *Herr Jesu Christ, du Herr und Gott, du Herr und Gott, first uns in Lehen aus dem Tod* ("Lord Jesus Christ, Lord and God, Lord and God, lead us from death to life.") ✠

**To donate a laptop computer contact Elizabeth Meyer at 408.286.1771 or [emeyer@tslms.org](mailto:emeyer@tslms.org)**

# A Christian's Journey

By Marcus Nelson

25 June 2004, Abakan, Khakasia

The rain stopped. After a day of lectures and clouds, a ray of sun broke through with Oksana's story. A simple question, "How did you become a Lutheran?" She had been raised an unbeliever as her parents before her. Having been raised in the Soviet Union they knew no religion except stories in Soviet text books of "religious superstitions" which sought to discredit Christianity and the Church. So they did not know of Jesus or Holy Baptism or liturgy, or catechism or prayer. Oksana was raised like millions of Soviet children, to believe that Christianity was nothing more than "an opiate of the masses." She ignored the Church - seeing "more important" things in life to attract her attention. One day when she was at the university she met some people who called themselves Pentecostals. She was impressed by the kindness of the people and the special interest they gave to her

Rising through the ranks, she became a "preacher," where she joined a "special circle," to use her own words, of "super-spiritual saints." This level of spirituality was based upon the "anointing of the Holy Spirit," which in pentecostalism means, "full of the Holy Spirit." (They did not understand Holy Baptism as she would come to understand it from Rev. Pavel Zayakin in the Lutheran church.)

Life was going well for her. She even developed a romantic relationship with a church security guard. Oksana and her boyfriend grew close and soon desired marriage. What should have showered her life with joy, doused her with hypocrisy, and forced her to reconsider the life she had embraced as a Pentecostal. When they went to those in her "circle of spiritual ones" they condemned the marriage. Why? Because he was not as "spiritual" - Oksana was told they were "unevenly yoked." They would not be allowed to marry. The marriage plans were canceled and the relationship ended. Devastated by what she considered a betrayal, she began to question her friends, and new-found faith.

At this time, she had wanted to work more with the Sunday School children. She believed that this was where God wanted her to work, but the "circle" did not allow it." The "circle" believed that since she was "full of the Holy Spirit" her main task was to "preach," and not do the work of those with "less of the spirit." She was drowning in a sea of confusion, she was told to "do this" and "do that," to "live this way," and to "live that way." It was impossible for her to live up to their expectations. She was told if she left their "church" she "would go to hell." This frightened her. She did not want to go to hell. She had been told that other churches were controlled by Satan. She was afraid of this. She did not know what to do. Finally, she left in despair.

Scarred by her experiences (in what she later would understand to have been a neo-Pentecostal sect), she needed time for healing, and prayed for direction. What was she to do now? Abandon Christianity? Try

Shamanism? She was lost, she had felt betrayed by those who called her "a friend." She needed to be rescued. Months passed, "then a sign" - a literal sign - "a small sign advertising St. Peter and St. Paul Lutheran Church - Father Zayakin's church" in Sayanogorsk. Probably not a sign like she was looking for, but nonetheless a sign.

She was not going to have what happened at the Pentecostal sect happen to her again, so she came with a storm of questions. She was really trying to understand what it meant to be a Lutheran. Her old church was ruled by the Law, but the Lutheran church was driven by the Gospel. The Church gave Christ's forgiveness. Here is the reason why she became a Lutheran: there were no strings attached, always forgiveness for the repentant. There were no mandatory tithes or works, no levels of spirituality to climb. Emotions welled up in her. I knew it was hard for her to share her story because she was cut so deep. She now has the healing touch of Christ - the balm of forgiveness in His Holy Supper - the cleansing of



**After this interview Oksana married Ivan Gorkovenko a Lutheran in the Sayanogorsk parish. Rev. Pavel Zayakin is their Pastor.**

sin in the gift of Holy Baptism. She now understands that it is not what she does which brings salvation, but what Jesus does. She no longer preaches in the way she did when she was a sectarian. She is now a Lutheran and believes the scriptures and what they say concerning the Pastoral Office. But she knows she still "preaches." The Apostle Paul writes: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do proclaim (preach) the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26)." Yes, Jesus answers prayer. ✕

Editor's note: Seminarian Marcus Nelson and his wife, Holly, attended the 2003 summer seminars. Marcus is a second year student at Concordia Theological Seminary - Ft. Wayne, IN.

## Vitali continued from page 1

Everything happened abruptly and unalterably. During these years I had enough time for reflecting upon my life. Upon release from prison, I planned to revenge all those who were “guilty” in all my misfortunes. But suddenly



**Deacon Vitali Gavrilov with wife and son**

everything changed. As if God with His invisible hand had crossed out all the past, and created a new heart in me.

God has given me a chance to meet the man, who later would become as a father and a brother to me. One day I received a letter from my mother, where she wrote that she believed in God, and had been baptized. She wrote that a man, whose name was Pavel Zayakin, had come to Tuim, and that he had founded a parish; he was very active in bringing up youth by organizing camps and scout trips. Her positive opinion about this person had prompted me to write him a letter. To my surprise, he immediately answered and continued writing me later on. I was surprised that some stranger was supporting me in his letters, helping my

mother, sending me liturgy bulletins with my name included in the prayers.

Meanwhile, I was reading the New Testament, alternating it with the book *Ben Hur*. When I had reached the part, in which betrayal by Judas in Gethsemane took place (when Christ was taken into custody), I left this book and continued reading the New Testament. And accidentally I reached the same place about Gethsemane there. And suddenly I realized... Jesus died exactly for me! It was some kind of a moment of enlightenment. “Oh, God! What a dirty, dumb, and horrible sinner I am!” All my understanding of the meaning of life had immediately changed. I was sobbing openly and loudly; I kept beating myself in the forehead, repeating, “God, forgive me! I’m nobody!” For a week afterwards I didn’t feel myself quite right. Whenever I took the New Testament and read any part of it, the tears inescapably started running. It seemed to me that I saw with my own eyes how Christ was hanging on a cross, how he suffered. And I thought, “How good it is that Christ has risen from the dead.

At last, Rev. Pavel Zayakin visited me. I had never heard of the Lutheran confession. Pastor Zayakin in the beginning of our correspondence described to me the basics of this faith in quite a concise but understandable form. For approximately two years our correspondence consisted of questions and answers. He was also sending me the printed sermons of Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, whom I didn’t know at that time. Unexpectedly to myself, I started dreaming about the time when I would become like Rev. Zayakin; how I would help those, who need help. While reading the catechism, I already had no doubt that this teaching is right, and that it deserves all attention and study.

Now, 11 years later, I’m with my wife and son again. God has transformed all my life. Being a problem child at a certain time, who didn’t leave teachers in peace; overloaded police with work; and who had lost everything, being lost himself, was finally found by God. And I believe that “with men [this] is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). And today I, Vitali Gavrilov, the deacon of the SELC, pray to God to fill our hearts with love to each other – love, with which He loved us first. So that we would be light to the world, and deserving to be called Christians. ✕

**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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# THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



Dear friends,

The [SLMS](#) continues to be bolstered by the donations and prayers of many individuals and congregations. At the [SLMS](#) Board of Directors meeting in January, our financial situation was discussed and the Board agreed to continue our support of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church at the current level of \$9,500 per month.

I reported the pending contribution of an anonymous donor which should result in a gift of at least \$100,000 which will be specifically designated for the purchase of flats for use by pastors and congregations of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The properties will be owned by the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Over time, we should be able to reduce our monthly distributions to SELC by the rental costs that will be eliminated once a flat is purchased at a particular location. The purchase of apartments will occur over time, but we are ever aware of the fact that in June of 2006, several additional men will graduate from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk and we will need to increase our disbursements at that time to cover expenses of their congregations.



**Mrs. Elizabeth Meyer**  
**SLMS Secretary/Treasurer**

Pastor Lytkin reported that he expects that donations and offerings by members of SELC congregations will be able to offset about 5% of the salaries of the clergy. This is a big step, as most members of congregations must survive on very low incomes. In Russia, there is not a tradition of charitable giving, in general, as people have depended on the government to provide for community needs for centuries. But our Russian brothers and sisters are beginning to assume a new outlook on providing for their spiritual needs and we commend them.

A summary of the Financial Report to date appears below. Although our balance is relatively high, it should be noted that in response to a request for contributions, we received two gifts totaling of \$10,163 with a matching gift of \$10,163 from LCMS WR/HC, as well as a donation of \$10,000 this past quarter. We would hope for, but cannot count on, this level of donations each quarter.

We now have a website at [www.TSLMS.org](http://www.TSLMS.org). A special "thank you" goes to Brian Bascom at Velocity Partners, Inc. for donating his time and talents in building and launching our website. The expense for the website will be paid by designated gifts to the [SLMS](#). However, it is our expectation that publicity generated by the website will more than offset the cost of maintaining the site.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to express my sincere gratitude for the faithful support of many donors. I believe your gifts are used very faithfully and wisely by the stewards of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. May we be ever aware of God's blessings to those of us who work with the [SLMS](#) and SELC, as well as to those of you who make our work possible.

In Christ,  
Elizabeth A. Meyer  
[SLMS](#) Secretary/Treasurer

**THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY**

**Financial Summary**

**Activity Recap**

(draft Results as of April 10, 2005)

	<b>Calendar 2003</b>	<b>Calendar 2004</b>	<b>Calendar 2005</b>
Beginning Reserve Balance	\$1,375.00	\$34,351.78	\$38,211.82
Contributions			
Q1	10,991.57	36,032.20	47,413.26*
Q2	10,610.38	67,886.30	
Q3	6,340.36	34,392.21	
Q4	<u>17,997.47</u>	<u>21,826.81</u>	
Subtotal	<u>45,939.78</u>	<u>160,137.52</u>	<u>47,413.26</u>
Disbursements	7,200.00	94,296.00	28,500.00
General Fund (Lytkin)	3,300.00	5,240.00	1,200.00
Saratov Ministry (Panchu)			
Misc. Missions			
Touim/Abakan	1,000.00	10,301.40	
Computers to Siberia		5,178.28	790.00
Tomsk		4,000.00	
Debt Reduction from 2003		35,000.00	
Quill Memorial/Liturgical crosses		1,150.00	
All Other	1,400.00	2,180.00	1,700.00
Misc. Expense	<u>63.00</u>	<u>931.80</u>	<u>1,060.70</u>
Subtotal	<u>12,963.00</u>	<u>158,277.48</u>	<u>33,250.70</u>
Ending Balance	\$34,351.78	36,211.82	52,374.38

**Notes:**

\* Included \$10,163 in matching funds from LCMS-WR/HC