



# THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



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## A Bishop of the SELC is Consecrated

By Elizabeth Meyer

A LUTHERAN BISHOP IN SIBERIA? Yes, praise the Lord, it is true. A Lutheran bishop now presides over the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). My husband, Ted, and I had planned a trip to Germany in late April to practice our German and visit historic Luther sites. But when we heard the long anticipated news that the senior pastor of SELC, Vsevolod Lytkin, would be ordained as bishop on May 6, we extended our stay to travel to Tallinn, Estonia. Until that date, SELC operated under the care of the Lutheran Church in Estonia.

The service was held in the afternoon of Sunday, May 6 in the historic Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary on a hilltop overlooking the old city of Tallinn. Amazingly, the church was not destroyed during the communist years, as were the Lutheran Churches in Siberia, perhaps because Estonia did not come under communist control until after World War II. The walls of the magnificent church display large coats of arms of what I presumed were noble families or those who have donated to the church. The chancel of the church is beautifully adorned and the clear glass windows above the apse allowed gentle sunlight to stream

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

translated by Marina Gaskova

(Editor's note: Part 1, 2 & 3 may be read from the September & December 2006 and May 2007 newsletters respectively. These may be found at [www.tslms.org](http://www.tslms.org). This is the final part of a four part series.)

### Part 4 of 4

In 1954 my mother and I received passports on the same day. It was the first passport in my life, and for Mother, her second one. Our exile was over by that time.

When I had grown old enough to become a communist party member, I was offered to do it, and I agreed. I became a Communist Party member in 1965.

I had remembered a time, when we were in the concentration camp, when two of our soldiers ran away, then were caught. We were all lined up; the two soldiers were put in front of us children. They were already beaten up heavily and could hardly stand on their feet. And then a pack of dogs were set on them. And in several minutes nothing was left of these people. Well...I remember how firmly these guys stood. And I remember the phrase: "one should go into battle as a communist." That's why I associated communists with those heroes, whom I saw in the war. When I studied at school, almost all teachers were front-line soldiers. Some of them lost a hand,

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# Hope crisis pregnancy center in Novosibirsk – a mission of mercy

By: Olga Netaeva

The women's "Nadezshda" (Hope) crisis pregnancy center in Novosibirsk has been operating for more than a year. It was started by pastors and members of the SELC. Hope Center was organized with the financial help of a charitable organization, LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Maggie Karner, Director of Life Ministries for LCMS World Relief was able to assist the SELC in making this center become a reality. Women and girls experiencing a crisis pregnancy, or those who have problems and questions may visit the center, along with women who want to help their relatives and friends.

Women and girls who have problems and questions may come, and also those who want to help any of their relatives and friends. The main purpose of the center is to give psychological and spiritual support to women who are undergoing crisis pregnancy, and also to the members of their families.

Parishioners of St. Andrew Lutheran church in Novosibirsk who work in the center are: Rev. Daniel Burlakov, Gloria Vladimirova, Elena Netaeva, and Alla Shvetsova. LCMS World Relief and Human Care also helped with organizing and financing the studies of two employees of the center, Gloria Vladimirova and Alla Shvetsova, at Concordia Theological Seminary – Fort Wayne, IN (ed. note: see Sept. 2005 and Dec. 2005 [SLMS](#) newsletters on our website at [www.tslms.org](http://www.tslms.org)). They are studying in the Deaconess Program, which is supervised by Dr. Arthur Just. Elena Netaeva is a permanent employee of the center. She maintains communications with the local authorities, and other social aid organizations in Novosibirsk.

The opening and consecration of the center took place on November 1, 2005, which coincided with the 50th anniversary of legalizing abortions in the USSR. Before that, abortions had been prohibited since 1936. Today Russia takes second place worldwide in the number of abortions. In addition, 11 percent of all abortions are received by girls 15 years and younger. At the same time, the population of Russia is decreasing dramatically. Until 1996, abortions were allowed up to 28 weeks after conception. In 1996 the Russian government reduced the legal limit for an abortion to 22 weeks gestation. "In our country unwanted pregnancies often result in fear, confusion, and offence, and a woman does not know where to turn," said Elena Netaeva. "To face an unplanned pregnancy is very hard, and the abortion procedure seems very easy and the only reliable solution."

Because of the enormous price of real estate in Russia, it is almost impossible to buy an office building for the center. Therefore employees of the center rent a small room in a busy shopping center near the university. On the shelves are many pictures and magazines about babies, the birthing process, as well as fetal and child

development.

Assistance given by the center to mothers is not limited only to financial support. The center also helps to buy medicine for babies and organize Christian chastity programs with youth at schools, orphanages, and colleges. The center has developed and distributed brochures with information about abortions in maternity welfare clinics, maternity hospitals, and youth dormitories, and give post-abortion consultations. It also provides a 24-hour toll-free helpline.

The population of Novosibirsk is about 1.5 million people. Yet the Hope Center is only the second women's crisis pregnancy center in this city. The first center of this kind was opened by a Roman Catholic organization. Hope Center workers closely with them, exchanging information and sharing experiences.

"Financial insecurity is one of the reasons why both single and married women want **Continued on page 3**



**Elena Netaeva is a permanent employee at the Hope Crisis Pregnancy Center. She maintains communications with the local authorities, and other social organizations in Novosibirsk.**

## The Story of One of Our Clients

**Oksana left home to live with her boyfriend when she was seventeen, and she lived with him for seven years. When she got pregnant and was in the hospital, he found another woman. Oksana returned to her parents. Because of the broken relationship with her ex-boyfriend and father of her child, she was depressed. She even wanted to kill herself a few times. Her mother found information in a newspaper about our center and brought her to us. It turned out that it was not in vain. Oksana needed psychological help, and we invited her for a few consultations with a psychologist. It was fruitful. We arranged for her to have an ultrasound, where she saw her future baby for the first time. Now she feels well and she is preparing to become a mother. She reads books we give her. We and her mother monitor her psychological condition.**

**Editor's note: We recently learned the baby was stillborn. Now the mother has the Church to provide her the mercy of the Gospel and the promise of the resurrection in her sadness.**

## Under the Cross

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and others, a leg.

That's why, when I was admitted to the party, I considered it as a reward. Especially since it was the first time when I wasn't cut down or stopped, even though my application form was stained and I had relatives abroad.

And when in 1993 the party "dumped" us, I didn't renew my membership in it. Our leaders had wandered off. Some started working in sales, and some in the area of private enterprises. We were abandoned. I'm not satisfied with the present-day communist party, however. It's a gathering of hurt people. I keep a membership card, though; let it remain a part of my life history.

I still regret that my mother let me forget German language. But it was dangerous. That's why we never spoke German with my mother upon our return from Germany.

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MY MOTHER ALSO TOOK A CROSS OFF ME AND HID IT, BECAUSE IT WAS DANGEROUS TO WEAR IT. AND IT WAS ALSO DANGEROUS TO SAY THAT WE HAVE RELATIVES IN GERMANY. WE HAVE MANY RELATIVES LEFT IN GERMANY.

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My mother also took a cross off me and hid it, because it was dangerous to wear it. And it was also dangerous to say that we have relatives in Germany. We have many relatives left in Germany. We are the only ones out of all of them who have returned to Russia.

We had lost contact with all relatives in Russia as well. Mother wrote to all possible authorities to find them, but received only refusals. And only later on, by accident, my mother found our relatives in Russia, as well as abroad.

She visited Germany many times. The first time more than a year had passed before a visa was issued. And while her documents were being processed, her mother died.

She visited her sisters many times afterwards, and I didn't do it a single time. I lived in poverty all my life. I have the lowest-paying job in the country (a teacher of Russian language and Literature). I simply haven't had money for such trip. Of course, I would like to go to Zalgov, to the grave of my godmother.

I kept thinking that when I retired, I would go there at least on a tourist visa. But I spent only 16 days as a retired person; I was asked to work one more year (because there is no one to teach). So it's my 49th year of work already.

When we were little, the word "seksof" was the worst possible offence. If someone was **continued on page 4**

## Hope

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to get rid of a child," says Elena Netaeva. Women come to the center for help not only in connection with pregnancy, but also to solve different concomitant problems: poor living conditions (some of the clients live in run-down barracks), psychological problems, and legal difficulties. The center staff tries to solve these problems to the best of their ability by collaborating with other charitable organizations. For instance, in very difficult situations, when pregnant women do not have places to live, they are sent to the catholic organization, "Caritas," where there are two shelters. "We hope someday, ourselves, to have such a shelter for young mothers who are in need," said Elena Netaeva.

All services of the center are free to women. It is the center's desire to help in more ways, but unfortunately, because of a difficult financial situation, sometimes it is hard to support even the existing services. In spite of the fact that all employees of the center are Lutherans, the center is not religious, so that no one need feel uncomfortable in coming here. Still, it was a big joy for the workers of the center when one of the girls who recently was going to have an abortion came to the church at Christmas with her newborn baby.

Even non-believers understand that abortion is wrong and sinful. "Our center is founded on care not just for the baby, but also for the mother," said Elena Netaeva. "Both



**Mothers with their babies.**

mother and baby are victims, hostages of a complicated system. The woman with an unexpected and unwanted pregnancy very often remains alone with her problems. Our first purpose is not to leave such a woman all alone. As a rule, if a woman in such a condition asks for advice, her relatives or friends, because of the prevailing mentality, suggest that she have an abortion. We wish to tell her that a baby is a blessing from God. The baby can change the women's life for **continued on page 5**

# Valentina Yurganova

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called that, he was fighting to death. When I studied at the institute, and we studied abbreviated words, this one was never mentioned. Only when I started reading more literature about repressions, I read that “*seksot*” was an abbreviation for “secret agent”. And I understood why this word wasn’t explained to us at school. I



This is me teaching school

understood, why we were fighting so seriously in childhood.

So I felt scared when recently members of our “*Duma*” (Russian Parliament) raised the topic of legalizing the institute of informers (and informers are actually “*seksots*”). We are very close to returning back to the things we have tried to go away from. Also, it was proposed to take the families of terrorists as hostages. But it is the same as it used to be in 1946, or in 1937-38. If a person is an “enemy of the nation,” then the whole family is an enemy of the nation.

My mother didn’t blame the State for her destiny. She thought that “you can’t make omelets without breaking eggs.” She said, “There could really be enemies among us.” But as for me, I feel strongly negative about it. Maybe that’s because I was born later. Maybe because I was scared too much in my childhood, and I’m tired of such feeling. Maybe, because in addition to what I have lived through myself, I have also read a great deal about this time.

It wasn’t the court that judged my mother, but a special council. It consisted of 3 persons. Sometimes these were communist party local leaders, and sometimes ordinary people. Three people gathered together, took a list and read from it. There were no interrogations, no witnesses, advocates, or public prosecutors. They read a list, and sentenced people in their absence. They didn’t care whether a person was really guilty or not.

That’s why I got scared to hear about the proposal to renew the institute of informers. It will create a lot of

opportunities for slandering people in our country. Unscrupulous people will use such a chance a lot. We have already passed through it in our history. We have managed to stand it, but I don’t want my grandchildren to face it.

When I traveled to different cities, I always tried to visit a church. But I felt that I don’t really belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. One time I bought a newspaper “Siberian Youth” in a local train. There were advertisements on the last page, and different religious organizations invited people to their services; there was also an advertisement from the Roman Catholic Church. I thought, “Since there are Catholics, there must be Lutherans in Novosibirsk as well!”

So I started searching. In the beginning I found myself in the German-speaking Lutheran congregation. But as I forgot German, I couldn’t understand anything during the service. I saw a telephone number of our church there. I called and asked whether there is a fundamental difference between German-speaking and Russian-speaking Lutheran Churches, because I was baptized in the German one. [ed. note: Valentina is referring to Bible Lutheran Church, the name registered with the Russian government before it took the name St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church of the SELC]

I came to our Church for the first time in December 1996. I was late, and the service had already started. I was given a place to sit, and was explained the order of the service with care. Even though it wasn’t very comfortable in the building, and there were holes in the floor of the room where we had tea... But somehow I felt that I was at home. I spoke with Pastor Vsevolod Lytkin and Pastor Pavel Khramov. They both confirmed that there isn’t much difference between Russian-speaking and German-speaking Lutheranism. That’s how I started regularly attending the Church. I always felt sad if there wasn’t a chance to come to the service. And I don’t come only if I’m sick. At first, in the beginning of the service, when a pastor said, “Let’s pray” and started praying, for me it was like congratulations for my birthday. I didn’t know a single prayer. I always waited for the time when prayers were to be read. And during the Holy Communion, when people were returning to their seats, it seemed to me that their eyes were shining differently. I also like how seriously the New Testament is being studied here. ✕

Editor’s note: We thank Rev. Alan Hafner of Victor, IA for editorial help in preparing this series of articles for publication.



Me with my son, Sergey

## Crisis center continued from page 3

the better.”

The first aim of the center is not to leave a woman all alone, the second task is to show her that abortion is by no means the best escape. For this very reason the center pays for ultrasounds, so that women can see their babies and understand that they are living persons. When they see their babies on the monitor screen, their thinking begins to change. And after that, employees of the center are minded to give guidance to these women, helping them with finances, training, and counseling. We pray that this center may serve our society, so that many mothers and their unborn children may find help here and support in word and deed, and above all, in love and as an expression of Christian mercy. ✕

**Editor's note:** Donations to Hope Crisis Pregnancy Center may be sent to the [SLMS](#) with a memo: "Hope Crisis Center." Matching funds may be available through LCMS World Relief Human Care by contacting Rev. Paul Kienker at 1-800-248-1930, Ext. 1376, e-mail: [paul.kienker@lcms.org](mailto:paul.kienker@lcms.org)

To learn more about the work of the Hope Crisis Pregnancy Center contact Mrs. Maggie Karner, at LCMS World Relief/Human Care, 1-800-248-1930, Ext. 1390, e-mail: [maggie.karner@lcms.org](mailto:maggie.karner@lcms.org)

## First Ordination by new Bishop

During the Pentecost Service in Novosibirsk the first consecration performed by Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin took place. Deacon Vladislav Ivanov (from the Church of St. John the Baptist in Cheliabinsk) was ordained as a pastor. This marked an historic day in the history of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). She now has her own Bishop to conduct ordinations. Previously the candidates would travel to Estonia to be ordained by the Estonian Lutheran Bishop in Tallinn.



## Consecration of Bishop continued from page 1

down on the altar.

The prelude to the service was a concert of lovely choral and organ pieces. When the service began, several laymen who were officials of the church proceeded down a center aisle to the altar and were followed by the Archbishop of Estonia, The bishop emeritus of Estonia, the bishop of Latvia, the bishop of Lithuania, several other clergymen, Professor William Weinrich (former academic dean at Concordia Theological Seminary— Fort Wayne), Pastor Vsevolod Lytkin and nine clergy of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. During the service, Pastor Lytkin's parents and his wife, Daria, sat in a box overlooking the altar.

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**"WILL YOU KEEP WATCH, WITH ALL FAITHFUL DILIGENCE, OVER THE CONGREGATIONS SO THAT THE GOSPEL IS RIGHTLY PREACHED AND THE HOLY SACRAMENTS ARE ADMINISTERED ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S INSTITUTION, AND THE CONGREGATIONS ARE SERVED ACCORDING TO ESTABLISHED CHURCH ORDER?" BISHOP-ELECT LYTKIN ANSWERED: "I WILL, WITH THE HELP OF GOD."**

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There were approximately 100 people in attendance, including some 10 Americans with a connection to the church in Siberia. Significantly, the metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox church sat in the front row, perhaps as a sign of solidarity with other Christians who had suffered under communist rule. Although the service was conducted in Russian, the bulletin was also printed in English. Accordingly, we were able to hum along with some familiar hymns, and follow the liturgy.

About twenty minutes into the service, Pastor Lytkin was called forward. The consecration began with the confession of the Nicene Creed. Pastor Lytkin knelt before the altar as the archbishop of Estonia posed a number of questions to him (very similar to questions we pose to candidates for ordination). An example of such questions is: "Will you keep watch, with all faithful diligence, over the congregations so that the Gospel is rightly preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, and the congregations are served according to established church order?" Bishop-elect Lytkin answered, "I will, with the help of God."

After this examination, the archbishop, bishop emeritus and three bishops **continued on page 6**

# Bishop

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placed their hands on Pastor Lytkin's head and ordained him as bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The archbishop placed a miter on Pastor Lytkin's head and two pastors from the Siberian Church stepped forward to place a red robe on his shoulders as he faced the altar.

Bishop Lytkin then bowed before the altar and ascended the pulpit to preach a truly inspired sermon based on the texts for the day. After the sermon, four pastors of the Siberian church stepped forward to join Bishop Lytkin and offer the sacrament of Holy Communion. At the end of the service, Bishop Lytkin stood at the foot of the altar while those in attendance walked forward to greet him.

The service was followed by a reception, arranged by the Estonian congregation, in an art gallery near to the

Cathedral. Congratulations were offered to Bishop Lytkin by all and people lingered to savor this precious time together.

I was truly blessed to attend this historic event. For those of us Americans who are puzzled by the importance placed on this consecration and ordination, it must be noted that this is the traditional structure of the church in



**Bishops laying on hands.**

Europe – even Lutheran ones. The SELC is now recognized as an independent church body within Russia and the historic relationship between the Estonian Church

and the Lutheran Church in Russia has been restored. SELC will have new status with government agencies in Siberia where it is now officially registered. Bishop Lytkin



**Bishop Lytkin after ordination of SELC clergy at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church – Novosibirsk.**

will have the authority to ordain clergy in his own right. This new status will give SELC greater credibility, especially in contrast to the many foreign sects that rushed to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

One of the highlights of the occasion was that I was able to meet several SELC pastors I had only known via email. Many of them speak quite good English – but the time was all too brief. Our Siberian brethren had arrived on Saturday after a five-day train trip, but they had to board the train immediately on Monday for a five-day trip back to Siberia.

Although supporters of the SLMS may all rejoice in this blessed ceremonial consecration and ordination of Bishop Lytkin, we were fortunate, in that private donations outside of the SLMS were given to arrange for the train travel of the SELC clergymen and to provide for the reception after the ceremony.

I left Estonia with the feeling that authority had been granted to the right man. Bishop Lytkin is a truly humble and dedicated servant of the Lord. He is loved and respected by parishioners and his fellow clergymen. He is well aware of the responsibilities of his office and he will serve faithfully and to the best of his ability. Let us rejoice and keep him ever in our prayers. ✠

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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