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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 [danieljohnson@tslms.org](mailto:danieljohnson@tslms.org)

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## First a pastor, then a student

By Gretchen Roberts

When Rev. Pavel Khramov began four years of classes at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia, he was already an ordained minister with a master's degree in mathematics.

It was 2004, and Khramov had served the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia as a pastor for three years and a deacon for seven. He'd come to the Lutheran faith at university, converting to Christianity in 1992 through evangelical missionaries. "In the beginning I was rather evangelical, but I've always been a member of the Lutheran church," Khramov says. "I was baptized as a student in 1992, and then within two years was ordained as a deacon."

Khramov came from an atheistic family, though he says the concept is different in Russia. "My mom was concerned that Christianity would take too much time away from my studies. She is not really a believer, and she doesn't go to church, but in Russia it's different. Ordinary people didn't grow up going to church, so they don't have this custom. It's not really Christianity and you can't call it real faith, but people consider themselves Christian even though they don't practice the faith," he says.

At the university, Khramov studied mathematics, earning his master's degree and teaching for two years while carrying out the duties of a deacon **Continued on page 3**



## A musician's journey to the church: The story of Natalia Sheldiakova

by Natalia Sheludiakova  
translated by Vsevolod Lytkin

I was born in Tomsk. Now I am 35, and my mother is 77. I am her only child, I don't remember my father. When I was about 5, my mom sent me to study music. I finished music high school and then the music college in Tomsk, and finally — I graduated from the conservatory and from the doctorate school (in music composition) in Novosibirsk. After graduation I remained in Novosibirsk. I now work as organist in the Lutheran Theological Seminary and in the parish of St. Andrew. Many times I wanted to return to Tomsk, because there I have my sick mother. And also because there it is the only parish of our church where we have a real pipe organ which I like to play. In my parish of St. Andrew we have only a synthesizer. But it is enough work for me here, in Novosibirsk. Also I am a second-year student in the Lutheran Theological Seminary. I entered there because I am engaged in working on a church hymnal and writing music, and I need theological education to do this work.

My first thought about God was when I was about 6. My mother and I traveled to the south of our country during one summer. We walked near an Orthodox church. And an old woman began to talk to my mother in front of this church, and I stood near and listened. Then the old woman looked on me and asked if I was baptized or not. Mom answered, "No!" that it is too early. The old woman said that it is necessary to baptize me immediately. Mom answered, not now. And I felt that I want it. And I even spoke to my mother about it. But it was still many years **Continued on page 2**



## Musical talents put to use in Siberian church

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until my baptism.

My teenage years were difficult. Since that time, my relations with my mother still are weak. In our country at that time there was some kind of religious boom. It was very easy to find Christian broadcasting on a radio. I listened to such broadcastings. I remember how a preacher on the radio called listeners to repent, to read a prayer together



Natasha (r) with classmates at conservatory in Novosibirsk

with him and to let Jesus to come into their heart. Several times I invited Jesus to come into my heart. But I still hadn't any feelings of His presence and not any confidence.

At the same time I prayed to God during hard moments of my life. When I was 18, I started to feel a strong desire to be baptized. I took two cousins with me. We entered into the "queue" (to register) in an Orthodox church in Tomsk for baptism, and

paid money. On the assigned day (with us, there were also about 20 people) somebody, quickly, in ten minutes explained to us something about what would be done and performed the rite of baptism. It was a swelteringly hot day, infants cried. Everything was fussy and obscure.

We were then commanded to visit the next day to take the Holy Communion. We came... And during the next eight years I lived without the Eucharist and without the Church (as many other nominal Orthodox Christians in our country). Because I didn't know why and what it is for. I simply didn't understand what baptism is, although I wished to know. I knew very little about Christ.

When I was a first year student in the Conservatory, my teacher of the composition class was Roman Catholic. She played the organ in the Catholic cathedral. She was so kind to me. That year I had no place to practice my piano playing. In the dormitory where I lived there was no piano at all. In the Conservatory there were just a few rooms for studies, and they all were permanently occupied. So, my teacher allowed me to study to play the piano in

their church. And one time she said dreamy: "If God gives, one day Natasha becomes our organ player." And God gave – except, I became the organist in the Lutheran Church, not in Roman Catholic.

It was a very poor time in our country. Many people were absolutely hungry. And especially students. For me, these five years in the Conservatory were very difficult and hungry. I tried sometimes to find part-time work, but I didn't have enough strength for it, and when I worked, my studies suffered.

I remember one situation. My classmate visited me in the dormitory and asked, why I feed my cat with rice, why I didn't give her at least some bread. I answered her, that I had no bread. And it was true: for several days already my cat and I had lived eating only rice. Although my cat didn't like it. My classmate when she was gone left me a bun and some other food that was in her handbag.

With another classmate, we went to collect empty bottles. It was easy to find many empty bottles on the streets. Then we washed them and brought them to a store, and received coins and bought food.

During these student years my health became very weak. And several years later when I participated in the missionary trip in Buryatia I caught tuberculosis. I received treatment for two years. I was lucky, because the church took care about me and I had all the necessary

medicines. In Buryatia, about one-third of the population is sick with tuberculosis, and nobody takes care for them, and they simply die. Our church tries to do at least something: periodically we collect money to buy vitamins for Buryat children.

Many Conservatory students had part-time work in Orthodox

Church, singing in a choir. I also worked there for about a year. I simply worked during the divine services, but I did not participate in the sacraments, neither did anyone invite us. I could observe from inside what happened in that parish. Many things struck me negatively and so I left the job at the Orthodox Church.

Two of my classmates began to visit the Lutheran church where Vsevolod Lytkin was the priest. They began to invite me to go there

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Natasha on trip to Buryatia

## Pastor-turned-student to return as teacher

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within the Lutheran church. A deacon can preach and teach, but not serve holy communion. By 2001, the church in Siberia was growing faster than its ministers: there was only one ordained pastor and two deacons. "Our pastor had a lot of pressure at the time, because he had to travel a lot to give people communion. So we asked the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Estonia, as the SELC did not yet have their own bishop, to ordain a few deacons even without a seminary education," Khramov says.

Even after he was ordained, Khramov knew he wanted to go to seminary eventually. Three years after ordination as a pastor, he entered Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk in 2004.

Seminary surprised him. Khramov had been in the field

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**"WHEN I STARTED TO STUDY I REALIZED HOW IMPORTANT THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND WAS... I THOUGHT THE EDUCATION WOULD GIVE ME, A PERSON WITH CHURCH WORK EXPERIENCE, A SMALL ADDITION TO MY KNOWLEDGE, BUT NOW I KNOW YOU CANNOT BE A GOOD PASTOR IF YOU DON'T KNOW THEOLOGY WELL."**

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for many years, and he assumed classes would simply cap off what he had learned from experience. "When I started to study I realized how important the theological background was," he says. "I thought the education would give me, a person with church work experience, a small addition to my knowledge, but now I know you cannot be a good pastor if you don't know theology well."

His first professor, Dr. Horace Hummel, a professor emeritus of exegetical theology from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, showed Khramov how little he knew. "He is tough. He demands. He explained to all of us, including me who had a good university education, that we have almost no idea about theology, the Bible, anything." Khramov began to realize how much background knowledge he was missing while writing his sermons and doing church work before attending seminary.

Now, Khramov says, the church doesn't ordain pastors without the seminary education.

Khramov is a Novosibirsk native, married to Tanya, also a mathematics major whom he met at university. They have two children: Tonya, age 12, and Sasha, age 4. This year the family is in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where Khramov is cementing his seminary education with a Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) degree. Once the degree is



**Pavel and family on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, winter 2009**

complete, he will return to Novosibirsk and begin teaching at the seminary himself. "We have always wanted to have Russian professors at our seminary," he explains. "Right now we have one full-time professor, who is not Russian, and a few Russian professors who teach things like language and philosophy, but not theology."

Khramov was chosen partly because he can speak and study in English, which was vital for further education. He also believes his master's degree in mathematics has helped him succeed with further school. "Math helps organize my mind, and helps me think logically and consistently," he says.

The family is enjoying the mild winter in Fort Wayne, and Tanya especially takes pleasure in her vocation as a housewife after juggling work and children while putting her husband through seminary in Russia. When Khramov doesn't have his nose to theological books, he likes to read 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature go **Continued on page 5**



**Pr. Pavel Khramov as a student at Lutheran Theological Seminary - Novosibirsk, spring 2008**

# **An interview with Pastor Pavel Zayakin, of Khakassia Region**

By Natalia Sheludiakova.

Translated by: Alexei Shilin

**Pastor, please tell us how is life in Khakassia nowadays, especially in Tuim where you started your pastoral ministry many years ago [Pastor Zayakin serves six parishes in Khakassia]? Has anything changed due to of the global financial crisis?**

Honestly, the phrase 'financial crisis' is not understandable for us, as we have such a crisis every day. Just look, that formerly the local population was of 16,000 in Tuim. At present time, it seems to be between 6 and 7 thousand. The people try to leave because of high unemployment or extremely low level of life, much less than the living wage in the country. Here is a good example: having a job at the local metallurgical plant a person could make about \$80 per month! The owner of the plant says: "if you don't want to work for this money -- leave!" But where to go? There are no other plants in the area: only small agricultural enterprises, mostly poor and without vacancies. Of course, the local people have no money. They cannot leave. So, many people just drink vodka. They live without any hope. Some others hope that their children will enter college after school (we still have a few free-of-charge universities, in big cities), receive a job and take their aged parents to live with them.

**Does the Church do anything for these young people to help them?**

We watch the situation concerning these young people with a heavy heart. Of course, our Church is too poor and we cannot do much. But we certainly try: for instance, we help our young parishioners to move from remote locations to bigger towns where they can study in local colleges.

**How do you manage that?**

You know, the biggest issue is accommodation, of course. The rent payment is very expensive for young people from provincial areas. In Abakan, the main city in Khakassia, our young parishioners may live in our church building to save money to pay for their education and food. In this case, they can survive in a big city. This happens not only in Abakan. For example, right now two young men live in the apartment of our Bishop, Vsevolod Lytkin, in Novosibirsk. The Bishop and his family have shared their apartment with them for up to a year now. The Bishop's wife (a professor in the local university) helps them to improve their academic skills to a level where they have a chance to enter into the college next summer.

**And what about the Bishop? Is it hard for him?**

Please ask him this question. But as you know he has three children. I believe he is very kind to accept two persons from Tuim, and put up with the inconvenience, though now there is less privacy for his own family in the apartment, you know. To turn back to the conversation about Khakassia, I want to point that our Church tries to help people with both the Word and deeds. First of all we help the children. In our parishes we collect money and

buy vitamins, we cannot do much but we try to do what we can. But imagine that in Siberia there are hundreds of such small towns as Tuim. In each town people live in poverty and survive it. What I worry now is that the great poverty moves people to greater demoralization.

Lately life has been going more dangerous here. There are no police stations in the villages and small towns (local authorities have no money to keep them) and robbery and stealing are widely spread there. Recently the wheels from the car that belongs to our pastor in Tuim, Vitali Gavrilov, were stolen. We needed to collect money to get new ones. This was a significant situation because before, thieves usually didn't touch clergymen and their property. (Though we had an incident when thieves broke a window in our church and tried to steal Church items.)

Another terrible accident happened a week earlier. Pastor Gavrilov drove a car late at night from Shira to Tuim and suddenly saw a man lying across the road. First the Pastor thought that the man was drunk. Drunks in Siberia sometimes sleep on the roads and freeze to death, as it is very cold here in winter, down to 40 below in Khakassia. Pastor Gavrilov stopped his car to touch the man and he found that he was not drunk. But just before he arrived, a car had knocked him down and went away leaving him to die. The man's face was smashed and both legs were broken. And the wolves had already come to bite his legs. But then Pastor Gavrilov drove near. So the man was really lucky -- usually few people drive at night by that road.

Pastor Gavrilov picked the man up and took him to the hospital. The doctors called the police. Then two local police officers came over and discussed aloud, that it would be a good idea to accuse Pastor Gavrilov, that it was him who hit the man on the road. The policemen discussed it because they know that Pastor Gavrilov was in prison, many years ago. It was in the jail, when Vitali started to communicate with Pastor Zayakin. He then visited Vitali in prison, and Vitali believed in God and was later baptized and ordained. [Ed: See the [SLMS Newsletter](#), May 2005]. So, it was very easy to accuse him. But fortunately, they did not dare do this with a clergyman. And I heard that they reported the next day they found the real criminal (but of course, who knows? It is Khakassia!).

This winter, it was very cold in Khakassia. The central heating system was destroyed -- the pipes froze up. That occurred in the only public school in Tuim. The school was closed and the children cannot go to school until this summer. The worst thing is that the pipes froze up in our church building in Tuim, also. At present, it is extremely cold in the Church and we try to heat the building by means of a coal stove. But it is too small to heat all the building. People feel cold during the services. We are waiting for the coming spring.

So this is the life we have in Tuim. Here there is always an "economical crisis" even if there is no economical crisis in the world. But we have to serve our parishioners because without Church, people will not have any hope and any salvation.

**Thank you, Pastor Zayakin! ✕**

## Meeting the challenge in Russia

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on long walks, and play basketball.

Khramov's hopes for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia and for its pastors are high. He believes they have reached the point where seminary graduates have a thorough and grounded theological training, but in thinking back to his own experience as a pastor before going to seminary, he would like to see pastors who are academically strong prepared also to work with people.

"Russian people are somewhat indifferent to Christianity. They say they are Christian even if they don't attend church. I would like to see our pastors out pestering people," he says.

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"RUSSIAN PEOPLE ARE SOMEWHAT INDIFFERENT TO CHRISTIANITY. THEY SAY THEY ARE CHRISTIAN EVEN IF THEY DON'T ATTEND CHURCH. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE OUR PASTORS OUT PESTERING PEOPLE..."

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Second, and related, Khramov would like to see the church become more financially independent. "We are really grateful to the people who are supporting us. Without their support, we would just be surviving, but with them we can grow. Even so, our people can and should take more financial responsibility for the church. This is a big challenge in Russia, because the majority of people still have the communist mindset. They don't believe in volunteering or giving money." That, he says, is where the practical teachings and "pestering" of the pastors would come in to play.

Khramov plans to finish classes in Fort Wayne in May 2009, then write his thesis and hopefully be back in Novosibirsk to begin teaching for the 2010 spring semester. He's looking forward to getting started there. "When I taught math, I enjoyed interacting with the students, though it wasn't always easy. That's why I willingly accepted the idea of becoming a teacher at the seminary." ✕

**Gretchen Roberts is a freelance writer and the wife of an LCMS campus pastor in Knoxville, Tenn. Her father, Alan Ludwig, has served as the full-time professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk since 1998.**



**Pr. Khramov serving liturgy in 2004, prior to entrance into the seminary in Novosibirsk**

## Musical talents put to use

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to Church festivals. But every time I had a different reason why I could not go. Then, by my request, they brought me a Bible. I began to read it regularly and learn more about Christ. I began to understand a little at a time what baptism is, what the Eucharist is. These were things I was not taught in the Orthodox Church. But I still didn't visit the services.

At the same time in our dormitory many students became Charismatics. They also frequently invited me to their "services" and told me how cool their "services" were! But I did not visit them, either. At that time I thought that only the Orthodox Church was the Church. But for some reason I didn't find my place there.

Also one time I accidentally visited "the Unification church." They advertised themselves simply as a movement for purity among youth. And also they taught what they called a "secret way to understand" the Bible. When I learned who they were, I stopped visiting them, but for a long time they still disturbed me.

Then I visited the summer Lutheran theological seminars. There I finally understood why we need the sacraments. I started very strongly to wish to receive them. Also the GOOD NEWS magazine issue about the Eucharist helped me a lot. And after this time I had no objections against the teaching of the Lutheran Church.

It was at this time when a lady who was an organist of the parish of St. Andrew was to give birth to a child. It also happened, that I received Confirmation at this time and became a church organist very soon afterward. And I'm still the church organist.

I remember one time my mother came to visit me for a weekend, and we came to church together. It was Easter. That time our parish rented a room for services in the basement of an apartment building. I was really in a very good mood. Because of the Church festival, and because of my life in general. But immediately after the service, my mother, being in tears, went into hysterics crying that "my child had fallen into a cult!" She didn't see us as the Church. Even though she was not a real believer, she was an atheist at the time. But maybe it was prejudice that she thought there is only one Church in our country, the Orthodox Church!

Now she is more tolerant to my choice. She is only unhappy because of the fact that I give all my time to the Church. She says that it is wrong to be a "fanatic," and that I must live as all people around me live.

Several years ago she was baptized in the Orthodox Church because she was not sure if she was baptized in her childhood or not. But she doesn't visit the services regularly. She thinks that it is enough simply to sit at home and to read the Bible. I struggle with it, but she answers that she is not so "fanatic" as I am.

Last winter for the first time I visited America. Although it was for me like a dream. Even when I returned back home, I couldn't believe that my travel was real. Maybe simply because there were too many strong impressions. I was impressed by many things. **Continued on page 6**

## Natasha

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My first impression of America was the very friendly attitude to me (and to our Siberian Church) from Americans. I visited several parishes with which we have friendly relations. I saw faces of people who are helping us, even though they are not obliged to do it, and they have many of their own needs. And I felt a big shame for us that we can't support ourselves. But unfortunately, this is our reality. We are still a young and poor Church, and we have yet to study and learn many things.

The second impression was the freedom people in America have. I saw it in the freedom in the people's behavior. When a country respects its citizens, which is shown in many levels in American society, it makes a people free. This also leads people to have freedom in making decisions.

Often in my country I am met with the absence of such freedom. I am met with rudeness and greediness of many of our citizens who are "locked in their own little world" and don't know anything better... and don't want to know anything better."

My third impression of America was how they care for children. I visited several schools. I was impressed by how many possibilities your children have to study and to improve themselves. For example, in one of the small towns I heard they had several school jazz bands! And in our country even if you go to a bigger town, you don't find any such thing!

Also I saw what a big emphasis you give to sporting activities for your children. In opposite, in our country there is no more free sporting activities for children. The government doesn't support it, and for many families,



**Natasha at summer seminar with Prof. Kurt Marquart**

sporting is too expensive.

Also I was impressed that the majority of Americans live in their own houses. And we live in large apartment buildings consisting of many flats. For example, I have a little flat and often feel I lack sufficient living space. But you know, I am a happy person. I have my own apartment. Many people in Siberia don't have a flat. During the last ten years the price for flats in our country increased by about 6 times. But salaries increased only by 1.5 times. For many young families it is totally unreal to buy a flat, or even to take a loan.

And at the end, I remember how one American man asked me to describe the "Russian soul," but I can't. We, Russians, have different "souls." When you talk with a man or when you read what he writes you begin to understand him a little bit. I think that Americans have different "souls," too. Although I met only good "souls" in America. But I am talking about how we respect and treat each other.

Theologically speaking, I think in reality that both human souls – American and Russian – are similar. And the problems that we Christians have are the same: the problem of the co-existence of the old and new Adam.

And both Russians and Americans need Christ because without Him our life has no sense. And both Russians and Americans need Church, where we can meet this God in the Word and Sacraments.

God saves us, God gives us power to live, God shares His love with us. This love compels us, encourages us to care for one another.

When we see the manifestation of such love, it touches deep inside the hurt which we all experience living in this world. It is such love which I have found in the Church. And after receiving such love, we then praise our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with holy songs.

Please pray for us! ✂



**Natasha at Grand Canyon**

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. Articles and photographs from this newsletter may be reprinted for publicity purposes. Please give credit to the author and [THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY \(SLMS\)](#). All donations may be sent to the [SLMS](#) c/o Mrs. Elizabeth Meyer, Treasurer/Secretary, 1460 University Ave., San Jose, CA 95126. For more information on how you can become involved in the work of the [SLMS](#), visit our website at [www.TSLMS.org](http://www.TSLMS.org)