



THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia

Dear Friends and Supporters of the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (SLMS);

The following letter explains (1) How the remarkable seminary in Novosibirsk was established through the joint efforts of Concordia Theological Seminary and the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation, following the fall of the tyrannical Soviet Empire; (2) how the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society came to be involved in supporting this endeavor; and (3) how you can help in the five-year strategy to save the seminary from being closed.



In April, 1996 Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, the newly elected President of CTS and Dr. William Weinrich, Academic Dean, were invited to a meeting in St. Louis with Rev. Lawrence Burgdorf and Dr. Wallace Schulz. They were asked if Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne (CTS) would be interested in accepting a significant donation from the Marvin M. Schwann Charitable Foundation in order to develop what would come to be called the “Russian Project.” The original project charter included three goals: (1) Preparation of men for the pastoral ministry on the Fort Wayne campus to replace the hundreds of pastors killed by the communists. (2) Assist Lutherans in Siberia in establishing a seminary in Russia for the training of pastors and lay leaders. (3) Work with the Russians in the former Soviet Union in organizing evangelism/catechetical Summer Seminars. Since then, nearly forty people have studied in Fort Wayne (including six women



who now serve as translators, church musicians, and deaconesses). These students came from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, and Latvia. Over the past 20 years, hundreds of laity have attended the annual evangelism and catechetical Summer Seminars held in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia.

On September 19, 1996, President Wenthe received a letter from Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, written on behalf of the west Siberian Christian Mission:

“For many years, we think and dream about the foundation of a Confessional Training Center (Seminary) in Siberia. After years of official Atheism the people are mostly unbelieving...As Lutherans we know that only Confessional Lutheran teaching can give people the pure understanding of the Christian faith so that they could find real comfort in the true Gospel.... Also, our Christians need to know how to resist the liberal theological influence that is growing in Russia at present



time. According to our experience of studying on the Fort Wayne campus in the summer of 1995, and after our experience this past summer of having professors in Novosibirsk, I can say that only the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can help us in Siberia to fulfill our dream and only your Seminary can help Russian Lutherans to establish a training center in Siberia.... So, we ask you to assist us in setting up this training center in Siberia. We don't know how long this religious freedom will last in our country. So, we need to start education project here as soon as possible.”

In September, Wenthe and Weinrich met with Synodical President Al Barry in Chicago and received his approval and enthusiastic encouragement to press forward with the project. Alexey Streltsov was appointed by the Siberian Lutheran Church to work with CTS to establish a new Seminary in Novosibirsk. This involved recruiting students, locating facilities to house them and their families, designing the curriculum, building a library, identifying and scheduling short term visiting professors from the LCMS and a multitude of other tasks. A house was purchased, remodeled and dedicated in July 1997. Classes began in October with short term visiting professors from the LCMS. In 1998 Rev. Alan Ludwig was deployed to serve as a full-time professor. Then on February 14, 2000, the growing Seminary was given the unexpected opportunity to move to a more adequate building in the center of Akademgorodok (Academic City). A former bank building was remodeled and houses the Seminary as well as the congregation of St. Andrews, where Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin serves, and the SELC Consistory. Over the past 20

years, nine Lutheran seminaries were established in Russia, Central Asia, Ukraine and the Baltics. As of today, five have been closed, and the remaining four are struggling to survive. Of these four, Novosibirsk has, without question, the strongest faculty and commitment to confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice. Its academic qualifications are stellar and more importantly the seminary understands that its purpose is to serve the church, to prepare the best pastors possible to faithfully preach, teach, conduct the liturgy, and travel across the vast land to give pastoral care to the faithful and reach out to the lost. It is painful to imagine what will happen to Lutheranism in Russia if the Seminary were to be closed.



When the first pastors graduated from the Fort Wayne and Novosibirsk Seminaries, the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church consisted of two, newly established mission congregations. Seminary graduates were sent into the mission field to plant new churches. The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society was organized in 2002 to raise funds to support these pastors and their mission stations. Today, the SELC has 23 pastors and 25 congregations and

preaching stations in cities and towns from Moscow to Khabarovsk on the Pacific Ocean serving about 3000 baptized members.

The 2009-2010 academic year was a major milestone. The Seminary achieved self-sufficiency -- with the exception, of financial support. In November 2009, the Seminary received the long-awaited License for Education from the Russian Ministry of Education. It was also the first year that all the classes were taught by the local faculty. The indigenous, LCMS trained, faculty have earned graduate degrees in theology and will soon have two faculty members with doctorates. The facilities: classrooms, offices, technology, student apartments etc. are excellent. It has the best theological library in Russia when it comes to supporting Lutheran curriculum and research. The sole drawback threatening the stability and survival

of the Seminary is the capacity of being fiscally self-sufficient. The SELC continues to grow, but it will take many years before it can support the Seminary on its own.

The “Russian Project” began as a “dream” of the Schwan Charitable Foundation and by the grace of God became a reality through the generous on-going financial support of the Foundation over the past two decades, and the dedication, sacrifice, and theological strength of the President and faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. The support of LCMS President Alvin Barry was also indispensable.

With the election of Pres. Harrison in 2010, the long overdue fellowship status with the SELC was quickly and rightly approved. The Seminary is now a strong independent institution fully capable of self-governance. It is no longer necessary for CTS to send professors, oversee the administration of the seminary or serve as the channel for the transference of financial support from the Schwan Foundation. Under the Harrison administration, fiscal responsibility was transferred to the LCMS Office of Church Relations.

In 2017, the LCMS experienced a serious shortfall in its fund-raising for theological education (i.e. Global Seminary Initiative). For the most part, the Schwan



Foundation has been the sole source of funding for the Novosibirsk Seminary. This cannot continue indefinitely. The Schwan Foundation has requested that the primary stakeholders (CTS, LCMS Church Relations) explore alternate avenues of support. It has become clear to all those involved that the financial strategy must include raising funds to cover the cost of the annual operations of the Seminary and building an endowment for future operations.

At the request of Dr. Collver and LCMS Church Relations, the SLMS was asked to assist with fund raising and to put together a strategy leading to the point where

the Seminary no longer requires financial support from the Schwan Charitable Foundation.

If you feel moved to be a part of this important work or have any questions, feel free to contact any of the SLMS Siberian Seminary Endowment Committee members.

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Yours in Christ,



Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

Chairman of SLMS Endowment Fundraising Committee



ADDENDUM



In August of 2000 Rector Alexei Streltsov articulated the foundational principles and goals of the Seminary in an open letter that appeared on line in Russian and English. Today, his thought provoking observations remain as true and insightful as they were seventeen years ago.

Streltsov quoted 2 Timothy 2:2, “...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” He then explained,

“We in Novosibirsk are convinced that in our day serious seminary training comes closest to the meaning of Paul’s words in this passage. It is neither lay discipleship training or short term leadership preparation, but a serious effort that makes demands upon both teacher and student. After all, the Apostles themselves spent no fewer than three years in the ‘seminary’ of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After 70 years of devastating atheism and 10 years of infiltration of all kinds of sects and cults into Russia, people will not be satisfied with the shallow talker who is no different from the pop psychologist. People long for deep theology and for the real sacraments. By ‘deep theology’ I do not mean scholastic construction, but a truly Trinitarian and incarnational hermeneutic that alone is able to offer hope to people amidst this world of despair and chaos.

It is no secret that, humanly speaking, the state of modern Lutheranism as well as that of virtually all other Christian confessions is lamentable. Many people no longer recognize Holy Scripture as the authentic Word of God. Various churches practice the ordination of women into ecclesiastical ministry. There are even homosexual pastors and bishops in certain places. And so-called conservatives among Lutherans, in their attempt to protect the Bible, all too often unite with the conservative Protestant camp, thus

making their worship and practically the whole of their theology barely distinguishable from that of the Methodists or Baptists.

We do not know the future of the Lutheran Church in the West—in Europe and in America, nor do we know the future of the Lutheran Church in Russia and in Siberia. But in view of the decay of Christianity in the West, it is not entirely impossible that the



Lutheran Church in Russia will have something to offer to the Western world in the future, regardless of what exigencies it may experience itself.”¹

Please mail donations to:

The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (Seminary Support)

Bob Kiefer, Ascension Lutheran Church

8811 St. Joe Road

Fort Wayne, IN 46835

or

Visit our Website (<https://www.siberianlutheranmissions.org>) to donate on line.

The SLMS is a 501(c)(3) organization, registered in Indiana, and a RSO of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.



¹ Alexey Streltsov, “Letter from the Rector,” August 31, 2000.