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How did I become a Christian?

Part 2

by Leonid Tsibizov

translated by Olga Suhinina

Editor's note: This is the second part of a two part story. In part two he tells how he becomes a Christian. In this first part Leonid writes about his struggle against Christianity. Part one appeared in the December 2010 edition of the **SLMS** newsletter.

I remember how I went hitch-hiking for the first time. It was an amazing revelation. I stood on route M51, lifted my hand, and was overcome with a thrilling feeling of freedom: a huge world was before me for the first time in my life, there was a road in it, and also sky and wind.... I traveled across Siberia and met many people; some just rushed past, leaving no trace in my memory, but I recognized myself in others; and there was nobody closer in the world than a vagabond like yourself, whom you met towards evening on an empty and cold highway. Now I recall those days with amazement. On whom did we rely as we stood on a highway? Why did we trust one another, even though we had met a few minutes before? When I came to a town, it was always easy to find shelter for the night. Hitch-hikers exchange their addresses or the addresses of "hangouts," where one can "stick around" or at least spend the night. When you come to such a "hangout," they do not ask you why you came here or how you learned the address; they receive you as one of their own, a good old friend. Why such trust? Why is a hitch-hiker, going out to a highway, not anxious for what he will eat, where he will sleep, and how he will move? I learned the answer to such questions a lot later, when, already as a Christian, I met an old buddy of mine. **continued on page 2**



Interview with Pastor Igor Kizyaev

Interview and translation by Pavel Khramov.

Q: What prisons do you visit now?

A: Now I visit two prisons. One in a village Antipicha, it might be called a suburb of Chita. Another one is in a village Olovyannaya, It is more than 150 miles away.

Q: I guess you do not visit the second one every week, do you?

A: You're right. I go there every time when I visit our congregations in Chita region — in small towns Edinenie and Yasnoe. Now it happens once in six weeks. I used to visit prison in Antipicha once a month, but now there is an opportunity to be there every week. Prisoners ask me to come more often, as

they'd like to study something besides Catechism. They want to know more about Bible, Church history, theology. Unfortunately, I'm too busy for such schedule. So, I try to come to people there every other week.

Q: In the SLMS Newsletter of September, 2008 you mentioned only the prison in Olovyannaya. When have you started to visit prison in Antipicha?

A: Two years ago. Ivan Konovalov was moved there from Olovyannaya.

Q: How big are the groups in these prisons?

A: In Olovyannaya there are seven communicants, though when I visit them, not everybody comes. Somebody might be working or something else. They are not free even within the prison. Besides 5-7 members of our congregation, about five more interested people regularly come to our studies. In Antipicha **continued on page 4**

Only God can deliver

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He and I talked of God, of faith, then just of life, and he said he was upset that he could not be with his girlfriend, who had flown home to Japan, while he was stuck in Novosibirsk, with no money, with no job, and could not fly to her. I told him then, "What seems to be the problem? Go hitch-hiking to Vladivostok, and then you will see. It is a stone's throw to Japan from there." He considered it and said, "You know, you are right. I am a fool to be upset that I cannot deal with the situation, that it is beyond my powers to change even a small part of the world around me. But actually everything is really simple: one just needs to commit himself to the Lord and be anxious for nothing. After all, when you go out to a highway, you rely on God completely, knowing that it is beyond your powers to walk a thousand miles in three days or to keep yourself from freezing and starving. Your self-assurance drops to zero, and you have no one else on whom to rely, besides the Most High." I thought then, "One could charge the likes of us with hedonism. Indeed, we do not earn a living, as the majority of people do—an odd job at the most, but we usually strum on the guitar in a crowded street and gather a capful of small coins, and that from kind people, but it is enough for a meal. Truck drivers carry us for free, and we only return kind words to them and keep them from falling asleep behind the steering wheel. But is not a farmer who ploughs a field by the sweat of his brow the same kind of hedonist? Does he himself make the wheat

grow? Can he shield his crops from hail or drought?" I probably did not understand what I was talking about. Of course, I am not a farmer and have no right to judge.

And yet I was not a vagabond in the full sense of the word. In winter, I lived at home, with my parents, or in a "hangout," where a multitude of friends gathered. I even matriculated at the university and was granted a bed in a dormitory. My roommate was a Baptist, and his fellow brothers came to our room sometimes, watched movies, and read and discussed the Bible together. I did not mind, but I myself usually left the room. I did not like those studies; they seemed boring to me. Sometimes, I asked my roommate to tell me something about Christianity. He would tell me in general terms, and then he would point me to my unrighteous way of life and encourage me to reform. How foolish was this? After all, I was 17; I partied at various informal parties with all my might, smoked pot, met bunches of interesting people, and took a great interest in everything that fell into my hands. A whole crowd of people like me would gather, and we would walk in the wood, drink beer and port, "jam" (this is when all people together improvise using all sorts of musical instruments, having felt a common mood—"the wave"), and discuss life in all its manifestations. And in each head there were all kinds of ideas of how this wonderful diverse world was arranged; we understood and accepted one

another; we were all "on the same page." Many of us used perception-changing drugs. Nearly all engaged in some amateur arts; people gathered for "jam-sessions" all the time, where they recited poems, sang and played their own songs, always in an informal atmosphere, and each could feel relaxed, each knew that he would be received "just as he was...." Indeed, it was a wonderful, rich life. How could I give all this up in order to assume a lenten face and speak of some kind of righteousness? I was a child, as we all were children, in terms of my attitude to life—we were not engrossed in "adult" problems, we did not "give a fig" about politics, society, and career; we lived for the present moment, not anxious that everything might change tomorrow. "Why?" I answered my parents' puzzled questions, how could I live so, taking care of nothing, as though I lived my last day? "We cannot guarantee in any case that our calculations will prove true; on the contrary, it is foolish to suppose that by taking action in advance, we shall secure life for ourselves even for another minute." And they told me, "With such views on life, you will come to a bad end! Look, life is harsh; it will dispel your illusions...."

One night, I was walking down a street. And suddenly, I felt very scared, I felt very bad and sad, I suddenly was afraid of death for some reason. It was a very strong feeling; I felt little and weak. At the time, I was

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not far away from an Orthodox church, and my legs carried me there by themselves. The church was locked by night, but there was an icon on one of the walls. I remember I knelt for a few hours before the icon and asked forgiveness of God. I did not know who he, that God, was, but I fully realized that he alone could deliver me from this huge problem which I suddenly felt. When I returned home, I thought, "I probably ought to go to that church now and tell somebody what I felt that night; they would be bound to understand me...." But in the morning, I already took the incident for an unusual, amusing psychedelic experience, and the church, with its little old ladies, bells, and bearded ministers, was very far from that which I felt that night. On the whole, my notion of God in no way fit into that external form I watched with my own eyes, while mixing with believers and having visited services in the Orthodox church a couple of times. What was the point of all those prohibitions on food? Why must a believer come to church on Sunday and listen to the priest who speaks some trite phrases from the pulpit? It is totally beyond comprehension, why they call intimate relations between young guys and girls, the sin of fornication? It is clear that killing and stealing is bad, but whom does fornication hurt? No, I was never going to commit my life into the hands of an organization such as the church. If only the church were **continued on page 3**

I began to attend

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normal, it would be another story. And “normal” meant that one could come there and receive complete spiritual illumination at once, not bothering at the same time about all kinds of fine points, what one can do and what one cannot do.

Nevertheless, humans, certainly, cannot live without faith. I am not talking about the Christian faith but about some faith in general. I have never seen an unbeliever. All my friends believed, each in something of his own. Some believed in black magic; some, in astrology; hippie ideals existed for some. A girl I knew had something like a cult connected with mice. And the mice were artificial, real, and existing in imagination. All three types deserved respect, but in different ways. Some discoursed on eastern teachings, but they seemed to me overly complicated. There were also fellows who perceived the world with the help of some mathematical structures, at least, this was how they described it. There were multidimensional cubes, fractals, and many other things I did not understand. There was a very common opinion that even though the whole world was not a figment of our imagination, it changed a lot depending on the state of our consciousness. This was what an attempt to explicate inexplicable coincidences and phenomena, perceived in the reality around us, looked like. Some reckoned that a benevolent force was taking care of us; this thought occurred especially often in groups using marijuana. In narrow circles, neopaganism, both Slavic and Scandinavian, gathered strength; paganism was for us something new and unusual; after all, the thought that there was a multitude of gods with their history, with legends and prophecies, was attractive and gave food to imagination. Almost all at the same time acknowledged the existence of spirits and life after death, and also the outer world’s inevitable response to a man’s actions, sometimes called “karma.” And so I, being in the midst of it all, was not alien to my company, except, maybe, I tried to avoid extremes, like meditation, sacrifices, or incantations....

But the time came when my world began to crumble. Oh no, this was not a time of severe shocks; nothing dangerous or sad happened to me, neither fears nor sad discoveries visited me—on the contrary, life was entering some quiet course. I asked myself sometimes, “What next? Did I expect this from life?” After all, the future is always filled with light; it sparkles ahead; my eternal, my happy future awaits me. The whole life cannot possibly be such—comfortable and meaningless. All in all, in addition to my feelings, a question arose: what is “good” and what is “bad?” After all, if “good”

and “bad” depend on the viewpoint of an observer only, it becomes clear that anything is allowed and nothing makes sense at the same time. From that perspective, it was a very disagreeable realization that all my experiences, dreams, and feelings were my own creation and had no bearing, but then, nothing had....

One time, I was in the garage fixing a motorcycle, drinking beer, and thinking of life. And my thoughts began to turn around Christianity. I knew that besides the Orthodox church, there was a Lutheran church in town. I once learned this from a girl I knew, and I was greatly amazed that she attended that church. I decided that it was probably a sect (anything then that had a dome and bells was a church for me, and other things were sects).

Because I took a bit of a fancy to that girl, this discovery upset me greatly, and I thought, “I declare, a religious fanatic!” Nevertheless, I did come to church once, since I took her invitation to a service to be her personal interest in mixing with me. I remember how I was at a service for the first time. I was amazed that the whole divine service was in the Russian language, but for all that everything that took place seemed utter foolishness. A few months went by, and I, while sitting in the very same garage, remembered that Lutheran church, for some reason. I felt like going to a divine service once again. By that time, I had sometimes attended services in the Orthodox church, and I suddenly wanted to understand what actually happened at divine church services and what these strange people in long garments talked about; besides it seemed to me that I would thus come to understand, why Christianity could attract that girl so—after all, she was in no way like the religious fanatics I had met before. She made the impression of a very calm but at the same time sensual person; it somehow always felt joyous and delightful to be near her; she was not at all like those who called themselves believers and, their eyes wild, cried, “Repent! Believe!”

I began to attend the Lutheran church. I came to all Sunday services, and sometimes also during the week; I tried to do the same as did people around me there; I tried to sing along; I spoke the words of the liturgy; I listened to sermons. All of this seemed a kind of a peculiar ceremony, but I felt no inspiration. Every time, I went to the church, thinking, “Perhaps today I shall know what it is all about,” and every time, I left feeling disappointed—the party was over but no miracle had happened; no illumination had visited me, and Christ had not become for me anything but a symbol and memory of a good man who taught people to be nice and to love one another.

And so it was every time, except for one time, when it changed. At that time, as I was leaving the church, I noticed something happened that

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Prison ministry in Siberia

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we have a group of four confirmed men. When Ivan was still in Olovyannaya, I blessed him to be a “reader” (we also call such helpers in the church “sub-deacons”). After his moving to Antipicha he talked a lot to many people there, he invited them to our services. There is an interest in biblical, sound, clear theology among inmates. The eastern orthodox priests, who serve there, they are good people. But in their preaching often you may hear only one “explanation”: “You are Russian, so you should be an (eastern) orthodox believer, that’s all you need to know.”

Q: How does the usual visit to the prison go?

A: Till recently the prison administration had a very formal attitude: “The law requires, that prisoners should have a possibility to practice their cult, so we’ll grant it.” It meant that I had time to conduct a service and that’s it. Now they are little bit more open, so, besides the service, I have time for Bible class, Catechism instruction, private confession. I stay in the prison for 4-5 hours.

Q: Does prison administration help you in any way?

A: I wouldn’t say so. They do not hinder, thanks for nothing. In Olovyannaya, where I have come for eight years already, I have good relationships with the support staff, we talk a bit when I come. But administration does not ALWAYS trust a pastor or priest. It does not matter — whether he is Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran or Pentecostal. They are always cautious about any disturbance in the minds of inmates, and they suppose that religion may provoke it. In addition, they firmly believe that everybody, who is in prison for the second time (and may be even for the first!) will never become “normal”, he will always be a criminal,

Administration is a little bit more friendly to me, as I’m a veteran of Afganistan war, I’ve got rewards, my wife works in procuracy. But with all this I do not have any privileges which would make my ministry more effective. You may say that they allow me to come, but they do not invite me.

Q: Do you have a place in the prison building to conduct liturgy, Bible classes and so on?

A: Often in prisons there are Pentecostal “prayer rooms”. They appeared in 1990s, when the whole bunch of all kinds of “evangelists” came to Russia. That time administrations in the prisons have no idea what it is, and they allowed them to use one or another room for “religious needs.” Still most of the people in Russia are illiterate in the area of Christianity, of religion in general. Therefore I often can’t explain, why I cannot conduct liturgy together with Pentecostals. I served in the canteen, even in the corridor of educational building, because all the class rooms were closed. But I keep saying to my parishioners: “Imagine that Christ came and stood in some nasty place. Will people come there?” They say to me:

“Surely.” Then I say: “When I come to you, I preach the Gospel, forgive your sins, give you Body and Blood of Christ in canteen or in corridor, you should see it as a blessing and opportunity, not as indignity.”

Q: If there is an Orthodox chapel in the prison, can you serve there?

A: Though administration is in charge of all rooms, normally they would follow recommendation of Orthodox priest. And as a rule, they would not allow “heretics” to use “their” place. I had a very good relationship with one priest and he let us use their room. But now he is removed from this ministry, and we are coming together in Pentecostal “prayer room”.

Q: What happens to your confirmed members, when they have served their time of imprisonment?

A: First, I need to give you a “big picture.” You know, I’m serving in the high security prison. It means that people have been convicted for murder, rape, armed robbery and so on. Their terms are very long, many of them spent more than half of their life in prisons. For these people it is very difficult to accommodate to normal life. They are aliens outside the prison. Often they have problems with registration at the place of residence and with getting a job. *(Translator’s comment: In Russia you need to have*

some real estate or you need to find an owner who would be willing to register you at his place. This registration is supposed to be voluntary, but if you do not do this, you will be fined – or, much worse, you will have many limitations on medical care, on getting a job and so on.)

Moreover, they just forgot how this society “works.” They do not know “rules” of this place. They feel much more at home in the prison, so, for some of them it is much easier to commit a new crime in order to come

back to the place, where they know how to live.

There are four people from those whom I baptized or confirmed, that are now in prison again. They could not find their place here. There are another four, who are doing OK. One lives in Novosibirsk. He is a member of the ELC of Ingria and also visits prisons in Novosibirsk region. Two more live in small towns in Chita region (now it is officially called Transbaikal region). Due to the distance (about 250 miles from Chita), they do not come regularly to the church. The fourth one is Alexey Kondratiev. He lives here, in Chita. He has married, has a child. Together with his wife they try to start their own small business. He comes to services regularly. I wanted him to study in Novosibirsk seminary, but it didn’t work. Anyway, he’s definitely found his place here, and I’m sure he’ll not go back to prison.

Q: In September, 2008 SLMS Newsletter, Ivan Konovalov mentioned that he will finish his term this year.

A: Well, this year he will have a chance to finish. His appeal will be considered in the court, and he might be released on parole. If the decision is negative, Ivan will spend two more years in the prison. **continued on page 5**



The way to the font

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day, inside, when I sat in the pew and listened to the sermon. Something happened, and from then on, it would never be the same as it was before. I walked fast, smiling to anybody and everybody; I felt I knew something very important, most important in the life of every human, and wanted to share this with everyone. I knew for certain that I would never go astray from then on, that there was a light that shone for me and would never go out. I asked myself what it was. Was all of this connected with the church, God, and Christianity? This was so simple and close to one's heart, that there was nothing closer; was it that which all Christian believers feel? If so, they are neither fools nor fanatics at all; then they are the richest and happiest people in the world, and at the same time they are the weakest and poorest people, for the world around is cruel and dirty, and it is impossible to watch it without pain, and nothing can be done to help it. I spent two days walking in the woods and thinking what to do. I could in no way explain what was happening, apart from the Christian faith. This was like a geometry puzzle which suddenly fell into place in an instant, and that which it depicted, pointed of necessity to Christ. On the third day, I realized that from then on I had no other way, besides the way to church, and this way, of all ways, would deliver me from darkness, from fear, from the non-being of death; that everything that had happened to me was no "illumination," "enlightenment," or another act of my consciousness, but it was the highest mercy, a gift of God, which could not be analyzed into parts, but was "the way, the truth, and the life," and one did not decide for it or against it but had to kneel in gratitude for this gift.

On that day, I went to the Lutheran church and asked for a minister there. The senior minister of the parish came out to me. In a short conversation, I recounted all that had happened; we talked for a while, after which he gave me a copy of the Small Catechism and a book of doctrine; besides, I had a Bible at home, so I went home in anticipation and began to read. Many formulations were unfamiliar to me, but I had a lingering feeling that I already knew it all anyway, that I absolutely agreed in advance with every word of Holy Scripture, and every word is like a breath of fresh air. I knew for certain that all believers believe in the Triune God, and that this is probably the only thing in which these people are at no fundamental odds with one another. I was not surprised when I learned that the Lutheran confession is contained in the Book of Concord—of course, what else does one call the book to whose every word every Christian can personally subscribe? On the day when I was walking to the church to talk to the minister, I already knew that I would be baptized, that I desired nothing better on earth than to be in church with God, that there is no other life besides the life with and in Christ, and that only a madman would reject eternity in God's grace—this treasure that is given us, all Christians, daily by his mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us. ✕

Prison

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Q: Will you petition for his sake?

A: No. I have two reasons for this. First, I have seen enough people who, while being in prison were saying that they changed, they are going to marry, to find a job and live normal life. But soon after their release they come back to prison. So, I do not think that I'm a person to guarantee anything. My second reason is that I do not want prisoners to see our church as a chance to leave prison earlier.

Q: Do you face such attitude often?

A: Yes. I would say always. When I come to the prison from outside, inmates look at me as a "bridge" to "freedom". From their point of view, I'm a person who can do something for them there, where they cannot be. I think it's OK, but I always try to discern, whether it is a real need. Often I'm asked to bring something — medicine, food, cloth, paper and envelopes and so on. (*Translator's comment: It was the usual way of "prison ministry" of many foreign missionaries. And now prisoners often consider it as the only thing Christian ministers are good for.*) Often I answer: "Our congregation has supported you already, when they donated money for gas, phone bills and meal for me. They make possible my visit to you. I preach you the Gospel and it is much more important than any financial help." I try to say it from the very beginning, so that prisoners would not think that I'm going to pay for their coming to liturgy or Bible classes.

Again, I do not think that it is something terrible, that they ask me for help. Some of them really need it, and all of them, after years in the prison, have this mentality: "You cannot miss a chance to get something."

Q: What is the difference between teaching Catechism to prisoners and to people, who are not in the prison?

A: I do not see big difference. People everywhere do not like to be convicted of their sins. People everywhere want to justify themselves. From one hand, prisoners have their sin revealed to everybody, but sometimes it is difficult to show them that their punishment is right not only according to human law, but also according to God's law. When a man comes to me for the first time and says that he wants to study Catechism, to become Lutheran, I ask him to write me a letter with the story of his crime. And from this letter often I may see, what kind of person came to me. Whether he recognizes his sin or he tries to explain it out. I met some murderers saying: "God moved me to kill people in order to put me in the prison, so that here I could meet Him." Such a sophistry!

Q: What is the most difficult for you in prison ministry?

A: Once a man came to liturgy. I was told that he is a child molester, who raped a few children. He was convicted for 38 years. When he came, I was paralyzed. I do not know how to talk to such a man. I'm not Christ, I'm an average human, I'm a father with two daughters, I have a grand-son. I understand that all are sinners, that we should be merciful to repentant people. But when this man started to explain that the conviction was wrong, I just stopped listening to him. It was almost physical, I didn't hear him. It was the most difficult. I know that I should listen to him, I should teach him, and finally, if he repents, to confirm and commune him. But my body resists. Such conflicts happen in my ministry. I think this is most difficult.

Q: Thank you, Pastor Kizyaev!

A: You are welcome! ✕

Winter visitation in Siberia

Peace to you dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently, our Bishop, Vsevolod Lytkin, and Probst, Pavel Zayakin, visited eastern parishes of our Church. It is always a big challenge to travel during winter. It is not easy to travel by car, because the roads are under snow, and nobody cleans them up; and the snow flies away only because the cars are moving constantly back and forth. But if there are not too many cars (say, at night time), then because of the snow the roads become so narrow, that to pass each other for two opposing vehicles is no longer possible, and we have to wait until the approaching traffic ends.

Another problem is the ice. Legends are composed about icy Siberian roads. Yes, this is a special part of our life. Siberian drivers like to drive on the ice. Sometimes, on an empty road, the people have fun driving a car – first speeding up the vehicle, and then pressing the brake. The car just slides forward on ice as a sled. “It is amazing feeling,” Bishop Vsevolod says about it. And then he continues: “In fact, it can be very dangerous to travel in winter. In Chita a terrible accident occurred several days before our arrival: our parishioners' friends went from their village to Chita. While on the road their car stalled. The husband left his wife and two children in the car while he went to find help, but he was attacked and killed by wolves. And his wife and children froze to death; they were accidentally found the next day.

“Siberian winter is a terrible thing when you are alone on an empty road. Therefore, of course, it is always necessary to keep your car in good condition, but we know, that no one is safe from possible accidents. This time most of the way we travelled by train [see:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Siberia_Railway]. The trains are usually warm, even hot too much: there is a tradition to heat them up during winters as much as possible, and the temperature in the railroad carriages sometimes moves up to 90 degrees Fahrenheit (30 Celsius). And it is impossible to beg the conductor to throw less coal into the heating stove.

“We arrived in Angarsk, when the temperature outside was about 40 F below zero. Pastor Andrei Ivolga's (he is the resident clergyman there) car froze up because of the low temperature, and we had to walk a lot. All my life I

lived in Siberia, but during cold winters I feel uncomfortable. Also, due to the cold temperature just a few people came to the church service – it was so sad.

“The same thing happened in Buryatia, where we went after Angarsk. During such cold temperatures people prefer to stay at home, especially since many of them have no job, and there is no particular reason to go out of their houses. We conducted the Divine services in Ulan-Ude, and then in Petropavlovka. And our final destination was the city of Chita.

“On our way back I left Pastor Zayakin in Krasnoyarsk and moved on to Novosibirsk, while he traveled to Abakan. Things happened to him on his way to Abakan. The engine of the bus that he went by, was frozen up somewhere far from an inhabited locality and the passengers were nearly frozen to death. They had to go on by foot until they found a small roadside cafe where they could be warmed until the next bus came over. There were no vacant seats in that bus, so they had to travel for several hours standing all the way – though in warmth. They arrived in Abakan very late at night. Yes, this is Siberia!”

In Chita, the Bishop gave lectures on liturgy in our Bible School, for the parishioners and visitors. The Lutheran Church has always carefully preserved the ancient liturgical tradition. Such practice is also attracting many people. Liturgy for us is the center of our life. That is why we should instruct our parishioners about the basics of liturgy, explaining to them the meaning of the liturgy as a whole, as well as its parts and rites. It is necessary to teach the parishioners, that the liturgy is not just a wrapper for the Word of God, but God's Word itself, the word that God speaks to us, and then He gives himself to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

“Such lectures are specially topical in Chita, where our parish is constantly replenished by new converts. People come from both sides: from disbelief and from different modern sects. It is very important to tell them about the main thing by which the Church lives -- about the Divine Liturgy,” Bishop Lytkin says.

Please pray for the spreading of clear Christian preaching in Siberia, and for safe travels of the Siberian clergymen. ✕

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the SELC email newsletter “Faith & Hope #202.” This version has been edited.

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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