

The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society



Fall Brings a New Year of Sunday School

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By the Rev. Pavel Khramov

Each chapter in the Small Catechism has a subtitle “As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.” Thus Luther reminds parents about their responsibility to bring children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). In the Preface to the Small Catechism he also admonishes ministers of the Word to teach all people, especially the young: “Therefore I entreat and adjure you all for God’s sake, my dear sirs and brethren, who are pastors or preachers, to devote yourselves heartily to your office, to have pity on the people who are entrusted to you, and to help us inculcate the Catechism upon the people, and especially upon the young.” So, Sunday schools in the church were established to help parents bring up their kids as good Christians.

In St. Andrew’s parish of SELC Sunday School has functioned for many years. Despite the fact that our parish is relatively young, we have now in our classes kids of those kids, who were the first students of our Sunday School.

Continued on page 6

An Interview with the President of SLMS: The Rev. Daniel S. Johnson, Part 2

By the Rev. Larry Beane

Continued from the last issue:

What was your scariest experience in Russia?

When my wife and I traveled to Siberia in 2010, we were stranded in Moscow (due to the volcano in Iceland shutting down all airline traffic in Europe). We were on the way from Novosibirsk to Frankfurt, Germany. I had a mobile phone with a Russian SIM card for emergencies like this. I contacted Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin, who was in Novosibirsk, and he put us into contact with a lady who was a member of the Moscow SELC congregation. I knew very little Russian language at that time. She found us a place to stay with another member of the Moscow congregation. Our host arranged for some of her university students to take us on a tour to a museum in downtown Moscow. We traveled into downtown from her apartment in the outskirts of Moscow by bus and subway early in the morning. We were arriving back to her apartment late after midnight. It was the last bus of the night. However, it did not stop at the bus stop where we were supposed to get off. I did not notice we had missed our stop until several minutes after the bus had driven past the designated stop. I called our host on my mobile phone, who was waiting for us at the bus stop. She told me to give the phone to someone sitting next to us on the bus. She told the fellow passenger on the bus our situation and asked this stranger to take care of us. The stranger helped us stop the bus, got off the bus with us, and waved down a taxi and gave the taxi driver directions how to get us to our proper location. To make a long story short, we were eventually reunited with our host. But we were very concerned, when we missed our stop, how we would get reconnected with our host. The battery on my mobile phone was very low and if I had run out of power before we could communicate, it would have been a much more stressful situation. But, I did have our host's address written on a piece of paper. But what made this situation my "scariest experience" was because I had heard many stories about tourists being robbed by dishonest Moscow taxi drivers late at night. When my wife tells this story, she calls the stranger on the bus "our guardian angel." Perhaps he was! After he secured a taxi for us, he disappeared. We never saw him again!

One of the most shocking things I have seen in Siberia was in 2003. I witnessed a lady who was 40-50 years old intentionally step in front of a bus. There was nothing I could do to stop her. I stood there and watched her wait for the bus to approach and at the last moment, she stepped in front of the bus. Needless to say, she died instantly! This was a very real example of the demoralization of the Siberian people and the need for the Church to make a difference in the lives of people. This is why the SLMS seeks to make it possible for pastors and congregations in Siberia to preach Christ and His hope of salvation and a different life, for such demoralized people.

What is the funniest thing that you've seen in Russia?

I have seen many things over the years which I have thought was strange or "funny." Maybe the strangest was when I flew from Novosibirsk to Chita. I kept thinking I was hearing a chicken clucking on the airplane. About half way through the flight, I got up to use the lavatory and two seats behind me was a passenger with a cage on her lap. Inside the cage was a chicken! This is probably the strangest thing I have seen in Russia.

One time I saw a man driving a car down the highway between cities, literally, with no top on the car. The car looked as though it had been rolled and he just cut off the top with a chop-saw, windshield and everything... He was driving down the road in a wrecked car, with nothing above the doors except an open-air cockpit, wearing goggles and a scarf around his neck. I am sure there are other things, just as strange, that I have seen over the years, but cannot remember them at this moment.

There are also some embarrassing moments I have experienced. I remember when I was in Chita several years ago. There is a deaf congregation there. The deaf people are very kind people and always want to communicate with me. One day, as I was preparing to leave, one of the deaf ladies had a gift she wanted to give to me. When I received it, I wanted to express my appreciation. I thought I had learned the Russian sign language well enough to sign, "Thank you!" When I gave the sign, everyone laughed! I had mistakenly told her to take her pants off! But they were very gracious and understood that I was learning the language and forgave my social *faux pas*.

Continued on Page 4

Khakassia Summer Camp

By the Rev. Pavel Khramov



Family camp was held this summer in Khakassia. Such a camp takes place for several years already, so it is possible to call it “traditional.” This year its name was “Glade.” Tatiana Strukova, St. Andrew’s parish member, was director of the camp for the first time. She told about the camp and answered a few questions.

Village Efremkino in Khakassia has been hosting family camp already four times. This time camp “Glade” took place from 16th to 22nd of July.

Guest courtyard, which received us once again, is situated in a scenic place, which includes mountain range of Kuznetskiy Alatau, prairies adjoining rocky mountains and mountain river Belyi Ius. This time we decided to devote more time to acquaintance with the surrounding beauty of nature. The theme of our camp was “The Tree of Life” and it had a spiritual and practical meaning. We were looking for it in the Bible and in the surrounding nature.

Almost 50 people, mostly families with children, during the week of Bible studies, studied the Word about creation, fall, and redemption from sin. We also had master classes and various programs where everyone could find something to do according to his or her interests and liking, such as weaving, painting on canvas, study of the laws of physics, secrets of cryptography, and basics of martial arts.

After that we all would go hiking – every day we discovered new places in the surroundings of Efremkino,

such as the natural rocky massif Tagyz-Az, through which the famous Trail of Ancestors – the path of ancient inhabitants of this place – passes. It has a sacred meaning for them. This trail has many grottos, ridges and obstacles on the way. We also visited an abandoned marble mine – a sad example of poor economic management of men. In addition, we saw river Belyi Ius banks and its abundance of herbs and plants, visited caves and much more. In addition to testing our endurance during the hikes, we had to deal with surprises from nature such as rain downpours and squally winds, which almost every day made us nervous but we held fast to our plans. Many children (and likely adults too) were overcoming their fears of nature’s hardships and obstacles.

Every evening during the common gathering we recollected the events of the days and would return once again to the themes of the Bible studies. In addition to serious events, we most certainly had games, contests and fun performances. And, of course, every evening we organized bonfire with singing guitar songs and sharing soulful talks, dreams, and plans for tomorrow.

Camp Statistics:

- **Number of participants** – 48 people, including 25 children.
- **Geography of the participants** – from Chelyabinsk to Verhniy Suetuk of Krasnojarsk Krai.
- **Number of families** – 14, including 6 clergyman’s families.

Some Questions for Tatiana:

Why do you think this camp is important?

It seems to me that now a family, namely parents and children, has not so many chances to be together. Of course, we talk to our kids at home, we go to the play, visit friends, and sometimes we just walk outside together. However, do children see their parents different? Do parents know their children’s other side? When nobody is evaluating us, when we do not pretend to be spotless and perfect. When we can enjoy the beauty of the nature, when we overcome difficulties. I see this opportunity as very important, especially in the context of the Holy Scripture, which we study together here, in the camp.

I see as very valuable for kids and for adults to be in different setting, to meet different people. It helps to

Continued on Page 4

Khakassia Summer Camp

Continued from Page 3

understand that life is various, to find something new in you and in your family members. If I would have power to form a budget of the state, I'd include the item "Christian family camps."

Was this camp different from the previous ones?

We had more participants, against about 30 last years, we had almost 50. I was pleased to see the whole families – not just mothers with children, but both parents with their kids. It was our intention, and we worked hard, to bring fathers as well.

This camp was more intense. We hardly had free time; the day was full with hiking, Bible classes, workshops, and evening discussions. In the previous camps the program was more relaxed. From one hand it was good – I've learnt a lot. From another hand it left too little time for informal fellowship with others.

Previous years we enjoyed beautiful weather. However this year it was quite unpredictable, sudden heavy rains made us to change plans.

What was the most difficult in your role as director of the camp?

The most difficult was to make impartial, fair decisions. Sometimes I was confused and didn't know what to do. I'm very thankful to those who shared my duties and the burden of responsibility. I'm also thankful to those who forgave my mistakes and faults. Sometimes I couldn't restrain myself from emotional speech towards others when I was sure that people do something wrong.



In opposite, what did bring joy and inspire you?

Support and help from other people did inspire me. The most important was that I heard from children and adults how significant and necessary was this time of family and Christian fellowship. I believe that our kids will remember this camp, its hardships and joys. I also believe that only by rousing ourselves, exploring the world around we can see the beauty and richness of God's creation.✘

Interview with the Rev. Daniel Johnson

Continued from Page 2

Another time when I was at a restaurant with a group of Siberians I wanted to pay for the meal. I tried to express this to the young lady sitting next to me. After I had stated my desire to pay the bill, she looked at me and in very clear English said, "Why do you want to cry for me?" So, there are, indeed, many occasions for embarrassment when learning a foreign language.

Another funny thing happened to me in 2003. I took my two children with me to Siberia for the summer seminars. Rachel had just graduated from high school. She was 18 and Luke was 15. They did very well and still, after 14 years, talk about their 25 days in Siberia. Rachel had taken Russian language classes in high school as part of a government grant to the school district. Her Russian skills were good enough to order food at a restaurant. She ordered a small pepperoni pizza and a drink for her and Luke. I tried to order in Russian, a small Hawaiian pizza and a Coke. They received their pizzas and drinks and I received a plate of French fries... I received no pizza -- but I did receive a Coke. (I guess it is difficult to mistranslate "Coke") So, my children continue to tease me about this event. Whenever we go to a pizza restaurant they ask me if I will order a pizza or French fries! However, I can confidently say that my Russian language skills have improved considerably since that day. A couple of years ago I ordered a pizza in a Siberian restaurant and received everything, just as I ordered. I immediately texted my daughter and son to celebrate with them my success at ordering a pizza in Russian.

But these are but a few incidents I can remember at this moment!

To Be Continued

The Bishop Interviewed About His Travels

You travel quite a lot. How many parishes do you visit every month?

If to divide all my travels it will be two parishes per month. Of course it is an average number. Sometimes I stay in Novosibirsk for several weeks in a row, sometimes I take long trips visiting a few places. My dream and wish is to visit every parish at least two times a year. Some congregations located closer to Novosibirsk, and I'm there more often. Some congregations located quite far away, and we need more time and more money to get there.

Let us talk about statistics a little more. How many kilometers per month do you travel?

Well, the distance between Novosibirsk and Chita is about 2,000 km on the map and about 3,000 km by the road. The distance between Novosibirsk and Moscow is 2,800 km on the map and a bit more than 3,300 km by the road. Thus, even flying to these cities twice a year gives us almost 20,000 km. In addition, we have parishes in Ekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk. These cities are located at the distance of 1,600 km from Novosibirsk. Abakan is 1,000 km away from Novosibirsk. With parishes in Novokuznetsk and Tomsk, I would say that I travel about 50,000 km per year, which gives about 4,000 km (2,500 miles) per month.

How do you travel usually? Is it by plane, train, or car?

Yes, it is plane, train, and car. It depends on money on big part. Air tickets are quite expensive. The train tickets might be of the same price, if to go by second class carriage, which is rather comfortable. So, if it is possible moneywise, much better to travel by plane. For example, flight to Chita takes three hours; train to Chita takes two days (48 hours). If the distance is not too big, still it is much easier to fly. For example, to Abakan plane goes in one hour. Train goes 24 hours; and going by car will take 15 hours non-stop drive. Of course, such driving exhausts. However, often I travel to Abakan by car, because we have three parishes in Khakassia and a few places, where our church members live. To visit all these towns and villages is possible only if you drive a car.

What does it mean to go by car in Siberia?

Well, the big majority of our roads are not smooth (to say it nice). They are narrow, even federal "high-ways" have only two lanes, one for each direction. A lot of trucks, tractors, and other agricultural vehicles are on the road. So, you may go with a speed of 30 mph for an hour, because you cannot drive by these trucks. You need

to stop regularly in order to clean your headlights from dirt; otherwise you can't see the road. So, after ten hours of such driving you feel like a zombie. You can walk, you can do some simple actions, but your brain is switched off.

Why then do you travel so much? We have just a few parishes without local minister.

Still, we have such places. Unfortunately, we cannot send people there. Even if we have candidates, we do not have enough resources. I feel sorry for our parishioners in such places, and also I feel guilty that I, as Bishop, cannot provide for them regular liturgy, teaching, pastoral care. People there sometimes think that nobody cares for them. Everything is so poor and dirty around, probably, nobody wants to come to such place. That's why we try to visit them as often as possible. It is true even to the places, where we have ministers. People always are very glad to see visitors. For them it is a sign, that the church didn't forget them.

Secondly, I try to take some of the burden off our priests. Many of them have secular job, so it means they work five days a week. On Saturday they get ready for the service. Often they have Bible classes or time for private confession. On Sunday they conduct the liturgy, some of them going to the second parish after lunch. Thus they do not have any day off. When I come to the parish, I take for a while some of this work, giving pastor chance to take breath.

The last question. Do you try to be in Novosibirsk on big celebrations, or do you visit different parishes?

As a rule, before the big church festivals the fight for the Bishop begins. Priests start to call me and say, "You haven't been here for a while, this time you need to serve at our parish. Church in Novosibirsk had enough of you." I feel the struggle within as well. From one hand I'm a senior priest ("Pfarrer") in St. Andrew's parish, so, I'm responsible for this congregation. From another hand I belong to the whole church and other parishes have the right to have me at the big festival. So, I try to switch. One year I'm in Novosibirsk, another year I'm somewhere else. I love to be in different parishes of our church, to serve people there, to help our priests.

Thank you very much! ✕

New Year of Sunday School

Continued from page 1

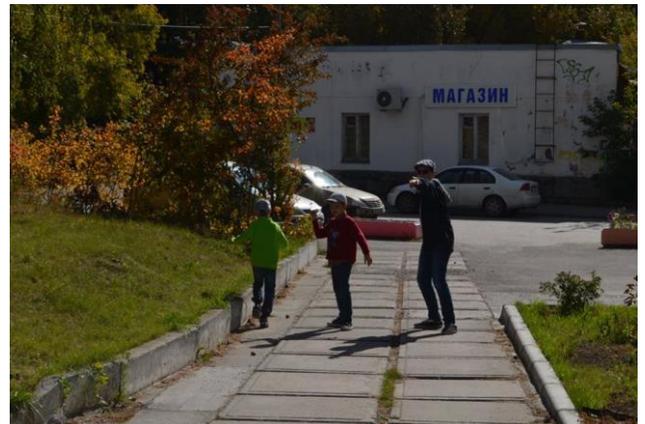
Several years ago we decided that it is too plain, modest, even boring just to begin Bible classes in September. We organized a fun day, where children and adults played games, answered Bible quiz, drank tea with cakes. It was so much fun that we repeated it the next year, and the next year, and the next year... Now to start a new year in Sunday school with "fun day" became a good tradition, almost "a matter of fact". Sometimes we form family teams of kids and their parents, who compete each other in knowledge of the Bible and different games. One year we had Sunday school team, team of adults, and seminary team. Of course, we differentiated the tasks, and still our kids didn't look like an underdog.



Such fun day gives kids a chance to interact outside the class. It is also a good opportunity for their parents to be with them. Finally, it is fun, and we want to keep something of this atmosphere in our classes, because we are sure, that the Word of God is amazing, fascinating, and tremendous. Studying the story of Christ, told us in the Old and New Testament, is anything but boring or trivial. Please pray that God would bless Sunday school teachers to hand over this attitude to children. Please pray for parents that they would remember their responsibility to raise children in steadfast faith. Pray for kids themselves that they would never leave the path of the Lord. ☒



This year we were lucky that one of the few sunny days in September was on Sunday. So we could go outside, though we always have "plan B" to move into the building. Small teams of kids were moving from station to station where they tried to guess the fruit by its taste, or to construct a paper plane, or to answer the Bible quiz. They also tried to play *gorodki*, a Russian game, where you need to knock out wooden blocks with a throwing-stick. The final game was to recognize a hymn by its first notes. After playing outside it was really nice to have tea with pastries and tarts and get small prizes.



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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