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danieljohnson@siberianlutheranmissions.com
www.siberianlutheranmissions.com

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641/753-9565

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Newsletter Editor
valeriekister@siberianlutheranmissions.com

Rev. Robert Wurst
Webmaster
robertwurst@siberianlutheranmissions.com

Contributions may be sent to:

SLMS

Ascension Lutheran Church
8811 St. Joe Road
Ft. Wayne, IN 46835-1037

The newsletter for **THE SIBERIAN
LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY** is
edited by Mrs. Valerie Kister

Grace Lutheran Church
Correll, MN
3197 141st Ave
Bellingham, MN 56212
605/949-1365
valeriekister@siberianlutheranmissions.com

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Khakassia region suffers severe damage in fires

By Pavel Khramov

April 12, 2015, became a day of trial for the people in Khakassia. An abnormally hot day (26 degrees Celsius or 80 degrees Fahrenheit) and hurricane winds turned grassland flames into shafts of fire that burned the prairieland and then covered many villages. Fire flew suddenly in the night, and people barely had time to run out of their homes. Some people did not have that time.

In the Sayanogorsk area (where one of our parishes is located), many villages were seized by the fire—Sabinka, Novokursk, Novoeniseyka, Dmitrievka, Novotroitskoe, Pervomayskoem and Troitskoe. In the suburbs of Abakan and Chernogorsk, many houses were burned down.

According to the local authorities, in Khakassia more than 1,600 homes were destroyed by fire in 42 settlements. Thirty-four people died, about 100 are injured and hospitalized. About 5,000 people were left homeless and lost all their property; many did not have time to take their documents and to gather belongings.

Generally, most of the residents had to defend their homes from the

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Ludmila's story—struggles lead to faith

By Ludmila Kotova

Translated by Pavel Khramov

I was born in 1950 in Tuim. My father worked at the mine for 20 years. It badly affected his health, so he died when I was 15. My mom worked in the shop. There were five of us children in the family, with two brothers older than me and two younger. We used to work hard, as our family had a homestead, namely two cows and poultry (chickens, geese, and ducks).

After graduating from high school, I studied in the nearby town of Nazarovo. I've changed jobs quite often in my life. I worked in a kindergarten, in a canteen, and in the small factory producing soda. I always wanted to learn and to try something new.

My first husband died in the army. I was left alone with my older son, Vitaly. Now he is the pastor in our church in Tuim. I had my second son, Nikolay. Then I married Yury. When our first son, Aleksander, was born my husband committed a crime and got a 14-year sentence. When he was in prison, I visited him. There I got pregnant and had a fourth son, Yury. In prison my husband committed some crimes, too, so he was freed after 23 years. All this time, I was alone with the kids. When Yury came home from prison, he didn't want to work. He was constantly asking for money from Aleksander. I realized that we were strangers to each other so we divorced and he went to

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Sunday school grows at St. Andrew's parish

By Pavel Khramov

I cannot say that Sunday school has a long tradition in our parish. The reason is that our parish is only 23 years old. However, and this is more important, Sunday school has a history as long as the history of our church. Since the very beginning in the early 1990s, our church had good contacts with the international organization, Scripture Union. One of its focuses is helping children to read and understand the Bible. Cooperation with this organization gave a priceless experience to some of our members. However, as we grew in theological understanding, it became more and more clear that its materials and methods don't fit into the Lutheran understanding of the Bible. Thus, we gradually distanced ourselves from Scripture Union.

Until 2007, our great team of Sunday school teachers was supervised by Pastor Vsevolod Lytkin, but he wasn't able to be fully involved in teaching the class or leading teachers. Moreover, in that year he was installed as bishop of our church, so the decision was made that I should be responsible for Sunday school in our parish.

I realized that there were virtually no confessional materials for teaching the Bible to our kids. Our teachers needed to correct and then use some protestant, mostly Baptist, materials. Obviously, these books and Bible study materials taught incorrectly on the Sacraments. However, the problem lies deeper. A wrong understanding of the Sacraments involves or leads to deficient doctrine on church and ministry, and ultimately to the wrong Christology. Moreover, I noticed that the teacher's guides failed to distinguish Law and Gospel. Finally, these books turn almost all Bible stories, especially from the Old Testament, into parables about us or into instruction for Christian living. They give the impression that the Scripture speaks primarily about us, not about Christ, and that Christianity is about conducting yourself appropriately. Thus, I started to prepare the Bible study material every week for an assigned passage. At the weekly meetings with Sunday school teachers, we discussed it and planned the forthcoming class. I consider it as a big advantage to be one of the teachers. I see kids progress in understanding the Scripture. I note the points where we need to focus more. I correct myself to be clearer and more accurate in presenting Christ to children.



A boy takes part in a quiz during the start of Sunday school activities at St. Andrew's parish.

Now some of our seminary students teach classes in our Sunday school. It gives them very helpful experience. Moreover, it is beneficial for the kids as well. In Russia, more than 90 percent of school teachers are women. I think it creates in children's minds the wrong pattern of a man's role in society and, eventually, the family. So, church can correct this in some way when kids see seminarians in the classroom.

Another minister of our parish, Deacon Vitaly Smirnov, is also involved in the Sunday school. I'm sure that people in the church, and especially the children, need to see pastors teaching not only from the pulpit, although it's their primary call.

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Khakassia residents suffer loss in spring wildfires

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fire themselves—so unexpectedly quickly the events spread out. In the town of Shira, all fire-fighting vehicles were sent to protect a local oil depot while the electricity in the town was shut off and all the water pumps stopped.

Some church members did not attend Sunday services because they struggled to save their houses and to stop the fire. For example, Galina Kalintseva (a parishioner from Sayanogorsk) was putting out a fire around a house in Sabinka village. The house was saved, although neighboring houses were burned to the ground.

Maria Makhniova, our parishioner and the administrator of the Christian camp in Efremkino, along with her husband Ivan fought the fire that was literally within a few yards of a fence around the territory of the camp. All the grass was burned, but the camp buildings remained untouched.

That Sunday night, Pastor Pavel Zayakin was returning from the church service in Sayanogorsk. He hit a colt while driving through the prairieland covered by flame and smoke. Providentially, he was not hurt but the car was badly damaged.

God was especially merciful to our church members. None of them was hurt; no one's property

was damaged by fire. Parishioners in Sayanogorsk and Abakan immediately started collecting money and items for those who lost their belongings. Many people in Khakassia and outside the region donated clothes, shoes, kitchenware, linens, home appliances, and money. Altogether, 100,000 rubles (\$2,000) was collected. This sum was divided among a few families. Some got \$200, some even less, about \$60. Although it doesn't look like much, \$100 (5,000 rubles) is the typical monthly income for many people in the small villages in Khakassia. Mostly, the people spent the money to buy necessary supplies or to restore their sheds. The state authorities promised to build houses for the fire victims, but in the village people need sheds and barns as well. Pastor Zayakin says, "Receiving money and stuff from us, people were crying. They cried for the loss of a big part of their life, but also they were touched by this help from people they do not know. For them it was a sign that somebody cares for them; they are not alone in this time of grief, fear, and confusion. Though the reason is very sad, I was glad to see my parishioners so sacrificial, so careful, and so willing to help. Truly, the light of Christ shines in these good works and people glorify our Heavenly Father. As our Lord became true Man and shared with us all our hardships and pains, His Church tries to be with people in their sorrows and losses." Pray for the victims of the fires! ✕

Sunday school children grow in biblical knowledge

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We've worked out a good pattern for our studies. We start the school year with a celebration for kids and adults. They participate in Bible quizzes and games that end with tea and treats. Up to Advent, we study a book or topic from the Old Testament. During Advent we prepare a tradition performance for Christmas. Every year, the kids present something. It might be a drama, shadow play, or puppet show.

After Christmas vacation, we study a book from the New Testament. Usually it is one of the Gospels. Sometimes we choose to study the Bible lessons assigned for each Sunday. And during the whole year the kids learn the Small Catechism. I noticed that knowing it by heart forms correct theological understanding in children and adults.

Our parish is not big, so the Sunday school groups are small. Children and teenagers are divided into four age groups: toddlers (3-4 years), young children (5-7), young schoolchildren (8-11), and teenagers (12-14). There are Bible classes for older teenagers, youth, and adults.

The school year ends with Vacation Bible School. Children and adults study the Bible, do some work at the church yard, play games, and have fun.

Coordinating the Sunday school and teaching classes is not easy. Sometimes it is very tiring. However, it is also rewarding to see kids growing in their faith in Christ and in their understanding of the Bible. And one of the brightest moments is to see them confirmed and kneeling at the altar to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord.

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‘It was one more miracle for me’—Ludmila’s story



Ludmila, right, with her sons Aleksander and Yury

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Krasnoyarsk. Shortly after this, he died in a car accident.

In the beginning of the 1990s, life grew more and more difficult. I had recently given birth to Yury, so I could not go to work. We ate what we could grow.

In 1996, Pastor Pavel Zayakin came to Tuim to start a church. I had heard from a friend that there was a church where they gave away Bibles for free. I couldn't believe that such an expensive book was distributed for free. I decided to go to the service. Aleksander was 14 and didn't want to go, so I went with Yury, my youngest. At the liturgy I noticed that people were dressed up; they didn't come in casual clothes. After the service, I asked Pastor Zayakin if I could get a Bible. He said that not only I could, but should get it. I was totally happy. Before this I borrowed the Scriptures from the lady living next door. That Bible was in the Church Slavonic language, so I understood nothing. However, this Bible was in Russian. Moreover, I started to attend Bible classes where Pastor Zayakin explained the Scriptures. The reading of the Scriptures became a bliss to me. Sometimes, I just cannot stop and read big portions.

In July 1997, we went to Novosibirsk for the summer seminars. It was one more miracle for me. We lived in the simple resort spa, attended Bible lectures, and talked. It was wonderful.

I was baptized and confirmed in June 1997, together with my son Yury. Aleksander came to the church a little bit later.

Vitaly, my oldest son, was in prison at that time. I wrote him that I joined the church. He answered that he also attended Bible studies in prison, conducted by the Baptists. Pastor Zayakin, who was ordained as a deacon in December 1997, started to visit Vitaly in prison. When Vitaly came back to Tuim, people were amazed to see how he changed to the better.

Now only one son, Nikolay, is not going to church. He is

an alcoholic and it holds him very strongly. He is a good person, hardworking, but can't leave his addiction and can't come to church.

It was very difficult to live at that time. A few months before I came to the church, Nikolay said, "Mom, let's sell illegal alcohol. Then we will have something to eat." At that time, it was a quite common illegal business. I felt so sorry for my kids. Somehow I found a person who brought illegal alcohol to me and I sold it.

Often, people didn't bring money for illegal alcohol but food like homemade preserves, jam, and milk. Once they brought a big piece of meat, saying it was lamb. We ate it. Much later I found out it was dog.

When I came to church I started to think if I could continue this "business." It wasn't easy, as it was the only income for my family. But talking to Pastor Zayakin, I came to the firm conclusion that it was a sin and I should stop it. The church helped us by giving us second-hand clothes.

I wanted to help the church somehow, so I was glad when the pastor asked whether I would help as a cook in a camp. It has been a real pleasure to me since the first time Pastor Zayakin asked me to cook at the seminars or camps.

In 2003, a doctor from the Tuim clinic sent me to Abakan for examination, as he suspected I had breast cancer. In Abakan, the doctors wanted money from me; they said there were no possibilities for a free examination. I knew it wasn't true, as I came from a remote area and there were a quota of such examinations for people like me. However, I was so depressed and downhearted that I was just ready to go back home. Yury was with me and pointed to a person, saying, "He must be a chief physician."

I addressed that man and he made sure I received all the needed treatment. The doctor who examined me first said I'm okay and need to come back in a year. He was very upset I had complained. When I came back in a year, I met the same doctor. He started to yell at me, "Why are you so late? Don't you care for yourself at all?" I was very angry at that time and said to him, "Don't you remember me? It was you who said I should come back in a year!" He immediately changed his attitude, and sent me to all the necessary examinations. In a few days, I was operated on and am now cancer-free.

At that time I was scared to death. I was recalling all my sins and confessing them, but I never thought that God was unjust to me.

In Christ I found peace; the church cared for me and taught me. I saw then and I see now that I am unjust before God and to God, but He is loving and merciful anyway. ✕

Annunciation parish grows in Moscow

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In 1998, he was ordained as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELKRAS, the Lutheran Church of the German tradition in Russia) and served for two years in the Far East of Russia. Then he moved to Moscow because of a family situation. ELKRAS didn't find a place for him, so he didn't serve as pastor until 2007, when he was asked to help with a newly-formed "church."

Pastor Chernyshev didn't realize the sectarian nature of that organization and agreed to help. He hoped that this organization would develop into the confessional church.

However, in a year and a half he saw clearly that this wouldn't happen. Thus he and a few people left the sect and started to look for a confessional Lutheran church body. He said that in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, they found a firm biblical foundation, pure proclamation of the Gospel, and a strong emphasis on the education of laypeople and ministers.

Pastor Chernyshev is married to Oksana and has a 16-year-old son, Albert. His youngest son, Arthur, died in 2013 at the age of 12. His death was caused by the wrong medical treatment during an ordinary illness.

Thus [Chernyshev] and a few people left the sect and started to look for a confessional Lutheran church body

Now the parish of Annunciation has 20 members. A few of them are members of our church who moved to Moscow from different cities. The parish doesn't have its own building, so they rent a room for Sunday services. Because of this and the distances in Moscow, there are no activities during the week. Socializing (tea time), Bible studies, and catechism classes take place on Sundays, before or after the liturgy. ✕

Seeking the 'lost' Lutherans

Faith & Hope newsletter #238

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

On April 22, Pastor Andrei Lipnitsky visited the village of Oravka in the Chany district of the Novosibirsk region. This village was founded by colonists from Estonia in 1894. It even had a church building, but during Soviet times it was confiscated and reconstructed to be used as a school. About 40 people came to meet him. Pastor Lipnitsky gave Small Catechisms to everybody.

To search and visit such small villages where there are people whose ancestors confessed the Lutheran faith—this is the continuing ministry of our church.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Roman Catholic priests started to travel all over Siberia to look for villages where Roman Catholics survived. Accidentally, they found a village where people said they were Lutherans. Their ancestors came to Siberia from Poland. The Catholic priests phoned us and invited us to come to this village. It was a long trip.

The first settlers came to that place in the late 19th century. Their life was very hard. The pastor from Irkutsk came once a year. He baptized, confirmed, gave Holy Communion, and conducted weddings. The last time a pastor was there was in 1935.

Then Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin became the first pastor to visit the village in more than 60 years. Many old people talked to him about the faith of their ancestors, and what terrible persecutions they had gone through. Half of the villagers died in concentration camps during the 1930s and 1940s. People were arrested if a Bible or prayerbook was found in their home.

But the older people still remembered what their parents taught them. A woman asked by Bishop Lytkin what Holy Communion is, said she never in her life took communion. But she remembered what her mother taught. And then she quoted by heart about Holy Communion from Luther's Small Catechism.

Then she said, "Now my eyes have seen a Lutheran pastor. Now I can die." And it sounded like Luke 2:29-30. It was very touching.

"That was so long ago," Bishop Lytkin said. "But since then we have found many other villages where people have kept their faith, or even the memory of their Lutheran ancestors. We owe these people because they brought Lutheranism to Siberia. For many years we are searching for such villages and we try to do something to help their inhabitants [a]nd to talk about Jesus Christ and His Church. Sadly, we do not have many resources to do this work. We are a very small Church, and we are poor. And distances in Siberia are huge. But we try, because it is out responsibility before God."

Please pray for the safe travels of the pastors in Siberia and that they find more villages, whose inhabitants have been and will be Lutherans. ✕

Parish of the Annunciation. Pastor Chernyshev profiles



Members of the parish of the Annunciation, Moscow, with Pastor Ivan Chernyshev (center)

Editor's note: This is the first of a series of profiles on SELC congregations and pastors

The parish of the Annunciation (Moscow) is the youngest in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. A small group of about 10 people joined SELC in 2011.

Before coming to our church, this group was part of a sectarian "church" that pretends to be Lutheran. People were deceived by their former leaders, but after a couple of years some of them realized that the Gospel was not being purely preached. In 2009, a small group contacted SELC and asked whether they could become part of our church. For two years we got to know each other.

Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin and pastors of SELC visited the congregation in Moscow, teaching the Gospel and explaining confessional theology. In 2011, the group became the parish of the Annunciation, Pastor Ivan Chernyshev was accepted with his ordination, and Sergey Kiryushatov was ordained as deacon. Later on, Kiryushatov left the church and joined a Unitarian (non-Trinitarian) sect.

Pastor Chernyshev was born in 1968. As a young man, he searched for information about Christianity and realized that the Western Church was more understandable to him. In the mid-1990s, he studied at a Catholic university (Pontificia Universita Lateranense) in Rome, but was confirmed in the Lutheran church.

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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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