



# THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



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[emeyer@tslms.org](mailto:emeyer@tslms.org)  
[www.tslms.org](http://www.tslms.org)

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The newsletter for **THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY** is edited by Rev. Daniel S. Johnson, and Mrs. Valerie Kister Redeemer Lutheran Church, 1600 S. Center St., Marshalltown, Iowa 50158 641/753-9565 (fax) 641/753-5516 [newsletter@tslms.org](mailto:newsletter@tslms.org)

Contributions may be sent to:

**SLMS**

1460 University Ave.  
San Jose, CA 95126

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## Edinenie – A Siberian village

by Marina Gaskova

The village of Edinenie (from Russian: **Unity**) is located about 200 miles away from the city of Chita. The village was given such a name because previously there used to be two villages not far from this place. During the Soviet regime authorities decided to move the two villages to a new place, having joined them together. It is not quite clear why it was done, but at that time a lot of things were done for the reasons that are not easily understood; even the rivers were moved. So, there is not even a river nearby the new place and one needs to dig very deeply into the ground to make a well. But, nevertheless, a new village was founded there. Pastor Andrei Ivolga said, "About one thousand people live in the village now; the place has a two-story school building and a club.

"Previously, the main occupation of villagers was cattle breeding. Now there are several desolate farms and also a parking place with 20-30 different broken agricultural vehicles, combines and tractors, which are not used anymore. **Continued on page 3**



## A life under the cross - Valentina Yurganova's story

translated by Marina Gaskova

(Editor's note: Part 1 may be read from the September 2006 newsletter. This is a four-part series.)

### Part 2 of 4

#### A return to Ukraine - prior to exile to Siberia

When we arrived in Zaporozhie, we discovered that other people lived in our apartment. We were allowed to come in there. There was our bright red cloth on the table, and all the furniture was ours. But we weren't allowed to live there. And that's why we had to rent an apartment.

I remember very well 6 February 1947. My birthday was approaching, and Mother was sewing a Ukrainian dress for me. My father is Ukrainian, and Mother is German. We were trying on the dress when 3 people knocked at our door. They showed us a warrant for search, and started searching the apartment. My mother's fashionable shoes were standing on the bureau (although people usually put seven statuettes of small elephants there for good luck). The shoes had survived two German camps together with us. I remember that German women were gathering around and examining them with surprise, wondering how it was possible to walk on such **Continued on page 2**



## Under the cross

continued from page 1

high heels. The investigator kept twisting them in his hands and asked, what size these shoes were. He said that his wife had the same size... Later on, these shoes disappeared. They didn't find anything. My mother was taken away, and the hostess of the apartment put me out in the street.

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I STAYED HOMELESS FOR 3 MONTHS. WE SURVIVED BY STEALING DOUGHNUTS, WHICH WERE SOLD BY UKRAINIAN WOMEN AT THE MARKET. DOUGHNUTS SPREAD A STRONG AND TASTY SMELL. WE SPENT NIGHTS UNDER THE COUNTERS AT THE MARKET FOR PROTECTION FROM SNOW AND RAIN.

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One family provided me a shelter. I only stayed with them for three days, because they weren't even able to feed their own children. I went to the market and exchanged some of my possessions for food. There was no money in Ukraine at that time. I was given half a loaf of bread and a small cup of molasses. Of course, I swallowed everything at once. There I met with the boys who lived in the street, and I joined them. That's how I became a vagabond.

We met those people, with whom I lived for three days, in Iskitim (where I live now). They were exiled to the Siberian camp as a punishment for associating with the "enemy of the nation." It was me who was called the enemy.

I stayed homeless for 3 months. We survived by stealing doughnuts, which were sold by Ukrainian women at the market. Doughnuts spread a strong and tasty smell. We spent nights under the counters at the market for protection from snow and rain.

I personally can't understand the phrase "bad influence of the street." As for me, it was in the street where I became an individual. I always share everything I have; I always protect those who can't protect themselves. And the boys, with whom I was on the road, taught me to trade possessions for milk rather than molasses (because molasses is not as good for health). I drank milk, but they didn't have a single sip! They kept saying that I was small, that I had to grow.

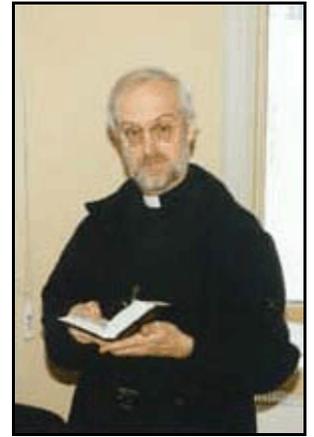
One time we were caught stealing and brought to the police. I was the youngest, and that's why I was sent to the children's home, and others were sent to the labor settlement. The children told me not to run away from the children's home, because I could have starved to death.

My mother was in prison at that time; she went on a hunger-strike, because there was no news from me (although, she was told that I was in Kiev, in the children's home.) I was still on the street at **Continued on page 4**

## After eight years

by Alan Ludwig

Having spent nearly eight years teaching at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, I am still delighted to be here. The task seems as vital as ever, as we train future deacons and pastors—not only for ministry in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, but also for service in other Lutheran churches throughout the former Soviet Union.



Our current student body at LTS is diverse. We have students from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kirghistan, Moldavia, and Kazakhstan. These men have quite varied cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds. Yet, different as they are, one thing unites our seminarians: a commitment to confessional Lutheran theology. These men desire to be grounded in the Gospel of grace. They strive to know how rightly to preach the pure Word of God and administer the Sacraments in accordance with this Word. All our seminary training leads to this.

The program at LTS is not easy. Nor is it "dumbed down" for the critical conditions that often exist in these parts. Before graduating, our students spend four years at the seminary taking courses, then one year doing their practicum. They must write a course paper after their second year, and a final diploma thesis at the end of their studies. The courses taught here are language-intensive. The students study Greek and Hebrew, and never do they go without courses that involve both of these languages. In fact, their regimen is often of a kind that would make many

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IN GENERAL, OUR CURRICULUM PARALLELS THAT OF CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN SEMINARIES IN AMERICA, ALTHOUGH IT IS MODIFIED FOR LOCAL NEEDS. WE WANT TO GIVE OUR STUDENTS THE TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE THAT WILL HELP TO MAKE THEM CAPABLE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK.

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American seminarians shudder! Right now, for example, our third-year seminarians have courses in Genesis, Isaiah, Worship of Israel, and Romans, where they are responsible to read and translate from the original Hebrew and Greek. In addition, they have Greek Readings once a week, for which they must prepare to read and translate by sight some passage from the Gospels. Our goal is to turn out pastors who can truly use the original languages of Scripture to preach, to teach, and **Continued on page 6**

## A Siberian village

continued from page 1

Probably, the village was quite rich at some time. And now it's dying out and will continue dying out more and more. Nothing is produced in the village. People survive by working in their households: they do gardening and stock



**Entrance to the village of Edinenie**

farming. Out of all public buildings there is only one shop and one school. No other job opportunities are there. People do not have any money; they eat what they grow themselves. Poverty level is the same as is in many small Siberian villages. Many people (especially young ones) move to the places where they can find a job. Those who stay ruin themselves by drinking, taking drugs, and stealing from each other – this is the kind of life they lead.

“Some of our parishioners have already moved to neighboring villages, because they managed to find work there. And, little by little, we start visiting the places where they have settled. These are the villages Yasnaya and Barzhigontai. Some younger parishioners went to Chita to study.”

Deacon Igor Kizyaev said, “Our congregation in Edinenie was formed in the summer of 2000. Our parishioner Aliona Syropiatova (who was born at this place) visited there and told her neighbors that she was baptized in the Lutheran Church.

“People became very interested by the Lutheran faith, they wanted to learn more about it and be baptized. In the summer of 2001 Dmitri Dotsenko (a student from the Lutheran Theological Seminary – Novosibirsk) and I came to the village. Fifteen women attended the first meeting, which was devoted to the Catechism. Later, these women were baptized together with their children, making up about 30 parishioners altogether.

“At that time I was able to come to the village only during big church festivals, because I studied at the seminary in Novosibirsk. And since my graduation from the seminary in 2003, I have been visiting the village every

month. Services take place in the house of one of our church members. The first man, Vasily Molokov, was baptized during Christmas time; and in 2005 his son, Yuri Zadorozhnyi, was baptized as well.”

When asked a question, *what are the specifics of work with people in Edinenie?* Deacon Igor Kizyaev answered: “The mentality of people at that place is constrained... They are all afraid of each other and of gossips. Rumors, gossip, slander – all these are very much widespread. If someone helps another person, he can be ridiculed by others. That’s the way people think there. And I can’t understand it at all.

“Even though some people there have education, they are very superstitious; there are a lot of Buddhist and shaman superstitions. There seems to be some kind of syncretism between Buddhism, shamanism and a perverted understanding of the Russian Orthodox Church.

“Our church that was founded there provoked negative reaction among people in the village. Our parishioners are treated with a lot of suspicion. That’s why we have quite a hard time. But people in the congregation hold together tight, and even new people join them.

“Actually, there aren’t any other churches in the village except for ours. The distance to the nearest (Russian Orthodox) church is about 100 miles.”

Question: *Why are there so few men in this parish?* Deacon Igor Kizyaev answered: “They are afraid. In such places men are like paranoiacs, and even worse. Men gossip about each other. After two men had been baptized



**Transportation in Edinenie**

in our church, many rumors were spread about them! They had a very hard time. One of them had a breakdown. He got very drunk, although he does not drink alcohol. His wife clutched her hand in despair. When I came there and started ‘bringing him round,’ he told me how much everyone was in arms against him. They were laughing at him, saying, ‘Well, you fool go and pray to your God. Now it’s forbidden for you to do this and do that, ha ha ha...’ And it’s hard to survive in such an outburst of idiotism. But these two men are getting stronger and stronger in their faith. Many other men would

**Continued on page 5**

# Valentina

continued from page 2

that time. Several times we sent bread and cigarettes through people to my mother in prison. Every parcel was accepted being told she had received them. Later I found out that she never received them.

I was sent to the children's shelter in 1946, when I was 8 years old. I spent a year and two months there. At the time when my son had to go to serve in the army, the thing I was worried about most of all was "dedovschina" (harassments of the younger by the older). The reason was that in the children's shelter I had lived through it to the fullest.

There were many boys, and they were separated into different groups on the basis of age. But there were only 37 girls, and we lived all together, in one bedroom. We sat together around the table in the dining room. The head girl demanded that all of us, one after another, give her a share of bread. In the evenings when they started playing cards, we (the youngest) were scared most of all that they would start playing "milkstop". The rules were the following: if you lose, then water has to be poured on you. If the girls lost, water was poured on them. But if the "head girl" lost, it was done to one of the youngest, and she had to go to bed like that.

I don't know why, but I always felt somebody's protection in the children's shelter. Water wasn't poured on me a single time. They did it in turns: one girl today, and tomorrow another one. And when it was my turn, they "stepped over" me. In the dining room they took bread from me only once, only on the first day. But on the second day the "head girl" returned bread to me, having taken it from the neighbor. And she said, "We don't take from this one anymore". I don't know why it happened like that. But when bread was taken away from my neighbor on the left or on the right, I shared half of my own bread with them.

We worked a lot in the children's shelter. I liked to work with the potter's wheel. We made dishes and cups for our dining room. We also made clothes for ourselves out of soldiers' blouses. And I enjoyed this job.

We also raised mulberry worms. We fed them by going 3 kilometers away from the children's shelter where mulberry-trees grew, broke off the branches, and brought them to the worms. It was our duty. Later on, they were brought to the silk-mill. The children's home received money for that, and we were complimented.

It's forbidden to use child labor now. And that's why children today start their lives being absolutely

unprepared for it. Many of them can't find a job, some get imprisoned, and others become alcoholics. But we worked at many jobs.

The only thing that was hard to make was adobe (bricks made of loam and straw). We were kneading it with our legs. We were kneading the layers of loam, which was on the bottom, covered with straw and water above it. Then we dried them. They were so heavy that we could hardly turn them: two or three people were needed for it. A horse worked with us. It was given rest sometimes, because the straw was hard, and the horse tore up its legs to the point of bleeding. As for us, we weren't allowed to rest. We had sores that almost reached the bones. And, of course, this wasn't the job I liked very much.

My mother was told by one guard in prison that she wasn't exiled according to the rules. She had to be exiled together with her family. Upon her arrival to Siberia, she immediately started looking for me, but nobody gave her an answer. Such was the policy: to do everything possible to destroy the families.

Even the name, last name, and birth date could be changed in the children's shelter. And such a child could hardly be found by parents. There was a group of preschool children (about 30 people) who didn't remember their last names. So all of them were given the same last name. Many chestnut trees grew in the nearby park. And all the children were given last names "Kashtanov" ("belonging to a chestnut"). Of course, in some places such things were done, because children had no documents; but in others it was done on purpose, so that parents wouldn't be able to find their children.

I was also looking for my mother. I wrote from the children's shelter to Dora, my mother's friend (I still remember the address). I asked her if she knew anything about my mother. My mother also wrote to her. Dora answered neither me nor my mother. She was simply

afraid. So my mother took the risk and wrote to her neighbor.

The neighbor went to Dora upon receiving the letter. But Dora said that she didn't receive any letters. However, the neighbor accidentally saw a letter on the bed, and it turned out to be from me, just received by Dora. The neighbor took the letter and sent it to Mother, as my address was written on it. At that time there were no envelopes, and letters were folded in triangles. That's how my mother found me.

I finished the second grade in Ukrainian language in the children's shelter. ☒

Личная карточка № 3014 на ребенка, оставленного в детдоме, в период временной распределительной комиссии НКВД	
1. Фамилия	Владимиро
2. Имя	Валентина
3. Отчество	Петровна
4. Число, месяц и год рождения	27/5 - 1938 год
5. Место рождения	Закарпатье
6. Пол	Женский
7. Национальность	Украинка
8. Семейное положение (в браке или нет)	
9. Место жительства (адрес)	Место рождения: Закарпатье, Украина
10. Тип и адрес школы, детской группы, детского сада, детского дома, детского учреждения	Не указана
11. Когда и откуда ушел из дома	6.05.46. Пошел как мать
12. С какого времени стал бездомным	забыто в тюрьме
13. Когда, куда и за что попал в лагерь принудительных работ	с 6.01.46
14. Чем занимался во время содержания в лагере	
15. Сын ли в детстве, проживавший с матерью, в том числе в период распределительной комиссии НКВД	Нет

Document sending  
Valentina to the orphanage

Editor's note: Part 3 is continued in the May 2007 issue of the [SLMS newsletter](#). We thank Rev. Alan Hafner of St. James Lutheran Church - Victor, IA for editorial help in preparing this series of articles for publication.

# Edinenie

continued from page 3

be baptized, but only due to fear of different kinds of mockery and gossips they can't bring themselves to do it. Of course, it's not good that there is no resident pastor.

Pastor Andrei Ivolga and I are able to come only once a month. We come for several days, and have too much to do, traveling through four villages, located far from each other, which makes up 200 miles total on very bad roads. And I feel really bad that it's

impossible to devote as much attention to people as they need. We conduct a service in the church, visit some people, teach someone, consecrate a house, – and all that needs to be done very fast; it's hard, because the time is pressing.

“We try to let them know about our planned visit beforehand, so that more church members are able to come together. There is telephone communication in Edinenie, and it does work from time to time.

So we have to send a telegram. But sometimes I get a feeling that a telegram literally 'strolls' there: it can arrive after what seems a month. It's such a remote place. But, nevertheless, the work is being done, and people cling to the Church.”

Yuri Zadorozhni (a parishioner) said, “How did I come to believe? My mother was the first one in our family to be baptized, about three to four years ago. I asked her all kinds of questions, and she explained to me the Christian faith. Actually, I wanted to be baptized long time ago, in the Russian Orthodox Church. But I didn't know the answers to many things, important to me. And they don't explain much at the Orthodox Church. You need to pay a lot of money for baptism, to bring a bag with food, and give them something else...

“My father was baptized after my mother (in the Lutheran Church). But at that time I wanted to go to Chechnya to serve in the army. I had even signed a contract and had passed medical examinations. Before going to Chechnya, I asked Deacon Igor Kizyaev to baptize me. He gave me a Small Catechism and



A house in Edinenie

explained everything in general. I prepared for the baptism and then was baptized.

“Deacon Igor Kizyaev talked me out of going to Chechnya. When he was younger he served in the Soviet Army in Afghanistan (he has several wounds); and he explained to me quite clearly, what it can lead to. He suggested that I, instead, enter the Bible school. So that's what I did. And I don't regret the choice I've made.

“After the Bible school I plan to start my studies at the seminary. I want to become a pastor. When I visited Novosibirsk last summer, I really liked it there – the liturgy, the way services are held; how pastors preach and people listen to them. I also would like to be able to do that, to call people to Christ, so that there are as few atheists left in this world as possible.

“One can say that the village I live in is atheistic. Last Christmas we were striving hard to get permission from the administration to let us hold a Christmas Service in the so called 'Club of Culture' in the village. The heads of regional administration and local village administration gave their permissions.

But the Club Head did not allow us, even though he had to obey his bosses.

“There are such people in the village, who believe in 'neither God, nor devil,' and they talk our parishioners out of going to church; and some of church members, unfortunately, stopped going. They say about our parish that we are Satanists, members of a cult. And that the true church should only be a Russian Orthodox one.

“But if you start to ask them to explain the specifics of

their faith, they can't. If someone asks them, what they believe in, they simply say: 'We believe.' I continue: 'Are you baptized?' They say, 'No, we aren't; but we are believers, we are Russian Orthodox believers...'

“Now we gather in the house of one of our parishioners. It's our dream to



A boy drinks tepid tea before worship.

buy construction materials and build a church out of wood. If we had funds... I could build it together with my father during summertime.”

Please pray for Lutherans in East Siberia to be firm in faith and be prepared ... to give the reason for the hope that they have (1 Pet. 3: 15). ✕

# Ludwig

Continued from page 2

and to refute the many errors that circulate here as everywhere. The seminarians also have full courses in other disciplines besides biblical studies. In general, our curriculum parallels that of confessional Lutheran seminaries in America, although it is modified for local needs. We want to give our students the technical and practical knowledge that will help to make them capable shepherds of God's flock.

It is not enough that future pastors be merely competent. "It is required of stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2). To impart knowledge is relatively simple. Far more difficult is the task of shaping and molding our men into wise, compassionate, diligent shepherds. We try to equip them for this as well. This begins in classes, where instructors by their own behavior toward the students seek to model to them pastoral attitudes. Then it extends to the church, in which the seminarians are expected to participate fully. In summers they do practical work in our various parishes throughout Russia, or with the supervision of their pastors at home. The final one-year practicum is designed to help our students develop those skills that cannot be fully learned in the classroom.

In these eight years of the seminary's existence there



Visiting with clergy

have been both joys and sorrows. Our first class of students was very small, and no one actually finished the program. Our second group has graduated, and several of them are

doing splendid work in one or another of the missions of the SELC. Our third class will graduate this November, and we have already heard good reports from various places as they finish their practicums and await ordination.

The fourth group of students is now in its third year of seminary studies. Next year a fifth class will begin studies. We have lost some along the way. But we have gained more, as



Prof. Ludwig teaches a bible class

men who barely knew what it means to be Lutheran have had their eyes opened to the pure doctrine of Christ, the importance of the sacraments, and the liturgical life of the church.

Despite the gains, the need is still great. In the territories of the former Soviet Union, expanding mission work is both

possible and necessary. We still do not have enough clergy, and only through called and ordained servants of the Word will the work get done. The number of missions in the SELC is ever growing, and the ordained clergy are stretched thinner and thinner as they travel over a vast expanse of territory, feeding hungry sheep with the Word and Sacraments. Despite the urgent need, we proceed carefully and thoroughly in our seminary training, taking no shortcuts, seeking to lay a foundation that will last. I am thankful to the Lord to be allowed to participate in this great task. ✠

**Editor's note:** Prof. Ludwig graduated from Concordia Seminary - St. Louis in 1989 receiving a STM in 1992. He served two congregations in South Dakota before being deployed by CTS - Ft. Wayne in 1998 to teach at LTS - Novosibirsk. He is presently completing a PhD in Old Testament. He is married to Patricia and has 3 daughters and 6 grandchildren.

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THE NUMBER OF MISSIONS IN THE SELC IS EVER GROWING, AND THE ORDAINED CLERGY ARE STRETCHED THINNER AND THINNER AS THEY TRAVEL OVER A VAST EXPANSE OF TERRITORY, FEEDING HUNGRY SHEEP WITH THE WORD AND SACRAMENTS.

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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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