



Sonya—Growing up in the church

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The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church is very young church. A little more than 20 years ago the first services in Novosibirsk took place. Some of our congregations (like in Yurga) have longer histories, but not as a part of SELC. The big majority of our parishioners came to the church as adult persons. So to say, most of us are "neophytes." That is why it was interesting to talk to a young woman, who grew up in the church, being a part of parish in Novosibirsk almost from the birth.

Q: Introduce yourself, please.

A: My name is Sonya Kanygina, nee Lytkina. I was born in Novosibirsk in 1989. My father is Vsevolod Lytkin. Now he is the bishop of our church. My mom's name is Daria. She is a professor at the university.

Q: When were you baptized?

A: I was baptized when I was only eight months old. My parents were members of Estonian church then, as in Novosibirsk there was only a group of German Lutherans. So, my parents took me to Estonia to baptize.

Q: What are your first memories of the church?

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History of the church in Yurga

My name is Nina Yantsen. I was born in the Zaporozhie region, in the town of Tokmak in 1938. My parents' names are Emil and Ida. Besides me, they had six children. I was baptized in hometown when I was about three. I remember how my parents hold my hands in church. However, I do not remember much about that time. My mom and dad taught me to pray since I was very small. I do not remember any single day when I went to bed without praying.

When German troops occupied Zaporozhie, we were moved first to Poland and then to Germany. There I went to a school, but now I do not remember anything about it. In 1945, when the Soviet Army came, we were sent to Siberia, to this town, Yurga. In the beginning, we lived in "zemlyanka," or dugout. Despite of this, we never lived too poorly, because we always worked hard. Our family had a cow and some pigs. In the vegetable garden, we grew potatoes. We could even help our neighbors by giving them milk and potatoes. At the same time, they were stealing from us. Finally, their mother stole a goat and was sentenced.

The Lutheran congregation was formed here in Yurga soon after

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Camps in Khakassia teaches Scripture, character

Editor's note: The following is reprinted from the Faith and Hope newsletter.

The traditional summer camp took place in Khakassia in July 2012. For the past 15 years Pastor Pavel Zayakin has organized them for kids from 4 to 17 years old. About 1,000 children have attended them during these years. The goal is always to introduce children to the Bible through studies, informal talks around the campfire, and games. The latter element is very important, as they are not just simple games, but a long role game continuing for a couple days. To go through all the tests and obstacles of the game, children need to get prepared during several previous days. They learn basic camp skills as making campfire, preparing food, first aid, orienteering, rafting, and so on.

Thus, camps become "character school." Kids understand the value of teamwork, of friendship. They see their Christian leaders in tough situations, in hard work. Therefore, the words of Bible classes "become flesh" in real life.

Pastor Zayakin reports, "With God's help, we have held our summer Christian camp '2012. Mission: Possible.' It wouldn't be possible without prayers and gracious donations from our friends.

"Instead of the expected 80 participants, we were able to take 110 people this year. That includes more than 80 children ages 4 to 17.

"The camp was based on the self-service scout model. Thus, except for the youngest group and the administration, the participants themselves prepared their own food, organized the camp watch and the evening campfire, etc.

"Every day, Bible classes on the passage of Ephesians 6:10-18 were held. These verses were cornerstone of the final game-hike.

"In addition to Bible studies, kids and youth chose one out of four workshops to be trained at, namely 'warriors' (learning self-defense), 'healers' (first medicine aid), 'rafts men' (the ability to operate a catamaran on a river), and 'rangers' (orientation with the compass and map, making fire, cipher skills).

"On July 26 and 27, the older kids went on a hike. Only the group of the youngest stayed at our venue. They had their own program. The goal of the trip was to pass 20 miles through the taiga, to find the attributes of a warrior: helmet, belt, etc.

Each group was carrying package with the last survived book on the Earth, the Bible. The goal was to bring it into the last bastion of civilization, the Library. Along the way, the groups met 'enemies' (that role was successfully played by the instructors and other adults), fought with them in fights, losing tokens of 'life' issued to them. They also rescued 'civilians,' thus earning tokens.

"In the evening, gathered around campfire, kids were studying the passage from Hebrews 4, focusing on the topic of God's Law.

"In the end, all four groups managed to get to the final point and to save the world, even without Bruce Willis!

"Leaders of the four groups of children, called 'masters,' have passed the final test and carried the Bible in the Library.

"The last day was a day of rest and summing up. The final talk was based on 1 Cor.1:18. The word of Cross of Christ is the only way to our salvation. We closed the camp with 'flying lanterns' and songs around the campfire.

"We hope that the lessons of the Scripture and of the good that children and youth received in the camp, will be the first step for someone to faith and church, for others – the next stage of their development as Christians. Approximately, half of the participants of the camp were our parishioners, the other half – unchurched people." ✕



Children are introduced to the Bible through studies and games at the summer camp in Khakassia each year.

Nina and the church at Yurga



Nina Yantsen, pictured on the far left, is shown with Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin (center left, back row) and other members of the church at Yurga.

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the war. There were many Germans sent here from the European part of the Soviet Union. More than 60 people were attending services. The choir was great! For some time we gathered at private houses; later the congregation has bought a house. It could not be an official church building, so it looked like a normal house.

As I lived nearby, my duty was to heat the oven on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. When many of our people were returning to Germany in 1990s, they gave this house to me. I had no idea what to do with this property; it was difficult to me to keep it. I gave documents to my niece, and she sold it afterwards. Now I think it was a mistake.

My parents, though they were believing people, did not go to church often. Probably because the life was not easy, they needed to raise seven children. In general, younger people did not attend the church; mostly our parents and grandparents went to the services. I did not go to church either, until I married.

My husband was a German, too. First, I attended Baptists meetings; there were also many Germans among them. Then I joined Lutheran congregation. Though I attended school for a year in Germany, I could not read German. At the services I stood next to an old lady and watched how she was singing and praying, following the texts in the hymnal. Finally, in some years I have learned all the hymns with words and melodies.

When I started to attend the church, we had no troubles with authorities, but before then people from

KGB were coming to the services. They were looking for the possibility to close the church. A Baptist pastor was even imprisoned for 10 years. In our congregation we had no ordained pastors, only "elder brothers." The first one of them was accused of treason and imprisoned.

Nevertheless, such pressure was only from the side of the state. In everyday life, we did not feel anything like this. There were many Germans around us — our colleagues, our neighbors were Germans deported from the European part of Russia. Thus, majority of us went to church or were sympathetic to the Lutheran faith. Especially older people were loyal "goers." Today we see something similar. My son knows all the prayers, I taught him from his childhood. He watches religious programs on TV, produced by Russian Orthodox Church. He knows the Bible. Nevertheless, when I call him to come to the liturgy, he laughs. He says that only old women attend services, and he feels uncomfortable to be alone among "grandmothers."

In the end of the 1990s, many people moved to Germany. However, I think it was not good for them. In Germany, they found out that not so many churches are true to the Word. Maybe it is a reason why they all became ill.

At that time we were gathering at the apartment, as just a few of us left. In 2004, Pastor Alexander Hahn started to come to Yurga from Tomsk. His wife is a cousin of a good friend of mine. Thus, he has heard that there is a Lutheran group here. Pastor Hahn has started to visit us. Quite a few people were coming for the services.

Now many of those young people went to different cities to study at the universities, so now our congregation is not as big as it used to. When Pastor Hahn started to come, we were able to use the building of German culture center for about a year. Then they disallowed us to conduct services at their place.

For almost two years we wandered from one place to another. Finally, with a help of Siberian Lutheran Mission Society, we bought an apartment in old house, built (what an irony!) by German prisoners of war.

As that building was old and dilapidated, the local authorities decided to pull down it. All the owners of the apartments got the new ones. Thus, we got a new place. Unfortunately, the very week before moving our old place was robbed. Thieves took everything, including the benches,

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Growing up in the SELC—Sonya's story

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A: I know that services started in 1991 in our apartment. However, I'm not sure since when I remember people coming to our place. When I grew up little bit, my parents explained me that these gatherings are services, it is church. Some of these people, like Galina Shvetsova or Olga Sukhinina, I remember since I was very little, as they were also friends of our family and were visiting us regularly.

Memories that are more conscious are from the later time. Women from our parish were teaching classes at Sunday school. Ludmila Kekalova always brought something tasty.

Q: When were you confirmed?

A: I was 11. Now kids in our church usually are confirmed earlier, but that time I was one of the youngest communicants.

Q: How did your classmates or teachers react to the fact that you are Christian?

A: There was no special reaction. I didn't talk too much about my faith with my classmates. More often I saw surprised faces when I said that my dad is the priest, pastor.

I was lucky to study in the school with an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and research. For example, my biology teacher considered the theory of evolution as really the theory, and not as fact. Thus, I felt no discomfort studying this. I even remember how a student asked a teacher in the primary school, "Didn't we come from the apes?" And a teacher answered, "I didn't. What about you?"

In the school and later in the university I was kind of an outsider. But I wasn't lonely. Always there were a few friends, who shared my worldview, my interests. They were not necessary Christians, but they were "nice boys and girls."

Q: Were your friends interested in faith?

A: I can't say they were. Some of them visited our church from time to time. Two girls attended liturgy quite long. One of them now a member of Russian Orthodox church, another was confirmed recently in our parish of St. Andrew.

In the high school for a period, I played an on-line game. I also met in reality with people whom I played with. They were rather different from my friends at school. Many of them were negative towards the church. They shared usual stereotypes: priests deceive simple people, take their money, church is not necessary for the faith, even harmful, because true

faith is inside a person. I discussed with them, but it was rather fruitless.

Many people expressed their surprise about the fact that I do not drink alcohol. Often they think it's because I'm Christian. I cannot say it's my Christian position. I just do not like alcohol, I do not need it to feel better or to express my joy.

When I was 14 or 15, I had a boyfriend. In the beginning, it was OK that I went to the church. But later he started to show his opposition. I guess, he wanted to spend more time with me, and the church "stole" my time. He said that it is "fanatic" to attend every Sunday service. Finally, I parted with him.

Q: Your dad was the priest, now he is the bishop. Your mom always did a lot in the church. Did you feel that parents give less attention to you and your brothers than they should?

A: No. My mom always was near. Until I was 15, she was always at home, taking us to the school, to different classes (music, sport classes etc.). Father was leaving often, travelling a lot. We always were glad when he was back. Even in four in the morning, we ran to meet him. Of course, that he brought presents helped us to get up so early.

I never felt that my dad is away when I badly need him here. However, my mom told me that every time when father travelled, something unpleasant happened. I understand this now, when my husband left for the conference and I stay at home with our little daughter.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: We met at the dancing evening at the university. He liked me, we danced and become friends. Michael also was surprised to learn that my dad is a priest. He thought I see him very rarely and he has a big long beard.

Q: Did you tell him that you'll marry him only after he became a member of our church?

A: That was my firm decision, but I didn't tell him anything like this. Michael studied physics, and as physicist, he understood that such complicated and well-tuned universe couldn't grow itself. He started to attend services, went with me to a Christian summer camp. Finally, he was baptized and almost immediately made a

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Sonya—Privileged to grow up in the church

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proposition.

Q: How could your life look like, if you would not be in the church?

A: It would be very sad. I am quite stubborn person. It is very difficult to change my mind. If I would grow outside of church, I'm afraid I would never come here, being adult, being a person with a formed worldview. It means I would perish.

Q: How would you summarize your experience of a person, grown in the church?

A: I realized that I couldn't think about something especially "Christian" in my life. In addition, I cannot see myself being non-believer. Faith is integrated part of my life, I cannot separate "Christian" memories from "normal" or "non-Christian." I think it is great, it is a privilege. Kids should grow in the church and in the Christian families, knowing Christ from the very beginning of their lives. It is right and meet. ✕

Spreading the Gospel despite travel difficulties

Editor's note: The following is reprinted from the Faith and Hope newsletter.

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

As you know, one of the biggest challenges in Siberia is its huge territory. Many people need to cover great distances. And many clergymen need to travel all the time. In this [article], we would like to tell you about the recent travel that Pastor Pavel Zayakin (Dean of the SELC eastern deanery) did to the Chita region.

Pastor Zayakin says, "The hardest thing in the journey was to be without the Internet. So you go for a few days in the train and feel as though you are cut off from civilization. You look out the window, and there is a monotonous pattern there. Well, I am glad that the cell phone is working, even at many train stations. During this trip I visited several locations with parishes or missionary

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Nina—Christian faith gives me the strength to carry on



Nina Yantsen, left, receives copies of *Good News* magazine. *Good News* is printed in several languages, including German and Russian, as well as English.

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though they were very simple. Above all, we feel sorry about the crucifix. They took even this!

I am very grateful to Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, that you are visiting us. Still I miss German language at the services. Our hymns are so beautiful!

The Bible in Russian is difficult to me. I need to read in German to understand it. Many people are used to German language and style.

To some [the Russian language] even becomes an obstacle to them coming to the church. I remember once a man saw, how we use here the sign of the cross. He said that it is wrong; that it is the Russian Orthodox tradition, and not the Lutheran one. However, the Small Catechism teaches it.

Though I did not go to the church in my youth, I always remembered that I am a Christian. I guess it gave me the strength to live up to now. ✕

Reaching Siberian congregations presents challenges



Pastor Pavel Zayakin, dean of the SELC eastern deanery has a meal on a train while traveling to one of the Siberian congregations.

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congregations of our Siberian church.

“Typically, such places are very poor. There are no normal roads there, and people do not live but rather survive. I think that most of these people would be happy to leave, but they are poor and they do not have any money to leave or to arrange relocation to a different place. In general, the eastern part of our country is a separate hemisphere. Economically, it is like Africa, but with cold winters with temperatures 50 below zero.

“On the road, I was joined by our pastor from Angarsk, Andrei Ivolvega, and together we arrived at Chita. Our parish in Chita is very special, primarily because about a third of the parishioners are deaf. You know that for many years our Church has served these people, and for this ministry we have a special ordained clergyman—Deacon Roman Kislov. It is rare for the church to have deaf clergymen. In the entire history of Lutheranism in Russia, there were no deaf ministers before. He is a man very faithful to the Church, and I always admire his

faithfulness to Christ.

“The biggest problem in the parish in Chita is a lack of our own building or facility for the divine services. We have rented something from the beginning—first, an apartment; second, a room in the municipal public club for disabled people. But we were asked to leave. Then we made an agreement with the local Roman Catholic congregation. So we rent a classroom in their parish school. But now the time is gone, and we should vacate this place. Most of our parishioners are poor, and I think we can’t collect enough to rent something inside commercial facilities.

“Our parishioners in Chita are poor people, but they donate to the Church as much as they can. They are collecting donations to help parishioners who live in remote villages and who are poorer. We traveled to these remote areas of the Chita region. We visited Edinenie and Yasnaya, and also drove to the prisons where Pastor Igor Kizyaev is serving also.

“I was at the parish in Yasnaya for the first time. Yasnaya is a small town, in reality, just several five-storied apartment buildings in the middle of a prairie. In the past, there was a Soviet military base there, and now it is just a town where people do not have work and money. And they have no other place to go to. There are hundreds of such towns in the east of our country, and nobody cares about people living there.

“Then we went to Buryatia. In Buryatia, our parishioners live in Ulan-Ude and Petropavlovka. In both towns, we don’t have church buildings so we are conducting services in the houses of our parishioners.

“Then we arrived in Angarsk and also our new missionary congregation in Sosnovka. Some of the parishioners in Sosnovka are descendants of Lutheran immigrants from Poland who moved to Siberia at the end of the 19th century. But there are new converts also. It is always a big joy to see that new people come to the Church.”

Please pray for clergymen and parishioners in the SELC eastern deanery, and also for the parish in Chita, that we may obtain a new place for divine services. ✕

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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