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SELC newest Missouri Synod partner church



SELC Bishop Vsevoid Lytkin, right, and Rev. Alexey Streltsov, rector of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, are pictured at the LCMS Synodical Convention in St. Louis, MO, in July. Delegates, in a nearly unanimous vote, ratified altar and pulpit fellowship with SLEC.

Editor's note: Reprinted with permission from *Reporter Online* (reporter.lcms.org), the electronic version of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's national newspaper.

ST. LOUIS, July 23, 2013—With a vote of 965 to 3, delegates voted nearly unanimously yesterday at the 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to ratify altar and pulpit fellowship with the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC).

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‘Baptized for Mercy!’—LCMS Convention homily

Editor’s note: The following homily was preached at the July LCMS convention in St. Louis by Rev. Alexey Streltsov, rector of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk.

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. **Titus 3:4-8** [Washing of Regeneration]*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We Lutherans are fond of saying from what we are saved. And in his epistle to the bishop Titus the Apostle Paul names particular sins and sinful attitudes characterizing our depravity. This is the condition we find ourselves in as poor sinful beings. And the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23).

However, by the mercy of our Lord we have been brought from death to life (John 5:24), from darkness to light (1 Pet 2:9). This was and is not of ourselves, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:9). “Deeds done by us in righteousness” are as useful for our salvation as a bankruptcy statement in a supermarket.

We are saved by mercy, which is not just a figure of speech. These are not merely abstract categories we are talking about. When we speak of Baptism, we speak of Christ, and when we speak of Christ extending mercy to us we speak of Baptism. Our text contains a clear Trinitarian and Christological confession: God our Savior IS Jesus Christ our Savior. And so this “our Savior” showed us “philanthropy.” How? He was made man and He took upon Himself what we deserved. And it was surely not a reward for the “deeds done by us in righteousness.” Rather, it was punishment for all our “foolishness, disobedience, being led astray, enslavement to passions and pleasures, malice, envy, and hatred.” It all fell on Christ, and in return, what

Christ won on the cross, that is, forgiveness of sins and life eternal, He freely administers to us in the “washing of regeneration.”

“Washing of regeneration”: this is translated in Russian Bibles as “banya”, that is, “sauna” of regeneration. [If you have never been to a Russian sauna, then come to Russia and try this unique experience for yourselves.] Plenty of water. Plenty of grace and mercy. God always gives us more than what we deserve or what we can even think of. No one approaching baptism ever walks away unwashed.

This Baptism then manifests itself in our life, which becomes a life of baptismal confession, which is the way it should be. However, it is easier said than done. Especially when hardships come, then what once seemed certain and sure suddenly can no longer provide. How can I continue to behave like a baptized child of God contrary to what my senses tell me, contrary to what my human experience advises, contrary to what the fallen world around me wants to throw at me? Curse God and die, says my old Adamic mind to me. Praise God and live through suffering and death, my baptismal faith keeps telling me.

The beauty of the Christian life is that it is essentially a life lived for others; it is a life manifesting mercy. To be sure, our mercy is a consequence of Baptism. Having freely received mercy, we then show it to others, and in this way our baptismal life becomes a true expression of gratitude to God for our salvation, and Baptism remains for us a continuously present reality.

Thus our mercy is only possible because of “His own mercy,” which is clearly manifested in baptism.

We Lutherans are fond of saying *from* what we are saved. But every once in a while it is good and profitable to say *for* what we are saved—and not just say it, but also live it out. It is good because the Apostle instructs us about it. We are saved, so that we may “devote ourselves to good works; these are excellent and profitable for people.”

In this way being saved by baptismal mercy (expressed in the “washing of regeneration”) leads to our being baptized for mercy. As Christ lived his life for others, so our calling is likewise to be merciful to others, and so in this way stay firm in Baptism, which has forever united us with Jesus.

In the name of Jesus. Amen. ✠

Family camp organized in Khakassia this summer



This summer, a family camp was held in Khakassia for people of all ages. Pictured above are some of the camps, who erected a cross on one of the mountains after their hike. Many of the attendees had attended camps for teenagers when they were younger and wanted to bring their families.

Pastor Pavel Zayakin has organized children's camps in Khakassia for many years. This summer, in addition to the camp for teenagers, a family camp was held. Oksana Lapkovskaya, director of this event, shared some of her thoughts.

Q: How did the idea of the family camp come about?

A: As camps were held for many years already, quite a lot of people attended them. Some of those former teenagers got married. They have children now. And they would like to be here again.

Therefore, for a few years we included in the program something for small children. However, we felt that it's not enough. Thus, this year we decided to organize the family camp, which will be comfortable for kids and their parents.

Q: Why did you decide to concentrate on the Ten Commandments?

A: It grew out of our Sunday School program. Quite naturally, we started study of the Small Catechism from the first chapter. When we were looking for the main topic of the camp, we thought that the Ten Commandments would fit well.

During our camps, we always have some sort of hike. It goes in the form of a game with story, goal, and hindrances. The Ten Commandments can play the role of signs, which point to our ultimate "goal," Jesus Christ. Thus, we arrived at the name of the camp, "Tropinka," or "Small Pathway." One of the last camps had the title, "The Way," so we thought that for kids it might be "Small Pathway."

Q: What could go better?

A: Everything we planned went very well. As the camp was small, with about 30 participants, everybody was involved in the program—all the people, adults and kids, actively participated. In the planning process, we were thinking about the kids from 3- to 8-years-old. However, some families came with kids who are older. So, in the future, we need to think how better to involve older children, what responsibilities they can have.

One more thing, which I'm sorry about. A few families, who first planned to come to the camp, didn't show up. Some circumstances of life prevented them from coming. For some of them, money became a problem. Even with our

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Children attending the family camp took part in Bible studies and learning the Ten Commandments and their explanations from the Small Catechism

Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, LCMS altar, pulpit fellowship ratified at convention



Rev. Alexey Streltsov, left, is interviewed by KFUCO-AM, radio station of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, at the Synodical Convention in July. The LCMS is now officially in altar and pulpit fellowship with SELC after 17 years.

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“It brings me special joy to greet this assembly on behalf on the brothers and sisters of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church,” said SELC Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin, who addressed the convention following the vote. “The LCMS has played a very special part in the life of the Siberian church, especially in providing matters of theological education.”

Prior to the revolution in 1917, the Lutheran church in Russia had more than one million members.

By 1939, nearly every Lutheran pastor in Russia had been exiled or worse and Lutheran congregations ceased to exist. It wasn't until the 1970s that small groups of Lutherans began gathering to worship together again. In 1998, the SELC formally approached the LCMS to open a doctrinal dialogue. Subsequent meetings were held, discussion ensued, and finally, in 2010, it was determined that the two church bodies shared doctrinal unity.

LCMS President Matthew C. Harrison formally declared fellowship with the SELC in December 2010, subject to ratification by the subsequent Synod convention. At the time of the declaration of fellowship, the SELC had 20 pastors serving 2,000 members in 22 parishes and teaching stations.

“After waiting 17 years, it is a great joy that the LCMS has recognized and affirmed itself to be in fellowship with the SELC,” said the Rev. Dr. Albert B. Collver III, director of Church Relations for the LCMS and assistant to the Synod president. “The Church in general and the Lutheran church in particular suffered under Communist Russia. To see the Lutheran church return from the brink of extinction in Russia prompts us to give thanks to the Lord for His goodness. The pattern of the cross and suffering turning into good and blessing is repeated here.” ✕

New church camp for families a success

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reduced price of 1,500 rubles (about \$50) per person, the total amount of \$150-\$200 per family was too difficult to afford. They missed something great.

Q: What was the best part of the camp for you?

A: I liked the most the Bible studies. Kids were very interested; they worked hard to memorize the commandments and explanations from the catechism. Once a 4-year-old asked me, “I want to memorize the commandments; help me!” We were sitting for about half an hour repeating over and over the explanation. Of course, the hike was great. Children patiently walked quite a long distance and solved problems at different stages of the way—made a map, helped an “injured traveler,” recited Bible verses and commandments. At the end of this hike, we erected a cross on one of the mountains. ✕

St. Andrew's parishioners help Karpysak children



These are some of the children of Karpysak who are helped by the parishioners of St. Andrew, Novosibirsk.

Editor's note: The following is reprinted from Faith and Hope newsletter #212

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A new humanitarian aid program was realized in Novosibirsk. Pastor Pavel Khramov says, "Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin and I went to Karpysak village (about 40 miles from Novosibirsk) in order to bring gifts from our parish to the children's club.

"The story of this project is as follows. Our parish of St. Andrew started to help the school in Karpysak in 2003. It was an initiative of one of our parishioners. Tatiana was born in that village. Later on she moved to Novosibirsk to study and then to work, but she kept visiting her relatives in Karpysak. She noticed the poverty of the school there. Tatiana helped as she could. She asked people in our parish to donate, to buy the most basic stuff: textbooks,

pens and pencils, and so on. Due to her energy and persistence, helping the Karpysak school became a good custom in our church

"Tatiana died in 2008 because of cancer. She is not among us, but her deeds do follow her [from Revelation 14:13]: the good tradition of helping the poor school has been kept in our parish.

"Recently, the Karpysak school was closed. Now, the students go to the neighboring village for classes. And the school building in Karpysak now is reorganized to be the children's club and the public library. In the village it is the only 'cultural oasis,' and it is the only place where kids can come to socialize, the play games, to do sport. Elena, director of the club, and librarian Lydia try to make this place cozy and welcoming. For example, they organize a birthday tea party every month for the kids.

Tatiana died in 2008 because of cancer. She is not among us, but her deeds do follow her [from Revelation 14:13]: the good tradition of helping the poor school has been kept in our parish.

"We were especially pleased to see the display of Christian books in the library. Almost all of them were *Good News* magazines and books published by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation.

"The children's club and library suffer from the lack of finances even worse than the school did. The building needs repairs, there is almost no equipment. I mentioned kids doing some sports, but they have almost nothing for it: just a tennis table bought by chance and a few hardly working exercise machines. Also, it is very cold inside the club. It appeared that the building was cut off from electricity and the heating supply because of huge debt. But this debt had grown when the school was occupying the building.

"With the money collected at our Easter charity fair, we have bought sports equipment: balls, volleyball and table-tennis nets, a basketball hoop. It was a real pleasure to see how glad and grateful the kids were. In one moment, they grabbed the

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Novosibirsk parish helps with humanitarian needs



Shown are some handmade toys given to the children at the Karysak children's club and library. In the past, the people of St. Andrew also gave basic school supplies to the children.

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balls, fixed the net on the tennis table, and started to play.

"Also, we gave some money for repairs in the building. Elena and Lydia were very thankful. They do repairs by themselves. They have bought a simple mini-audio system, but obviously they cannot maintain the club from just their own money.

"As in almost every Siberian village, most of the people in Karpysak drink heavily. So, for some children the club is most cozy and a safer place than home. It was very nice to meet those kids and teenagers. They listened attentively. When I talked about Christ's resurrection, they asked good

questions.

"Most of the children wore dirty and old clothes, so we'll try to bring some second-hand stuff there. We do the same regularly for some of our poor parishes.

"Our church tries to help children in several places like Karpysak. The Christian care is often the only chance for kids to change their lives, to become normal people and not to follow the steps of their parents-alcoholics.

about Christ's resurrection, they asked good questions.

So, for some children the club is most cozy and a safer place than home. It was very nice to meet those kids and teenagers. They listened attentively. When I talked about Christ's resurrection, they asked good questions.

"We also plan to collect books and toys from among our parishioners, to help the library in Karpysak and to organize a playing room for children.

"Lydia told us once that an old lady, one of the library readers, brought 500 rubles [with average pensions in villages being 4,500 rubles—equivalent to \$150 per month] saying, 'You are doing such important work.'

"So we also want to help build a spot of hope and joy for kids and adults in Karpysak."

Please pray for the Christian ministry to poor people in Siberia. ✕

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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