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How it all started: From Special Forces to the Chancel (pt.2 of 2)

by Igor Kizyev
 translated by Alexei Shilin

Editor's note: Part 1 appeared in the December 2005 issue. This is available for download from our website at: www.tsims.org

My decision to leave the Pentecostal church and enter into the Lutheran Theological Seminary was met with great hostility from my friends and the pastor of the Pentecostal church in Chita. My wife continued as a member of that congregation for four more months after I left Chita to study at the seminary in Novosibirsk. After the first semester I returned to Chita for Christmas and took my wife (from what I now understood to be a sect).

The pastor and members of that group tried to separate us. Our family had to endure threats that we were going to go to Hell, that we no longer had the Holy Spirit, and now belong to the Devil. They told my wife that I had lost my salvation and had been converted to heresy by what they called a Lutheran sect. We were shunned. No one from the congregation was allowed to greet us and talk to us. This was all very hard on my wife. During those six years as a Pentecostal, she had become comfortable with the congregation, the people, and what she had been taught

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Svetlana Gilyazutdinova: a mother's story

interviewed by Daria Lytkina
 translated by Marina Gaskova

I was born in Krasnoyarsk, Khakassia (Ed. Note: Khakassia is a dependent republic in south central Siberia) and later on moved to Tuim, because my parents lived here. Here I met with Dmitri, my second husband. By that time I already had a son from my first marriage. I had two more children with Dmitri. Five years ago I became a member of the Lutheran church, being influenced by my second husband. I was confirmed and studied at the Bible school. Several times I visited Novosibirsk and took part in the seminars.

When I look at the people who had become Church members, I notice how they changed. And those who leave Church for some reason, soon return to their previous lifestyles, and they even become worse. I used to socialize with such people, for whom it was a habit to drink alcohol regularly. It was normal to visit with the only purpose being to have some alcohol. I turned away from it and don't have such friends anymore.

Our family even stopped watching TV often, because we just didn't feel like it. We were reading different books, studying the Book of Concord and the catechism. I was reading the Bible and discovering a completely new kind of life. We attended morning and evening services. You get up in the morning and see the



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Siberian teen visits America

By Daniel Lytkin

Editors' note: Daniel Lytkin, the son of Bishop-elect Vsevolod Lytkin, accompanied his father to America in January 2006.

When I came back to Russia, all my friends asked me the same questions: "Well, did you like it? What was there?" and so on. I answered, "Yes, it was great, I liked it very much". Of course, I heard many things about the US; and I had some of my own expectations. Generally, everything was the way I expected it to be.

I was especially impressed by the people, they were absolutely different. Americans are more open for communication. For example, they all came up and asked how I was doing. I liked very much all the people I met there. I don't know, maybe it happened because I was visiting, but everyone was very friendly. Also, I was amazed to see how people live in America, absolutely differently than in Russia, really. There were mainly two-story houses in the places where we had been. But my dad told me that people aren't that rich everywhere. There are also poor neighborhoods, similar to the provinces in Russia. We passed by large communities where people lived in trailers. But I still think that this kind of life is better than in the Russian villages, where people live in the wooden rickety small houses.

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I was boasting to my friends that I had visited Disneyland in California, in the suburbs of Los Angeles, near Orange City. On my way there I was thinking, "What shall I do at that place? Look at the Mickey Mouse? It's only for children!" But in reality everything was really cool for people of all ages. There were many different side-shows. In Novosibirsk we have a fair, but these parks cannot be even compared with each other. After three days we still didn't have enough time to make the round of even one fourth of Disneyland. It is so huge and so much fun to visit. I mostly liked the American rides. At first all three of us with Elizabeth and my dad went there. But my dad said, "It's terrible! I'm too old for this" and never rode with us again. I also liked very much "The pirates of the Caribbean".

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Svetlana Gilyazutdinova

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world with different eyes.

I always liked to work with children. When we studied in the ninth grade, I remember how my friends went on dates and I played with kids in the sand-box. My friends were telling me, "You will probably make a good preschool teacher." Maybe it was the result of the way I grew up: my grandmother brought me up, and I always felt the need for brothers and sisters. Then I finished a pedagogical college. But I didn't go to work at a nursery, because the salary was low there.

My youngest son, Paul, is a wonderful child. When I was pregnant with him, it was the time when I started receiving Holy Communion. So he was, probably, influenced by it. I never had a problem with him. He slept well during the nights and rarely got sick. He didn't speak until the age of 2.5. And then, when he said his first words, we



Sofia at tea following Vespers.

were stunned with mouths open in surprise. During liturgy he repeated the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end. Probably, it happened because we were constantly attending morning and evening services, and he was with us. He was baptized 2 weeks after birth.

I had three children of my own: Valera, Sofia, and Paul. Then I adopted Sveta. My friends in Krasnoyarsk are wondering, how I manage with such a "crowd" and how I am able to feed them. "We never know how to make enough money to buy clothes and food just for one child," they say. And I see that God makes real miracles sometimes; that God never abandons me, especially at the moments when I lose my heart. I have 3-4 jobs, but still don't earn enough money. Sometimes I get so discouraged that I wonder what to feed the children. **Continued on page 3**

A mother's story

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Then very unexpectedly someone would just give me money. That's why I'm grateful to God. He never leaves me.

Sveta became a part of our life when my husband Dmitri and I still lived together. She has been attending our church for about two or three years; and all parishioners were collecting food to help her family. They lived in a wooden house; her mom and step-father drank alcohol. The conditions were horrible. The children had nothing to eat. We were helping them but then understood that everything we gave was used by their parents to buy alcohol.

So we said to Sveta, "You'd better come to our place."

Gradually, she started going to the Church, taking part in the festivals. Once we left her at our house, because her mother was drunk, and she had beaten Sveta. Then my husband and I decided to keep her as a member of our family for good. We started paperwork to deprive her mother of her rights. Now she is already 13 years old. Of course, she is a difficult child, and we have conflicts. But it's good that I can influence her through the Church. I often ask our pastors to talk to her.

Recently I happened to adopt two more brothers – Dima (15 years) and Timothy (4 years). I don't know what brings me hope. But I think that

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the food that we share between the four of us we can also share between the six.

These two children lost their mother in August. I was at the funeral. And then I saw the conditions these kids lived in; I saw that all neighbors around drank alcohol. And somehow it turned out that these children found their home here. I helped the older boy to be placed at a college. The younger one has a father, but there is something wrong with the papers. And for now guardianship is drawn up on me. Maybe later his father will take him.

It's very hard with Dima. His father died early; his mother was drinking hard. From the age of 10 he basically was making his own living. He wandered the streets, slept in the basements of the apartment buildings, was addicted to inhaling toxic glue. He was

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Daniel Lytkin

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It's good that I know the English language. I was able to freely communicate with people without a problem. Although, sometimes it happened that I couldn't say what I wanted right away. But, generally, I always managed to express my thoughts. I had no big difficulties with that.

I was asked, whether I would like to live in the US. Probably, I wouldn't be able to live here permanently. Even though I'm not a major patriot, there is something that keeps me in Russia; I don't know what it is. At the same time I wouldn't mind living in the US for a year or two. The place I liked most of all was St. Louis. The city is not very large, but I was impressed by the Arch; it is really huge. I heard a lot about it, but I never thought that it is so huge.

The people we lived with (Dr. Wallace Shultz and family) were very nice. They have a son Paul, and he is 16. We spent a very good time together with his friends.

I've noticed that as time goes by Russian teenagers are trying to look more like American teenagers (or, maybe, it happens by itself). It's a trend. I think it's normal and don't see anything wrong about it. Unlike five years ago, young people have become more relaxed when talking.

Teenagers do not have inferiority complexes; they can say everything they think; they wear clothes they want. It's good that people can feel so free. I think that in time Russian teenagers will become the same as American ones. It is too bad that in your country a person can start driving a car at the age of 16, while in Russia we must wait until we are 18. For example, Paul drives a car remarkably well. Actually, I can drive too, but I'm not allowed to do that, unfortunately.

We visited several churches. It was very beautiful there. Choirs were singing beautifully. The services are very similar to ours, and I could understand everything. People also socialize the same way after the service. We visited the Seminary in Fort Wayne. They have a huge organ there, it sounds really cool. And at another place the choir was great, it sang so nice. I think that someday we will also have such things.

Of course, I would like to thank everyone we visited, those who welcomed us so nicely. Thank you so much!" ✕



Sveta (left) with friends after Vespers

Igor enters seminary

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But all these threats convinced me more and more that I had made the right choice to become a Lutheran and embrace the Lutheran confession.

When I was home at Christmas time, my friends started to visit me. Some tried to persuade me to come back, some asked questions, some wanted to know what I learned. So, in February 2000 I invited three of my friends



Boys in Buryatia meet Dcn. Kizyev before liturgy

to a seminar in Novosibirsk. During Holy Week of that year, Dmitriy Dotsenko became the first person from Chita to be baptized. That signed the birth of our congregation. In 2001, Dmitriy entered our seminary. Right now he is preparing to defend his graduation thesis and will serve the Church as a deacon after holy ordination.

Studying biblical languages and theology of the Church at the seminary was not an easy thing. But with the help of fellow students, wise professors, spiritual support from the clergy and by the mercy of God I graduated from the seminary with good grades. I defended my thesis, "Teaching Catechism" in January, 2003. In the same month I was sent by the Church to my home city, where a congregation of about 30 members had been born. I was ordained by the Estonian Archbishop, Yaanus Kiivit, as a deacon in May 2003.

During my years at the seminary I invited people to our seminars in Novosibirsk. When I was home on vacations, under the supervision of Rev. Pavel Zayakin, I would teach catechism, answer the questions of those who were newly converted, lead Matins and Vespers, and organize seminars where professors of the seminary and the clergy of our Church taught. When I was at the seminary, I wrote letters to parishioners, answered their questions and sent sermons written by our pastors. Generally speaking, I was trying to support the young faith of our parishioners at the Lutheran Church in Chita in any way possible.

Lutheranism, however, is not new to the Chita region. The first Lutherans appeared in our region in 1851. They were immigrants from Germany, Sweden, and the

Netherlands. Some of the Lutherans were Russian. Lutherans were building railroads, towns, plants, factories and served in the Russian Army. It is a pity that during the Soviet regime the Lutheran Church was destroyed, not just in Chita but throughout all of Russia. Pastors were executed and sent to jails, regular parishioners were prohibited to meet together for the Holy Supper and liturgy, or even to catechize the children. Many church buildings were desecrated and destroyed. There was a Lutheran congregation in our city up until 1937, but the pastor was arrested and the congregation was scattered. For sixty-six years, from 1937 to 2003, there was no Lutheran pastor in our city nor in any part of the region of Chita.

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Thanks be to God that this awful time is over. It is very hard, but now the Lutheran Church is restoring itself in our country. I am thankful to God that serving in my position I am a part of this holy work. It is not easy for us, because people have forgotten the Christian faith, her doctrine, teaching, history and the whole Christian culture. Now we have to restore the roots of the Lutheran Church in Siberia. We water, with the holy water of Jesus Christ's Gospel, the seeds of faith which

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Sheep herding on the open range is common in the Chita region. Pr. Alexei Streltsov and Dcn. Igor Kizyev can only wait as they pass.

Svetlana Continued from page 3

registered on the books at the police office for being caught with narcotics. He had been smoking since the age of five. He also constantly drank alcohol. Now, having found himself in the surroundings where nobody drinks, he isn't that happy. I can only influence him by scaring him, "Dima, if I disclaim you, you will be sent to the orphans' shelter right away. Older guys will treat you very badly there." In this way I can manage him somehow.

It was also quite difficult with Valera when he was 15. But at that time we still lived together with my husband, and we could find a way to cope. Last year Valera lived in Novosibirsk, working and trying to become independent. He is back now, and it turns out that he is the oldest in the family. Sometimes he behaves like a grown-up man: he can start yelling

at me, punching the table, as if he were the head of the family. And from time to time he behaves like a spoiled child. For example, he doesn't control how much he spends. He constantly asks me for more and more. It's as if I were "drawing" money, but not earning it. But, compared to other teenagers, he is much better.

Of course, it's very bad that my husband and I are divorced. It's hard for the family to survive now, there is a need for a man's helping hand. Not really a hand, as much as his word. When Dmitri

was at home, there was discipline here. He was strict, and everyone had his own responsibilities. But we were constantly fighting with my husband; he used to disappear from the house for a long time and started going with other women and boozing up. (I'm sorry; it's

hard for me to talk about it.) Pastors Andrei Ivolga and Pavel Zayakin constantly worked with him, as well as Pastor Vsevolod Lytkin. But, nevertheless, nothing has helped.

My oldest son, Valera, doesn't approve of my giving refuge to these two new boys. I tell him, "As a Christian, you have to help your neighbors. Don't you feel sorry for these children? What happens if we put them out? They have their own flat, so we'll let them live alone, but what will it lead to? As a result, they will sell their furniture; they will starve. Shady people will stay in their house. Valera, how can you say such things!? They are only kids. If I had

a huge house, I would take 20 children like these!"

Everyone is surprised at how I manage them all alone! Of course, sometimes I get upset with them. Recently they were jumping so hard that a neighbor from downstairs came to me, asking me to tame them.

My mother lives close to us, in the same apartment building. And the children have a habit of slamming the doors and running away to her when they get upset. Grandma feels sorry for them. And they often abuse this situation. Recently they started cheating on me a lot. I really lose heart when it happens. I tell them, "You are not bad kids. Of course, I don't feed you well, but I'm trying to bring you up as a mother, I buy clothes for you. But if you cheat on me, I won't be able to do anything for you. How should I punish you?" They sit and cry, and promise to behave well.

We try to organize different hobby groups in the church to rouse children's interests. A lot

of exciting things are going on during holidays: we always have children's performances and sing songs. In summer we had a playground for children attached to the church. Katya Chertova and Galina Shvetsova from the parish of St. Andrew in Novosibirsk brought beads. Children like doing beadwork very much. Previously children came to participate in such events in multitude. They were all from the deprived families. They are grown now, aged 16-17. Now the situation is more complicated. We invite people from the outside to come to the classes, to watch movies, and do woodcutting.

"It's a misfortune that has happened to Svetlana," Deacon Vitali Gavrilov said, "She is a provider and a mentor. Everything is on her shoulders. What is taking place in this family is a miracle. When I myself

think of adopting a child from the orphans' shelter, I never have enough courage. I understand that I'm afraid of such responsibility. Svetlana isn't. She has adopted three children, and one girl is almost grown. What a courageous woman! I'm full of pride for such people. But I know that it's very hard for her. Sometimes it's so painful to observe her, spinning in the whirl from early morning till night, and there are cases when she doesn't have enough time to come home to rest before the new day begins. But we try to help her as much as possible." ✕



Tema and Pasha.

"WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN THIS FAMILY IS A MIRACLE. WHEN I MYSELF THINK OF ADOPTING A CHILD FROM THE ORPHANS' SHELTER, I NEVER HAVE ENOUGH COURAGE."

Igor Continued from page 4

were once sown by the Lutherans before us. Our work is blessed by God and we can see the first fruits. In 2002 a new congregation "Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God Lutheran Church" appeared in our region in the Yedinenie village.

We carry out a missionary work in the town of Olovyanaya too and I hope that there will be yet another missionary congregation of The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). The distances between Chita, Yedinenie and Olovyanaya are great. Our pastors travel many days by train to complete the circuit of visitations where they visit the sick, catechize, hear confession and conduct liturgy. I work with convicts in a maximum security prison. Once a month I visit and have a Bible study, lead liturgy, and hear confession. I try to give these people the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only answer and solution to their sinful lives, and become pious Christians and law-abiding citizens of our country.

I HAVE A GREAT DESIRE TO SEE THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMED IN SIGN LANGUAGE, BY WELL CATECHIZED AND EDUCATED DEAF PEOPLE, TO OTHERS WHO ARE DEAF.

I travel over 1,250 km (750 miles) every month to visit my congregations. It is sad, but I am the only representative of the Lutheran clergy in our region that covers about one million square kilometers. Still there is hope that not only the number of congregations, but the number of students who will study at our seminary will be growing. This year, three young men from Yedinenie and Chita congregations will enter the Biblical School (a pre-seminary and advanced catechesis program). It is a good sign, showing that the seeds of true teaching are bearing good fruit.

My wife Yekaterina and her sister Svetlana are fluent in sign language, they learned it in childhood, because their parents were deaf. Because of this we are able to communicate the Gospel to the deaf. Yekaterina and Svetlana translate Sunday liturgy for them and catechetical and Bible sessions. They are also active in the parish life teaching the deaf to solve different social issues.

In January 2002, three deaf persons came to our congregation and were confirmed in July the same year. There are 15 deaf people in our congregation at the moment. Just recently, in February 2005, one deaf parishioner Roman Kislov was consecrated to serve as a sub-deacon. Roman is a good teacher of the Holy Scriptures, Catechism and church doctrine and is well received in the deaf community. He participates in the Sunday liturgy, helps me to teach the Bible classes, catechize newly-converted deaf people, and on occasion preaches the sermon. In the future we hope to organize a Biblical School for our deaf people. This would bring great benefit to them and help satisfy their desire to learn more about the Church and their life in the Church.

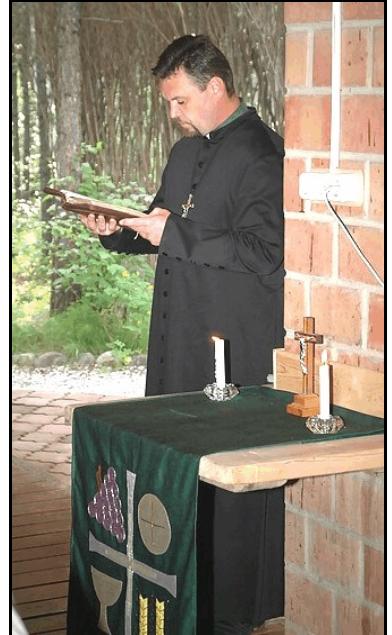
Many times I have tried to contact Lutheran churches who have deaf people and the clergy who work with them, but with no success. I know that there are educational centers for the deaf in the US, Europe, and Australia, but we are not able to contact them in order to grasp their experience in education. I have a great desire to see the Gospel proclaimed in sign language, by well-catechized and educated deaf people, to others who are deaf. It is a very difficult task and we are not able to do it on our own. We continue to look for help outside of the Chita region to others in the SELC and to our friends in America.

Presently our congregation, Saint Trinity, totals more than 50 baptized and confirmed members. The congregation in Yedinenie village is more than 40 people. We are also working in two other towns of our region – Barjigontai and Olovyanaya. We hope that in time with God's help they, too, will have Lutheran congregations. ☩

Editor's note: Rev. Kizyev is featured in a new DVD video - "The Mission - Siberia." This video is distributed upon request by the SLMS. To receive a copy contact the 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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THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY

Dear friends,

Through God's grace and the generosity of many congregations and individual donors, the SLMS was able to meet the goal of sustaining the financial needs of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church during the 2005 calendar year. As I reported to the Board of Directors in January, there was an actual decrease in the end of year cash balance from \$38,211.00 in 2004 to \$28,486.00 in 2005. This may be explained by the fact that in March, four clergymen graduated from the Seminary in Novosibirsk. At that time, we increased our monthly allocation to SELC by \$2,000 a month.

We have gladly welcomed new donors to our ranks and have continued to receive support from World Relief Human Care for special projects. There is great variability in our receipts. Unrestricted General Fund donations ranged from a low of \$29,618.37 in the second quarter to \$63,461.61 in the fourth quarter. But so far, we have had enough of a cushion to provide monthly allocations for SELC without any special calls for additional funding.

Again, the DVD produced by SELC, which is available from Pastor Daniel S. Johnson or me, has proved a great fundraising tool. It speaks for itself and the mission of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church in proclaiming the Word. If you haven't seen it, you might want to request a copy for your congregation. If you have friends or family in other congregations who might be interested, spread the word.

Thank you for your faithful support. Our brothers and sisters in Siberia who serve the Lord faithfully deeply appreciate our efforts and ask for your constant remembrance of them in your prayers.

In Christ,

Elizabeth A. Meyer
Secretary/Treasurer SLMS