



Elena—Church gives strength

Interview and translation by Pavel Khramov

Editor's note: These interviews are taken from Elena, young female parishioner at the Lutheran Church of Transfiguration of the Lord, the SELC congregation in Touim, Khakassia, and from Pastor Pavel Zayakin, senior pastor of the congregation.

Q: Elena, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Elena: My name is Elena, I'm 24. Now I live in the town of Shira. I was born in the small village, Kirovo, and lived there until I entered a college in Shira. My parents worked in the collective farm. My dad was a worker, my mom worked in the kindergarten. I have two brothers, two and four years younger than me.

Q: The 1990s were really difficult years in Russia. How did your family live then?

Elena: In the beginning of the 1990s, the collective farm started to fall apart. There was no work, the whole situation was very depressive, nobody saw any perspective. My parents started to drink much more than before it. By 1994, the only people who had a job in Kirovo were teachers, physician assistant, and sellers in the shops. Our family lived from what we can grow with our hands. We had cows, sheep, and chickens. It meant hard work.

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Christians '... must be trained and educated in the Scriptures'

by Pavel Khramov

Luther says in his "German Mass" about immature and young Christians, that they "...must be trained and educated in the Scripture and God's Word daily so that they may become familiar with the Bible, grounded, well versed, and skilled in it, ready to defend their faith and in due time to teach others and to increase the kingdom of Christ." In some sense we always remain immature Christians, though not so young. That's why we have summer theological seminars in Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is

rather long tradition in SELC. Seminars started in 1995, so for 17 years in the row we gather our parishioners and not-yet-Christians for classes and fellowship.

For many people summer seminars continued with catechism classes and confirmation afterward. For many people summer seminars continued with catechism classes and confirmation afterwards. For many parishioners it was the exposition to the serious theology, as we were blessed by the coming of such prominent teachers as Dr.

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Medieval music at St. Andrew's serves as outreach



A violinist from *Insula Magica* performs at St. Andrew's Church, Novosibirsk. The concerts serve as an opportunity to present the Gospel to those attending.

For three years St. Andrew's Church nave has served as an "official concert hall" for an ensemble named *Insula Magica* (Magical Island in Latin). This collective is based in Novosibirsk State Philharmonic Society. The peculiarity of this ensemble is performance of authentic medieval and baroque music. They search in archives for old publications or even manuscripts of music of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. They find craftsmen who make replicas of old instruments such as the lute. Thus even fairly well-known melodies start to sound new and thrilling.

How did all this start? In 2004 we were planning some events around Reformation Day. Natalia Sheludyakova, our organist, suggested we invite an interesting "ensemble of early music," as they call themselves. Natalia studied together in the Novosibirsk conservatory with one of the women from the group. She said they can play Bach, which would be proper to

do at Reformation Day.

We had some reservations as most of people in Russia have very little idea what is church, what is proper in the church, and what is not. But we decided it will not be an absolute disaster, so "let us try." Members of *Insula Magica* turned out to be nice and respectful. They asked if they can play from the altar area, as it one step higher. When I said, "No, it is the place where the Word is being preached and the Sacrament is being given," the musicians understood it. I mention it because many people in Russia think they know better, how church should "work," what she should teach, what you can do in the church and so on.

Thus, the first concert went well and we wanted to invite the ensemble again around Christmas. They brought "Christmas drama on the prophet Daniel." This drama was composed in the 13th or 14th century to perform at Christmas, as the book of Daniel mentions the
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Summer seminars grow



Pastor Andrey Ivolga spoke on the Table of Duties from Luther's Small Catechism at the Khakassia summer session this year.

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Arthur Just, Dr. William Weinrich, and many other competent teachers and devoted pastors.

There were times when we could gather people from different congregations of our church. It was very helpful, as our parishioners could see with their eyes the unity of the church. We saw each other face to face, we got to know people from different cities and towns of Siberia, we became friends. As our church grew bigger it became too expensive and thus impossible to gather everybody in one place.

So, we split the seminar into the regional parts and started to hold it in different cities, where people could come easily. Also we have less pastors and professors coming from abroad. From one hand, it gives us less input from outside of our church, outside of Siberia. On the other hand, it compels our pastors to go beyond routine the catechism and Bible classes and to study more to prepare lectures and talks for the seminars.

The first day of the seminar in Novosibirsk fell on the day of Saint Margaret of Antioch. Opening classes Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin said, "... the life of Saint Margaret is becoming more and more relevant example for us, Christians of the 21st century, as the world is moving further away from Christianity and slipping deeper into paganism.

"The world forces Christians to acknowledge the truthfulness of other religions; the world is tolerant to everything but to Christianity. In Europe, the conservative clergymen are imprisoned for preaching against abortions, fined for their refusal to marry homosexuals, and dismissed if they do not accept ordination of women.

"In our country, the criticism of demonic false-religions such as Islam may result in criminal prosecution for 'fomentation for national, racial or religious hatred' (on the contrary, Muslims are allowed to abuse Christianity freely).

"But only the Christian faith is salvific. And we should stay in this faith, and to learn from the early Christians how to be faithful to Christ. "We should always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that we have (1Pet. 3: 15). That is why we need to learn about this faith. That is why it is so important to bring our children to church and to come here by ourselves.

"That is why it is necessary to study the Bible and to learn the catechism. That is why every year for last 17 years our Church organizes summer theological seminars, and invites people to come and to listen. So come and listen, and learn. Learn from the ancient saints, learn from the Church."

This year the summer seminars started in Novokuznetsk. Indeed it was the second seminar in the St. James parish in a couple months. Rector of Lutheran Theological Seminary (Novosibirsk), Pastor Alexey Streltsov, and professor of this seminary, Pastor Alan Ludwig, visited this congregation in May and delivered a few lectures.

Pastor Dmitry Dotsenko who serves in St. James parish says, "I was a little bit cautious whether people will be willing to attend more classes. But everybody was so positive about usual summer seminars that we decided to organize it."

In July Pastor Streltsov gave talks about "Missionary journeys of Saint Paul." The same lecture he delivered later in Novosibirsk, Ekaterinburg and Beloretsk. He explains, "I've chosen topic 'Missionary journeys of St Paul' for the same reason I choose any topics for such occasions as the summer seminars: it is of interest to me, and so I think that it might as well be interesting for somebody else. I wanted to show people at the seminars that they can read New Testament almost like novel, like a fiction story - only that it is not a fiction, it is reality. Since the Christian church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, we should do our best to understand how apostles lived, how they served their Lord Jesus in what they said and did.

"The matter of fact is that apostolic Church is in many aspects just like our Christian community. Those early Christians attended liturgy, committed themselves to the apostolic doctrine, lived by their Baptism, shared true Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper... just like we do it in the Church today. And so I think that the subject of journeys of St Paul opens doors to many aspects of reality of Church life: necessity of purity of doctrine, Christian life as sacrifice, charity, martyrdom, to name just a few. Overall, it was a very exciting topic to teach, and I am glad that I had some maps and pictures to

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Gospel overcomes despair in rural Siberia

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Q: How did you feel about such a work?

Elena: Of course it was very hard. I guess I started to help at haying when I was 10. Sometimes I didn't want to go there, I felt like going with other kids to the lake. And yet, I recall now that work with some sort of satisfaction and pleasure. I was used to hard work. In our family kids were starting to help in the house early. I remember that when I was six, I was already helping my parents.

Q: Pastor Zayakin, what was your impression from Kirovo?

Zayakin: The life in Touim was not (and is not!) easy. But comparing to Kirovo, Touim could be considered doing OK. When we came to Kirovo, we saw houses with broken windows, closed with card boxes. Children were wearing rubber boots on bare feet at the end of November, when the snow is already covers the ground. Drunk people were everywhere, clothed in some rags.



Elena is shown with her daughter, Polina.

Q: Elena, how did you come to the church?

Elena: At the end of the 1990s, Pastor Pavel Zayakin with a few of his parishioners came to Kirovo to start a mission. They began with simple services where pastor preached. I got interested because it was something new and unusual. In Kirovo, we do not have many visitors, so any sort of event attracts people. Especially it was interesting for kids, as there were nothing for children in Kirovo. Even kindergarten was closed by that time due to lack of finances in the local budget. So, kids were just wandering about on the street.

I do remember the first class. It was about weed — the sin is like a weed in our soul. We were drawing those weeds. After a while Pastor Pavel Zayakin told me that I needed to go through catechism with him to be confirmed in the Lutheran Church. So, when I was 12, I became a member of Lutheran Church.

Q: Pastor Zayakin, how did you decided to start that mission in Kirovo?

Zayakin: I guess in 1998 our parish in Touim had received a large amount of humanitarian aid. We distributed stuff in our town and a lot was left. Somebody told that there is a very poor village not far from us. So, we went to Kirovo. People came to get something, but some stayed for Bible classes as well. Initially we planned classes for adults, but many kids came. From time to time adults didn't show up when we arrived, but children always were coming. I started to take along with me teenagers from the Touim parish to help conduct children's classes. After a while some people in Kirovo were catechized and confirmed. Most of them were teenagers.

Q: Pastor, what do you remember about Elena of that time?

Zayakin: She was amazing child. Despite of all depressive surrounding, she had a willingness and desire to study. She wanted to escape the trap of usual life in Kirovo.

Q: Elena, tell about your education.

Elena: Around 16, when I was in the last grade in the school, my parents moved to another village where they could find a job. I stayed in Kirovo with my grandma to graduate. I thought about high school, but it would be very difficult. Thus, I entered a college in Shira, where I could live in a dorm. Moreover, the state provided free meals for the college students. It helped me a lot, as my parents were unable to support me. First, I wanted to study in IT area, but my friend could not enter that department. Together, we started classes to become sellers. After graduation I entered a new

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Finding hope, strength

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department for a year get another specialty — record clerk. I hoped it will give me more chances to get a good job.

Q: How did your church life go while you were studying in Shira?

Elena: Touim, where there is my parish of Transfiguration, is about 13 miles away from Shira. Public buses do not go often, so Pastor Pavel Zayakin, and later Pastor Vitaly Gavrilov picked me up when they went to Kirovo. So, I was participating in liturgy in my parish.

Q: What happened after your graduation?

Elena: I worked some time as a seller. I met my husband, Fergan. He came to Russia from Azerbaijan looking for a job. Now I'm housewife, sitting at home with our two-year-old daughter, Polina. Also I'm studying as an off-campus student to become an economist.

Q: How did your husband react to the fact that you are Christian, Lutheran?

Elena: Fergan considers himself Muslim, but he does not practice his faith. He was opposed to my regular visits to church. He considered it as wasting time. Also he felt uneasy that his wife communicates with different people. But then he met my pastors and understood that I need to be at the liturgy regularly. Once he even drove me to Touim that I could be at the service. He also brought me to our summer seminar.

Q: What did the church give you?

Elena: First of all she gave me God. I was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church when I was a baby. But I didn't pray, I didn't go to services, I didn't believe. I didn't know God.

Q: What your life would look like if you were not in the church?

Elena: Many of my classmates didn't finish their studies. Some finished, returned back home to Kirovo and sank into the routine of hard work. People in my village drink a lot. Husbands beat their wives. The Church gave me guidance, gave me strength to go "against the current."

Q: Pastor Zayakin, what role did the church play in Elena's life, from your point of view?

Zayakin: Of course, I cannot be 100 percent sure she would become alcoholic. But I believe that the Holy Spirit helped her to be stronger in all difficulties and temptations. Her grandma became a member because of Elena.

Thank you very much, Pastor and Elena! ✕

Concerts provide witness

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Son of God, who delivered three friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace. Performing this drama, artists not only played music and sang. They also gave a translation of the Latin text. And it was a proclamation of the Good News of the Son of God, Who was born to deliver us from the hell's fire.

We realized we want *Insula Magica* perform in our church regularly. We tried to invite them two or three times a year, around biggest festivals — Easter, Christmas, and Reformation Day. It was not always possible due to their schedule and our finances. Finally in 2009, the ensemble's administrator asked whether our church could become their "official concert hall" in Akademgorodok. (Akademgorodok is a remote part of Novosibirsk, about 20 miles from downtown. As not many people in Russia have cars, it is rather difficult to get back home after the concert. Thus, many collectives try to find a way to perform in Akademgorodok itself.)

We agreed. Being an official concert hall we can attract more people. Announcements are placed on official web-page of Novosibirsk Philharmonic Society, on their leaflets, and so on. Many people in Russia still consider all non-Russian Orthodox churches as sects, and hesitate to come, even for a concert. But if it's official, then it's fine.

Before every performance one of our pastors gives a short talk. Normally, we say some words about nearest big festival. Or we talk about the significant impact of Lutherans on the Russian culture, science, building of the state, industry and so on. Then we pray before the concert.

Another way listeners meet the Gospel is the concert itself. Musicians translate hymns they perform. When it is Bach's compositions, it is almost a sermon. I also noticed many visitors were surprised to learn that a lot of music, especially of the 16th and 17th centuries, is church music. People who love music and know it, who adore Bach, Schütz, Buxtehude, Pachelbel miss the fact they were Lutherans, they served in the church and composed for the church. The artists give a short, historical explanation of the composers' life and work, and it becomes another witness to the audience.

Finally, we get a good reputation in Akademgorodok, as a place where good concerts take place. Many people now know there is a Lutheran church. Some stay after concerts to ask a few questions about church and Christianity. And a few people visit our services afterward.

For the next concert season *Insula Magica* will give five concerts. The administrator asked for our church calendar to see what festivals will be near the concerts. They want to select music which will fit church season. I pray that many of those who attend concerts will come to the church to adore Creator of all the beauty in this world and to worship Crucified One, Who inspired many composers. ✕

Summer seminars reaching people across Siberia

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make the presentation more accessible to the audience.”

The second lecturer was Pastor Pavel Khramov. His topic was “The Book of Ruth” (as well as in Novosibirsk and Khakassia later).

The next city where the seminars were held was Novosibirsk. Besides Pastors Streltsov and Khramov, Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin was teaching here. He lectured about Divine Liturgy. He said, “Liturgy is the Church’s breath, it is her life. The Church lives by the liturgy and for the liturgy. In it God comes to us so close, that we can touch Him.

“There are many Lutherans, who do not go to church regularly. Obviously, they are not taught so. Therefore we need to teach parishioners what is Divine Service, how and what for God comes to us.

“In our church this task is easier, as in every congregation the liturgy is the same. We believe that unity in the liturgy is the sign of the unity of the Church.” After Novosibirsk seminars went to Khakassia. They took place in the village Efremkino, where our church with help of Siberian Lutheran Mission Society purchased the premises. Pastor Pavel Zayakin conducts there children camps, and it gave us place for seminars. Three lecturers were teaching. Pastor Andrey Ivogla spoke on the Table of Duties from the Small Catechism, Pavel Zayakin had a class on the calling of Abraham, and Pavel Khramov taught on Ruth. He said, “Here I had more time, as two others teachers gave shorter talks. And I was very glad about it. We could read the Book of Ruth slower and more attentively. It is the fascinating story. It’s the story of a pagan woman, whose integrity deserved the respect of Israelites, and whose faith joined her to God’s chosen people. It’s a story of a man, who was faithful to the God’s word, thus he was a genuine man. But the most important, it’s a story of Jesus Christ, Who is foreshadowed by David’s grand-grandparents, who comes in His type, Boaz. I hope that people learned two things. First, the Bible is

an interesting book. It has thrilling stories of men and women, who had their ups and downs, and who lived through them with faith in Messiah. Second, the Bible in the first place is the book about Jesus Christ. Sometimes it takes more efforts to see it, but it worth it.”

The last place for seminars this year became the Ural region. Pastor Alexey Streltsov went to Ekaterinburg with his lectures on St. Paul’s missionary journeys. Then he continued in Beloretsk, the smaller town in Bashkiriya, about 300 miles from Ekaterinburg. As there we have a missionary group, Pastor Streltsov added talks on the Small Catechism.

I asked a few people what they learned at the seminar, what was important to them.

Ludmila (Beloretsk): “I was assured that we do not choose to follow Christ, but the Lord chooses us. As our natural birth does not happen by our own will, but by God’s, in the same manner the new birth, birth from above comes from Him. The Holy Communion has been really opened to me. I realized that it is not a simple remembrance of the sufferings of Christ, but it is His true Body and Blood, given for me.”

Veronika (Beloretsk): “The lectures on missionary journeys of St. Paul left a deep impression on me. Father Alexey Streltsov vividly and in details pictured that time, countries and cities visited by the apostle, their culture and customs. Such seminars widen our view and help to understand the Bible better, read it more consciously.”

Elena (Khakassia): “I liked that interpretation of the Bible was simple and clear. I realized that Bible says more than I see. For example we can see Christ or Eucharist in the words, which say about usual, daily things.”

Alexey (Ekaterinburg): “It’s a pity that seminars became shorter and we can invite less people. But the classes themselves are still very good. Father Alexey’s lectures reminded me what I studied earlier. Also I learnt that Olympics games took place in Corinth, so, when St. Paul wrote to the church there, he wrote to them as to people who know sport (1Cor. 9).” ❖

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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