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IDE president shares Siberian experiences, observations

Editor's note: At the end of October and the beginning of November 2015, Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders (LCMS Iowa District East district president) participated in the conference in Novosibirsk and visited a few SELC congregations. We asked him to tell about this trip.

I was asked by Rev. Daniel Johnson to accompany him to Lithuania and Russia this past October and November. In Lithuania, I was the presenter at a pastor's conference held in Palanga [Lithuania]. It was a two-day conference and I presented on the relationship between Augsburg Confession articles V and VII with reference to article XIV. In summary, I spoke about the Office of the Holy Ministry and the reasonable, as well as, unreasonable expectations of the Office.

From Palanga, we flew to Novosibirsk where a conference was being held. I wasn't sure what my participation would be until I arrived in Novosibirsk. My plan was to present what I did in Palanga, but that would have required two days. As it turned out, I had one hour to present, so I had to combine hours of material into a short delivery. It was very difficult to do that and I fear I did not deliver a helpful presentation to the hearers. I feel bad for that, but we did the

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Yuri Lytkin reflects on trip to American congregations

Editor's note: Yuri Lytkin is a member of St. Andrew's parish, Novosibirsk, and the youngest son of Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin. This January, he and Natalia Sheludyakova, organist from the same parish, accompanied the bishop on his visit to LCMS congregation. The following interview with Yuri is about that trip.

Q: How many places did you visit? Was the travel long? Was it hard or boring to take long trips?

A: I guess we visited 14 congregations in different places. Usually, we went for an hour or two from one place to another, sometimes longer. The longest ride was from Wichita [KS] to Denver [CO], and then from Denver to Bremen [KS]. Both times we went for 500 miles. It took about seven to eight hours. Was it hard? You better ask Pastor Daniel Johnson (president of SLMS and LCMS OIM catechist to Siberia and the Baltics), who drove us. It was never boring. We saw interesting places. For example, on the way from Denver to Bremen, we stopped in a small town with just a few

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Siberian Lutheran congregations mark a half-week of Ash Wednesday services

By Pavel Khramov

This year, Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) went to the congregation in Khakassia to conduct the liturgy of Ash Wednesday. Bishop Lytkin tries to visit different SELC parishes throughout each year, especially at the time of important festivals or days in the Church calendar.

The beginning of Lent is definitely an important day. Our parishioners want to start these days of fasting and anticipation of Easter with the ritual of Ash Wednesday. The cross painted on our foreheads with the ashes profoundly reminds us of our sinfulness and mortality, as well as the sacrifice of God's Son for us.

Bishop Lytkin said in his sermon: "We kneel at the altar and the priest puts the cross of ashes on our foreheads. He puts it on and says the same words to everybody—old and young, ill and still healthy, strong men and beautiful women.

"The priest says that each one of them is dust. Death doesn't take into consideration how beautiful, how smart, or how old we are.

The cross painted on our foreheads with the ashes profoundly reminds us of our sinfulness and mortality, as well as the sacrifice of God's Son for us

"Remember, man, thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.' Remember as well that God gave to you the Savior. To you and to all. Christ died for us on the cross. He took the punishment

we should bear.

"Our death was extinguished by His death. Our condemnation was laid upon Christ. We deserved it, but He bore it. His death became our life, and the instrument of execution—the cross—became the sign of salvation. That's why the ashes on our foreheads took the salutary form of the cross.

Our parishioners were so willing to start Lent with Ash Wednesday that the bishop traveled around Khakassia the whole week and served Ash Wednesday in Abakan, Ash Thursday in Touim, Ash Friday in Sayanogorsk, and Ash Saturday in Taskino.

Of course, all these "ash days" sounds kind of odd, but with our distances it was the only way to start Lent with this profound ritual. ✕



A child stands nearby as the altar and ashes are prepared for the liturgy of Ash Wednesday conducted by Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin in Khakassia. Several 'Ash Wednesday' services were conducted on different days in different congregations of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church this year

Saunders shares impressions of Siberia

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Rev. Daniel Johnson, left, and Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders shown in the town of Petropavlovka

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best we could with the time allotted.

I found the level of theological knowledge of the presenters to be superb. I could only understand the English speakers, but what I heard was thought-provoking while remaining faithful to the Holy Scriptures. There was not a great deal of reference to the Lutheran Confessions, but the topics did not necessarily call for that.

I was in Russia 11 years ago presenting at the summer seminars, and I am glad to say that I have seen great growth and strength in the Lutheran Church of Siberia under the leadership of Bishop

Vsevolod Lytkin and at the seminary under Alexey Streltsov. The training of the pastors is sound and comprehensive. They graduate with a full knowledge of the Word of God, as well as the systematic application of the Law/Gospel dynamic to the lives of their congregations. I was able to conclude this by the private conversations I had with each of the men listed above.

After the conference in Novosibirsk, we traveled by plane and train to the eastern section of Siberia. The train ride was mostly at night, so we slept but the ride was smooth and comfortable. Wherever we went, I was received with great respect. Whether it was a house-church or one that met in a separate building, many souls were in attendance to receive the Holy Treasures God gives in Divine Service.

At one of the house-churches, a woman said to me, "Please don't forget us. Come back." What she meant was this: When the priest is here, so is the Word of God and Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. He feeds and they eat; he preaches and they hear; he absolves and they are forgiven. Daily life has its challenges and tough times, but they knew where to be in order to receive the Goodness of our Lord. I was impressed by the faithfulness of the people. I also see a very high respect for the Pastoral Office in Russia that is beginning to wane in America. Much conflict in America arises over this topic, and I think the LCMS would do well to observe our sister church body in Siberia on this doctrine.

The church in Chita was so filled with members that I decided to sit in a chair outside the sanctuary so as not to take a seat from any of the regular members. A lady saw me waiting and she instructed me to go sit in the church and not in the hallway. It was important to her, based on her respect for the Pastoral Office, that a priest, even a visiting one, not sit in the hall but in the midst of the assembly.

One teenage boy at a house-church was wearing a sweater with the American Declaration of Independence printed on the front. I was able to ask him if he knew what that was and he said he did not. Using a little bit of our American history I explained. I then transitioned into an explanation of the real declaration of independence earned for us in the war fought by Christ Jesus on the cross against sin, death, and the devil. His victory was signed in His own blood, granting us forgiveness and freedom from eternal death. It was an impromptu moment I will cherish.

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Yuri Lytkin sees commonality in worship, confession



Yuri Lytkin's travels in the U.S. included a journey through Colorado

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houses. Many of them were obviously abandoned; it was clear there were almost no inhabitants there. However, there was a big Roman Catholic church building, clean and well-kept. This contrast was striking.

Q: Today in Russia, one may hear a lot of negative things about the USA. How did people treat you?

A: All people we met were kind to us. One night I talked to a group of young people over a meal. They understand that the current situation is primarily a situation between our governments. The common people were open, and talked to us with interest and warmth.

Q: What attracted your attention most about American churches?

A: I would say, it was the solemnity of the liturgy. I'd even call the American services more colorful. For example, the prayers are chanted, not just read. In our church, some do it, too, but it is the exception. The music in general was impressive.

Q: What, in your opinion, may we take from the practices of the churches you visited?

A: I liked congregational singing, the hymns they use. In some places, the choirs were great. They didn't just perform, but were really "integrated" into the liturgy. If we do better in this area, it would enrich our worship. Of course, it is not the main reason why we come to church, but good hymns and good singing teaches, adorns, and promotes the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Q: Did you feel like a stranger in American churches?

A: Not really. People were very kind and welcoming. The liturgy was very similar to ours. In some places we even chanted "Amen" to the same tune. Thus, this common way of worship underlined and enforced our common confession.

Q: Were you misunderstood because of cultural differences?

A: Once, I was walking around in Fort Wayne and, as the weather was cold and snowy, I was muffled up in many pieces of cloth. Some teenagers took me for a homeless person. They were very friendly. They stopped their car by me and said they had just chatted with a homeless person and wondered if I was one, too. I said I was just walking around. They wished me good luck and went away. It was funny. I guess in such weather, not many people like to take a walk in America.

Q: You were to the United States about 10 years ago. What changes did you notice?

A: Well, I don't remember much from my last visit. For example, though I spent a week in Fort Wayne that time, I didn't remember that there is a pond on the seminary campus.

Q: Was there anything in America that you'll be missing in Russia?

A: First of all, the friendliness. I've never seen people being so kind to each other. The first days, I even feel tired of constant smiling. We do not do it so much. Second, I like American food. I definitely will miss it.

Q: Thank you very much, Yuri. ✕



The Lytkins enjoy a meal in an American home during their recent trip to the U.S.

Yekaterinburg church hosts educational projects

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Evangelical Lutheran Church. Summer theological seminars organized with the help of Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne, IN) and Lutheran Theological Seminary (Novosibirsk) have been held in Yekaterinburg since 1997. Educational projects, such as these seminars, biblical school, and conferences, are very important in forming the congregation in the city of Yekaterinburg and in the area.

Pastors Sergei Glushkov (married to Tatyana and father of three children—Anna, 23, Fyodor, 19, and Elena, 5) and Alexey Trapeznikov (married to Svetlana and father of two children—Maria, 18, and Daria, 13) were leaders of that initial group. They studied and graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary at the time when “The Russian Project” was being operated. In 2003 and 2004, respectively, they were ordained as pastors of the Siberian Lutheran Church. Their faithfulness and perseverance in preaching the Word resulted in establishing a few congregations in the Ural Mountains region.

For several years, the congregation rented places for Sunday services. Sometimes it helped to connect with new people, but whenever the church moved to another place some people stopped attending services. Finally, in 2006, with financial support from SLMS, the parish in Yekaterinburg bought premises in an office building. When a church has its own place, it has the freedom to gather whenever it needs to. Thus, besides worship services and Bible and catechism classes, “mission activities” are also held. For example, the “movie club” gathers to watch and discuss movies and Tatyana Glushkova leads a hand-made workshop. Pastor Alexey Trapeznikov’s two daughters are musicians, and they play music at the services.

One of the unusual aspects of this congregation is their active and rather productive use of social media and the Internet. Information about coming services and events are regularly published through these means. Young people in particular appreciate this way of communication. ✕

Siberian observations

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There was also a moment when I observed another commonality between Russian and American Lutherans. As we arrived at the house, a teenage girl and her friend were just leaving to go somewhere. We asked if she was going to return for Divine Service and she said she would. She did not return. Maybe she had an unexpected conflict and tried to get back, but she was not there. We have the same challenge in America. Whether it is peer pressure or a lack of appreciation for God’s gifts, they too struggle to be in church.

There will always be much work to do this side of heaven with our young people. We need not fret. We have the Word, and the Word has crushed the head of Satan and declared victory for our side in the resurrection from the dead. It is our calling to remain faithful to His Word and not try to figure out non-biblical ways to attract our youth to church.

I was asked what was most negative about the trip. Of course, being away from my wife for an extended period of time is difficult. In some of the places the rudimentary facilities were a challenge, but we got by. The weather was very cold for me. It was about a 70 degree (Fahrenheit) difference from my home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I am glad I brought my winter coat, hat, and gloves.

The most positive experience is the brotherhood I share with the bishop and rector of the seminary. I find them to be very faithful men who love Christ and His Church. They wish to prepare the best shepherds possible to feed each flock and to oversee the doctrine and practice of the Church with great care.

I value my time in Lithuania and Russia. I thank my brothers and sisters in Siberia for my time in Russia, and pray for God’s blessings to be with them always. ✕



Sts. Peter and Paul parish returns Lutheranism to Urals



The congregation of Sts. Peter and Paul, Yekaterinburg, on Easter 2012

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

The SELC congregation of Sts. Peter and Paul in Yekaterinburg (the Ural Region) was founded in the mid-1990s. However, the history of the Lutheran church there goes back much further. The first Lutherans came there 300 years ago. The first school in the city was destroyed and the pastor was forced to leave Russia or die in the camps in Siberia.

In the early 1990s, a group of Lutherans restored the congregation and became a part of the Siberian
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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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