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# Coming to Lutheranism

**Editor's note:** This is the final part of the story of Tatiana Sokolova, a parishioner at St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Novosibirsk.

Translated by Pavel Khramov

I was looking for Lutherans in Novosibirsk and found the website of our Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. It took no time. However, what I saw was too good.

For three more years, I could not dare to leave Russian Orthodoxy. The idea of visiting St. Andrew's parish and talking to a pastor scared me almost to death. "Do you want to start everything anew? Was not one time enough? You will step in new problems." Those were my thoughts. I was reading answers on the website and saw how Lutheran pastors patiently answered even stupid questions. It was obvious that they try to help. In the beginning they looked suspiciously good and considerate to people. I also worried about my husband's attitude toward Lutheranism. He was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church as well. I told him many times that he should not become Lutheran just because of me. I guess if he did not agree to come with me, I would not do what I did.

I read about liberal Lutheran Churches and it grieved me. Our Siberian Lutheran Church is so small. The Russian Orthodox Church is a

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## *Children in Finland join with SELC; help sick children in Siberia*

**Editor's note:** Daniel S. Johnson wrote this article. He is a charter member of the SLMS and is currently the president. He has served as an LCMS pastor in two congregations. Trinity-Wellsville, NY (1990-1993) and Redeemer-Marshalltown, IA (1993-2012). He has served as a catechist and pastoral care specialist for the LCMS OIM since 2012. He is currently deployed to Germany with his wife Amy and regularly travels to Siberia and the Baltics.

"It was the second concert of the Tomsk State University Choir in our church. And once again it was a wonderful performance!" says, Pastor Daniel Burlakov, pastor of St. Mary Lutheran Church – Tomsk, Russia, in Siberia, in March 2014. "The goal of this concert was to raise money for a six-year-old boy, Leo, who has a brain tumor and his family needs serious financial help in order to get treatment in one of the Moscow's clinics."

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# ***Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church honors Lytkin***

**Editor's note: The following is reprinted from the Faith & Hope newsletter #231**

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

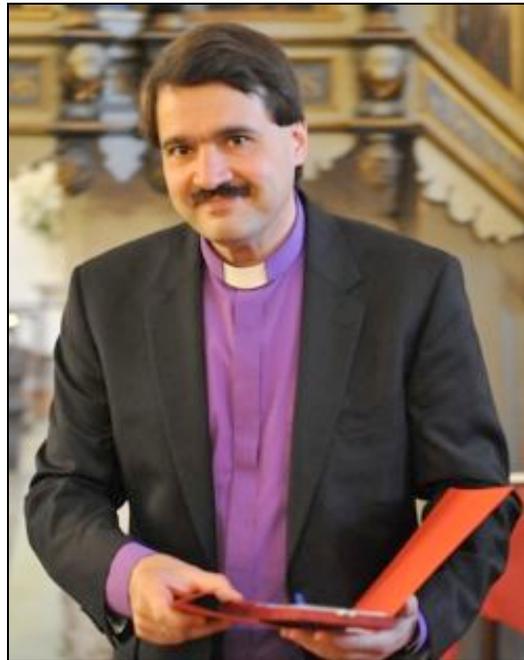
May we bring to your attention the report written by Pastor Daniel Johnson, who accompanied Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin during his recent travel to Tallinn, Estonia.

On a cool Sunday evening in June, we walked from the Lutheran Institute in Tallinn, Estonia, where we were lodging, to an awards ceremony at the Lutheran Cathedral. A light rain had been falling throughout the day. Clad in light jackets and sweaters, with umbrellas in hand, our band of eight Siberians, two Estonians, and two Americans walked the narrow cobblestone streets of Tallinn, Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin walked with us, as he humbly anticipated receiving the award from the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC). This medal was to be bestowed by the archbishop of the church, Andres Poder, in a liturgical ceremony.

Bishop Lytkin's theology teacher and catechist, Rev. Jaanus Noormagi, witnessed the presentation. He sat by his former student and catechumen's side during the ceremony. Bishop Lytkin was called forward from the front pew as his wife, son, and several Siberian clergy and laity, along with my wife, Amy, and I, looked on. The award of First Rank Cross of Merit of the Estonia Evangelical Lutheran Church was hung around his neck, the congregation applauded in appreciation of Bishop Lytkin's service to the Church; for the men who had been used by our Lord, Jesus Christ, to restore the Lutheran confession to Siberia. The award was seen as recognition of what the Holy Spirit has done in Siberia among many, instead of any man's single achievements. The bishop represents the entire Church.

Before Vsevolod Lytkin became bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, he was a man in search of answers to theological and philosophical questions. In the late 1980s, as a young man living in the academic town outside of Novosibirsk, he had read some Soviet propaganda books that criticized Christianity. From this propaganda, the Holy Spirit worked "where and when it pleased." It "pleased" the Holy Spirit to create faith and a desire in young Vsevolod to receive Holy Baptism.

In 1987, this young "believer" traveled to Estonia to seek Holy Baptism. It was on his trip to Tallinn that he would meet the wife of the pastor. It was through her efforts that her husband (the man who would later become archbishop of the EELC; from 1994 until his unexpected death in 2005) agreed to give Vsevolod



**Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin**

his first Small Catechism. It was a binder containing photographs of pages from a Russian language catechism. After studying the documents for a few days at the train station, Vsevolod presented himself before the holy font at the Church of the Holy Spirit and was baptized. He would later bring his wife, Daria, and daughter, Sonya, to the same font, to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

In the beginning, very few of Vsevolod's friends shared his interest in Lutheranism. Although many were interested in spiritual things, some of them turned to cults instead of Christianity. Gradually, he gathered a group in Akademgorodok (the academic town outside of Novosibirsk where he lived) to study the Bible. Soon the group of students realized from their study that in order for them to be church they must be baptized and have a pastor. Vsevolod returned to his pastor in Estonia with a request that this "group" in Novosibirsk become a congregation. He received theological training and was ordained as a pastor in Estonia in 1993, passed his theological exams in 1996, and received his pectoral cross. To receive a pectoral cross at ordination is an Estonia tradition, similar to when a man receives a stole at his ordination in American Lutheran churches. Vsevolod was then appointed as probst of the Siberian part of the Estonia church, a title he

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## **Churches join forces in effort to help those in need**



**Rev. Daniel Burlakov of St. Mary Lutheran Church, Tomsk, shows some of the items donated to families of sick children in a joint effort between SELC and a Finnish Lutheran Church.**

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Such is the work of witness, mercy and life together of the church. Almost three years ago, Pavel Khramov, pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk, Russia, and professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary, was contacted by Pastor Eero Kuikanmäki of the Finnish Lutheran Church in Pelkosenniemi. Kuikanmäki proposed a joint mercy project between a Finnish school in his community of Kemijärvi and the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). The two organizations would join to support families of sick children, by providing financial means to purchase needed medical supplies, diapers, lodging, nursing care and other necessary mercy work.

Burlakov says, "They contacted me with a proposal to help our sick children here in Tomsk. The church knows what mercy is all about. Many children are sick and must be hospitalized to receive chemotherapy and recover from surgery and illness. Often, the stay in the hospital is long. In Russia the medical treatment is often paid from public funds. However, there are many other expenses which the hospital and the government do not cover, such as, pay for private nurses, diapers, bathing supplies, baby wipes, as well as, lodging and transportation for parents."

The money collected at the concert of the Tomsk State University Choir, (sponsored by St. Mary Lutheran Church), was matched by the Kemijärvi Schools in Finland. Every year, children from one of the schools in Kemijärvi work for one day and donate all their money for charity. For the third straight year, they send their gifts (between 1,500-1,600 euros), to Siberia, for children in Tomsk's hospitals. To date, the Tomsk children have raised \$5,000 to be matched by their counterparts in Finland. This is a clear example of the universal aspect of the Church working as an agent of mercy in a local setting.

Moscow is one of the most expensive cities in the world, in which to live. Hotel rooms and food is very expensive. Even though the expense for hospital treatment of the children and the cost of the hospital room is covered by the state, many families do not have the resources to pay for non-covered expenses. Many parents must accompany their children to hospitals in distant cities. Such treatment may last for several weeks, often requiring the parents to absorb rent or lodging expenses far beyond their ability to pay.

"It is simply impossible for many families to afford to accompany their children to places, such as Moscow, for treatments of cancer," says Burlakov. "This is why many families are forced, by the cost of treatment, to sell their apartments and cars, in order to afford to support their children's medical needs and provide needed comfort, during treatment." So the Finnish children and Tomsk congregation raise funds through volunteer donations to offset the travel and lodging expenses for these families. In many cases the parents must also hire private nurses to provide ongoing care, while the parents are at work or unable to travel or be with their children, due to financial or other reasons.

"Sometimes children are abandoned," says Burlakov, "Those infants who are sick need special medical treatment, as well as, private nurses, diapers, clothes and everything for their welfare. Nurses must also be hired to hold and cuddle the children and nurture them and be with them. They will sing songs to the children and help keep them comfortable during treatments. These infants and young children need a 'mother' to be with them, to show them human love and care. Such acts of mercy, actually saves their lives."

Pastor Kuikanmäki says that the children in the local Finnish school **Continued on page 5**

# Finding balm for the soul in the Lutheran church



Tatiana Sokolova

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giant compared to us. People in our country know little about Lutheranism and most of them are not friendly to it. It is normal to be an Orthodox believer, but to be Lutheran is strange. It is even stranger to leave the Orthodox Church for a Lutheran one. Looking from outside, it seems unwise to trust your soul to so small a church. However, Christianity in general does not seem wise from outside. We can only believe that the Lord will stay with us with His mercy.

Three years passed after I started to look for another church. It was my birthday, but I wasn't happy. I lived without a church, what sort of happiness here could be? It was an end of March, the time of Lent. The only person I could talk to about Christianity, about church, was my husband. He came home that day, saw me downhearted and said, "Do not cry, this Sunday we'll go to the Lutherans."

We came to the church to the beginning of service. At the door we were met by the smiling bishop, who showed us where to go. Many well-dressed parishioners were joyfully talking to each other. We didn't realize at first what day we visited the church on. We heard at the liturgy the congregation singing about Christ's resurrection. It was Easter!

We talked to a pastor after the service and said that we

want to join the Lutheran church. He told us that we need to study the Catechism, and it will take some time, maybe a couple of months or half a year. Probably, for those who do not think seriously about church, it could be an obstacle. However, for me it was a balm for soul. I had chance to study doctrinal basics, I had time to stop and look around. Our confirmation took place at Pentecost. So soon! I could not believe that all this happened to me. The Lord was so merciful and loving to us.

I remember very well the sermon on the first Sunday after Easter. Pastor said that Thomas did not believe not because he was unwilling or unable to believe. The question of the resurrection was too important for him, so, he wanted to be 100 percent sure. We believe easily in bad things, somehow we expect them, but we often are hesitant to believe in something good. I was in the church for several months and still everything seemed to be too good to be true. I could participate in Holy Communion. I liked to do simple things, like folding church bulletins before service or cleaning up the room after tea. I liked it because I could touch something and be assured that everything is real, it's a part of my life, and I am a part of the Church. If God gives us so much in this life, listens to us, forgives us, and saves us, then how much bigger will be His blessings there, after our death?

I do not want to divide my Christian life into two parts. I believe in one Church, as the Creed says. I am grateful to Orthodoxy for the Sacraments and first lessons. I want to remember even my pain, in order to value more what I have now. It happens to us. We cry when we suffer. When we are struck by leprosy, we long for healing. However, when we got it, we forget to come back and thank Him who healed us. I do not want to wake up one Sunday morning and think that church could wait one more week, or even two. I remember too well, how it was to get up every morning and realize that you have no place to go to. And I remember what it means to begin a new day with the understanding that there is a place where you are welcome, where the best is prepared for you, where God's Kingdom came in order to

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## Rejoicing in the gifts of God

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dwell among us. He always waits for the poor and homeless to give them all He has.

Is it possible not to love Lutheranism that so clearly distinguishes the condemning Law from the salutary Gospel? I felt all this in Orthodox Church, but could not understand and explain to myself. This caused pain; it looked so contradictory. However Lutheran teaching so simply puts everything on its proper place. This is simple. Just water, just bread and wine, just Christ, dying on the wooden cross. Salvation comes to us under these simple things.

We are inclined to rely on our houses, money, material goods. On the other hand, what is really reliable does not look such. It is too simple, sometimes we cannot see with our eyes. Invisible God, small church. The same is true of our faith, always under attacks of doubts and temptations. One cannot grasp Christianity with his own mind. We need to rely on God, to cross the abyss of sin and death on the invisible bridge.

And this crossing would not be possible if Christ by His suffering and death had not become this bridge, if He Himself would not hold our hand on the way.

***However Lutheran teaching so simply puts everything on its proper place. This is simple. Just water, just bread and wine, just Christ, dying on the wooden cross. Salvation comes to us under these simple things.***

My dad once asked, what my grandma got from God apart from pain. God will let me to see, how He wipes her tears, how He gives her eternal life, righteousness, innocence, and blessedness in His glory. Moreover, He will give this to all, who trust in joy and suffering in God's Son. ✕

## Working to show mercy

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are released from school to work for one day. The money they earn from this work in the community is donated to support this joint mercy project. Members of Pastor Kuikanmäki's congregation are students of the school. Pastor Kuikanmäki says the children used to send the money to big humanitarian organizations, like UNICEF. But when asked how the funds are used, the organizations seldom could provide detailed examples. "The children wanted to see how their money is used and in this, the SELC has been a much better partner," says Kuikanmäki. Wanting to do joint mercy work in Siberia, Kuikanmäki contacted his colleague, Pastor Pavel Khramov, in Novosibirsk. Khramov suggested some humanitarian projects and put Pastor Kuikanmäki in contact with Pastor Daniel Burlakov in Tomsk. The children from the Kemijärvi community school decided to accept Burlakov's suggestions.

The Tomsk congregation works with several secular charity organizations in the Tomsk Region. They have raised money during Advent and Lent to help families of young children receiving treatments for leukemia and other oncological illnesses. One organization with which they cooperate is Blagovest, which means "Good news bringer," This is a secular organization established to help

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Children with cancer receive the gifts donated through a joint effort involving St. Mary, Tomsk, and a Lutheran church in Finland.

# Reaching out in Tomsk

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purchase non-hospital covered services and supplies for the families of ill children. During the first year, the Tomsk congregation and Kemijärvi School provided Christmas gifts (toys and books and diapers) to children with tuberculosis in Tomsk Region hospitals.

Recently, a local television station interviewed Pastor Burlakov, concerning his congregation's mercy work.

Burlakov says, "Such work with the Finnish Lutherans and Kemijärvi School demonstrates how the church operates on more than a local level, but the mercy work of the church operates on an international level. The Tomsk community now sees that the work of the church, whether it is involved in works of mercy or witnessing the faith or living in this world together, is more than just a local activity, but the church has an international, or universal, presence."

Burlakov went on to explain how the secular world often sees the Lutheran church as many separate entities or congregations working in competition with each other – not as one body working in a unified confession, proclaiming Christ.

"Even children far, far, away want to help. They join with local children to help. We are very thankful for these kids who live so far from us, but have such kind hearts for their neighbors. Here the church is united," says Pastor Burlakov, "Lutherans around the world join together to provide humanitarian acts of mercy as She witnesses Christ and His Gospel."

Such is the work of witness, mercy and life together of the church. ✘

# *Lytkin receives honor*

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would hold until his consecration as bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church on May 6, 2007.

This event on June 8, 2014, at the Lutheran Cathedral in Tallinn, Estonia, puts an exclamation point on a life of a man who has been used by the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, to bring hope and confidence to a people dying in sin and despair. In his sermon, delivered at the Feast of Pentecost earlier that day, Bishop Lytkin expressed his work as a bishop and pastor with this words:

"... Yes, it always has been and will be, that in the world there are heroes of faith and there are ordinary people. We are of the latter. We feel fear of our Savior's call to give Him all our life and follow Him, taking the cross. Perhaps this is because our faith is weaker than the faith of the ancient saints, who gave all their possessions to the poor [Luke 12:33] and went to proclaim the Gospel. But I think that God understands this and therefore His demand to us is softer. You can start with coming to church at least every Sunday. Can you make such a sacrifice? And to pray every day, to read the Bible, to help neighbors, to bring your children to Sunday school ... It looks that without a helper we cannot do it. So ask the Holy Spirit to help you. ... The color of the Pentecost Day is red. Red means the fire of the Holy Spirit. But red also means the blood of martyrs who suffered for the witnessing of Christ—in order that we who have reach the end of times can hear and believe and be saved. And so, we now proclaim the Gospel to all who are near and far away. Happy Pentecost festival, beloved brothers and sisters! Amen." ✘

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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