

THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



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By The Rev. Larry Beane

We LCMS Lutherans are generally not used to the idea of a bishop, although we do somewhat approximate it with our presidents—those at the District level as well as our Synod President.

One difference between our systems of church polity is that the Synod and District Presidents are typically not serving a parish (President Harrison is an exception to this rule). For good or for ill, a man serving in the position of ecclesiastical oversight in the LCMS typically does not have an altar and a pulpit, and often, the congregations under his care are autonomous with regard to its practices—even in matters like closed communion and the role of the laity in the congregation. Often, the presidents can only appeal to the congregations and pastors under their oversight to voluntarily comply with synod guidelines and ancient church customs.

In the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, they have retained the church polity that the reformers themselves desired to preserve, but in many cases, could not. According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 14:

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It is our greatest wish to maintain church-polity and the grades in the Church [old church-regulations and the government of bishops], even though they have been made by human authority [provided the bishops allow our doctrine and receive our priests]. For we know that church-discipline was instituted by the Fathers, in the manner laid down in the ancient canons, with a good and useful intention.... We know that our Confession is true, godly, and catholic.... We will gladly maintain ecclesiastical and canonical government, provided the bishops only cease to rage against our Churches. This our desire will clear us both before God and among all nations to all posterity from the imputation against us that the authority of the bishops is being undermined.

German churches were forced to have pastors ordaining other pastors, as the bishops chose to remain within the Roman Catholic Church and refused to ordain priests in Evangelical congregations. This was not the case in Scandinavia—as several bishops adopted the Lutheran confession of faith and retained the polity of the grades of ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon. Through its mother church, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the SELC had its bishop consecrated in the usual canonical manner by other consecrated bishops.

But there is more to the polity of the SELC than retaining the ancient custom. By virtue of his office, Bishop Vsevolod is indeed the pastor of all SELC congregations and pastors. He has much more authority than a District or Synod President, but also much more spiritual responsibility. As the pastor of churches stretching from Moscow to Chita, Bishop Vsevolod spends a lot of time on the road, in the words of the American comedy, by “planes, trains, and automobiles.” He provides pastoral care to pastors, oversees their doctrine and practice, and provides pastoral care to each parish through the ministry of parish priests and deacons.

Bishop Vsevolod’s travels are extensive and exhausting—and he isn’t staying in five star resorts—but this is the calling to which God has summoned him.

After celebrating the Divine Service for Reformation Day in the Cathedral parish of St. Andrew on October 27, Bishop Vsevolod drove to Yekaterinburg to the Parish of Sts. Peter and Paul, where he celebrated Reformation Day again on November 1. It was a snowy day, and the Bishop celebrated the Mass with Fathers Sergey Glushkov (the parish pastor) and Vladislav Ivanov (of Holy Spirit in Chelyabinsk) as well as preaching the sermon.

The Bishop then traveled back home to Novosibirsk to lead the services at St. Andrew for All Saints’ Day.



All Saints’ Day, St. Andrew’s Parish, Novosibirsk

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The following week, he travelled back to Yekaterinburg (Sts. Peter and Paul) and then off to Novokuznetsk (St. James), where he was assisted in the liturgy by the parish Deacon Vadim Raskin.



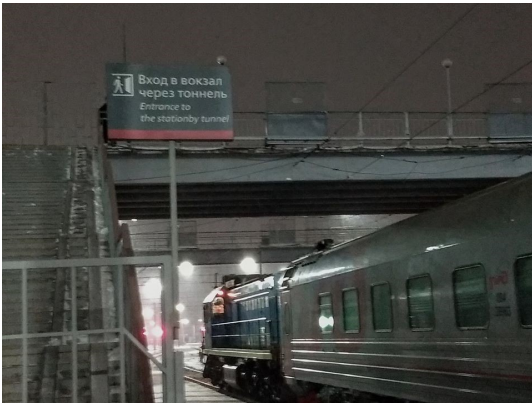
The Bishop then traveled to the most westerly parish in the SELC: Annunciation in Moscow. This was a joyous occasion, as Bishop Vsevolod was assisted by Father Ivan Chernyshev (the parish pastor) as well as Deacon Roman Kislov (Holy Trinity—Chita) from the most easterly parish of the SELC! Deacon Roman also translated the service into Sign Language. While there, the Bishop conducted two baptisms—including that of his own daughter-in-law!



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The Bishop then made the long journey eastward to Tuim for the last Sunday in Advent, where he celebrated the Liturgy with the assistance of the parish pastor of Transfiguration Parish, Father Vitaly Gavrilov.



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Bishop Vsevolod then returned home to St. Andrew for the Christmas Eve celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then travelled again to Novokuznetsk for Christmas Day Mass!



Bishop Vsevolod has many responsibilities as bishop, but the greatest joy of being a bishop is being a pastor: preaching and administering the sacraments. Fortunately for the brothers and sisters that he serves, his priority is giving pastoral care, proclaiming the Gospel, baptizing, confirming, communing, ordaining, visiting the sick, and supporting the clergy who work so hard for the sake of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray for Bishop Vsevolod's continued safety and many more years of service to the Lord and to His beloved bride, the Church. ✠

An Important Milestone

Congratulations, Father Alexander!

November 11, 2019 marked the twelfth anniversary of priestly ordination conferred upon Father Alexander Hahn in 2007. He has served St. Mary's Parish in Tomsk ever since! Father Alexander was previously ordained to the diaconate on May 23, 2003, and had also studied in the United States at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Here are some pictures of Father Alexander's ordination 12 years ago at St. Mary's. Many more years, Father Alexander! May the Lord continue to bless your ministry! ✠



The Bishop's Christmas Message

The following message was read to all SELC parishes from Bishop Vsevolod:

Brothers and sisters,

When did the Christian Church begin? Different people respond differently. Martin Luther speaks of Adam and Eve as the first church. Most people consider the feast of Pentecost to be the birthday of the Church, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in tongues of flame. Sometimes such a beginning is seen in the events of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion.

But about Christmas, it is quite possible to say that with it began the Church -- the mysterious Body of Christ, in which we are all members, according to Saint Paul. After all, the Lord Himself was born "to save His people from their sins." The Word has become flesh to dwell among us.

In the Church for each of us, this salvific presence of Christ began and continues, when He abides in us, and we in Him. That is why, today, as those ancient shepherds, we came to worship Christ and hear the Gospel. But we are more blessed than the shepherds, because we have the Eucharist -- a meal of eternal life.

If we take of Holy Communion, we will not die, but we will live forever with our Wonderful Savior.

I congratulate you on Christmas, my beloved parishioners, and I wish you a happy and churchly new year! ✕



Lutheran Theological Seminary

How You Can Help!



Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Siberia is one of the single most important Lutheran educational institutions in the world. The devoted faculty teach men from around the former USSR, training them residentially for ministerial formation as pastors and deacons for service throughout the Russian-speaking world.

LTS is uncompromisingly faithful, confessional, and liturgical. And it costs a lot of money to run an institution that does not cut corners, that is unbendingly faithful to the Bible and the Book of Concord.

The seminary's rector, the Rev. Fr. Alexey Streltsov, explains the strategy of creating an endowment for the ongoing work of Lutheran education:

Greetings from Siberia. I'm Alexey Streltsov, rector of the Theological Seminary of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The seminary is located in the city of Novosibirsk in the midst of Siberia. My country once had a Lutheran Church of several million members, but the tragic events of 100 years ago, namely, the communist revolution, led to catastrophic results for Christians in general and Lutherans in particular. As they say in Russia, it is much easier to destroy than to build. Restoring the church through the process of pastoral training is what we are doing at our Seminary in Siberia.

Back in 1995 pastor Vsevolod Lytkin, now the bishop of the SELC, requested confessional Lutherans of the LCMS to provide help in the area of Lutheran education. In 24 years we have made some progress that is worth mentioning.

For years guest professors from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and other places in the USA as well as Germany, Sweden, England, and Australia, came to us to share their expertise with us. And I dare say that we were good students. At this time a local, fully formed Faculty operates at the Seminary, taking care of all our Academic needs.

Our model is a classical Seminary model. We don't believe in compromises. Our academic program takes 5 years. We teach the Biblical languages and all the disciplines necessary for pastoral formation. It would not be right for the Lutherans in Siberia to be consigned to a deficient Word and Sacrament ministry.

In the past, students have come to us from different parts of Russia and Russian-speaking places beyond Russia. Now, besides maintaining a full residential program, instructors of the seminary go out and teach at the schools and seminars of other Lutheran churches that rely on the high standards our seminary has come to be known for.

So it takes commitment. It takes energy. It takes time. And it takes money. Running the seminary isn't cheap, but the impact it makes has full potential to last for generations to come – in Russia and hopefully in the world far beyond Russia.

I'm very busy concentrating on the duties of the holy ministry, teaching assignments, academic research, and administrative oversight. Speaking like this is not a regular activity for me. I would much rather just read another book and share some biblical and theological insights with the students. But to ensure the continuing operation of the Seminary, we need your help and your support with prayers and whatever resources you may wish to contribute, in order to provide for the process of restoration of the Lutheran Church in this part of the world.

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Why an Endowment?

Any educational institution needs to stand firmly on its feet to be able to look confidently into the future. The Theological Seminary of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, also referred to as the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia, is no exception. A few years ago this Seminary came under increasing financial pressures and is now teetering on the edge of survival.

One may think, “So what?” Seminaries open and close all the time in today’s world, especially in the mission setting. There were at least 10 attempts to establish Lutheran seminaries in various post-Soviet countries, and most of them were never followed through. It is not quite like that with the Seminary in Novosibirsk.

Think of this Seminary as a plane that has taken off from the ground and currently is flying higher and higher. While still in need of manual operation, it is somewhat close to the level of the clouds. Yet the take-off continues, and so it is still too early to put the plane on autopilot (of course, the main pilot, the chief Shepherd, is always on guard).

Think of this Seminary as being like some of the classical Lutheran Seminaries, such as Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, or Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, in their first decades of work. That is, from the very beginning our vision of the future was of a Seminary that would be here to stay. A seminary that would be able to offer something to the global Lutheran community, especially that part of the community that uses the Russian language as one of its working languages.

In the first months of its operation the Seminary depended upon rented facilities to conduct classes and provide living quarters for the students. That is no longer the case. The Seminary has an adequate building with classrooms, a library, a dining room, and a worship facility, as well as places for the students to stay.

In the first years of its existence the Seminary critically depended on short- or long-term teachers to come from abroad. Had these teachers not come in any given year, no classes would have been possible. That is no longer the case. Ours is a fully established Seminary operating in the unique context of the major Academic community in Russia east of the Ural mountains. The Seminary’s resident faculty currently meets the demands of its 5-year curriculum and also successfully teaches in other areas of the world.

In its first decades, the Seminary wholly depended upon financial support from the outside. This critical financial dependence remains until now, but the financial situation changes for the worse whenever there are adverse external factors. At this point there is a growing discrepancy between the concept of the Seminary as a long-term project with a global vision for the future and its very short and quickly-changing projected life span when the survival of the Seminary may be assured only on a half-year or even several months basis. For the Seminary to fully realize its *raison d’être* it must also have financial stability. If the Seminary were to shut down, its faculty and staff would be able to provide for themselves on an individual level in secular jobs. But the Seminary as an institution with significant potential for the future would become a thing of the past, and so those far-ranging efforts already invested in its establishment would have become futile.

As the Rector of the Seminary, for whom the building of this Seminary has become a life-long project, I cannot allow this. I am prepared to fight for the Seminary, as I believe that this is indeed a worthwhile and noble cause to fight for. And so I ask you to join me in this fight. I believe that the creation of a specialized endowment will provide the capability of long-term financial sustainability for the Seminary and thus resolve the current problems, and will thus allow the Seminary to more fully realize its potential.

Christians form a family, and so it is good to get to know more about your relatives who happen to be far away from you physically, yet who are very close through the bond of Baptism. That is why in future messages I will make an effort to share with you some of my thoughts and observations that you may find of interest.

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In a family, relatives usually help each other. If you are concerned for the continuous spread of Christianity in the 21st century, especially as it pertains to its Lutheran confession, I ask you to consider supporting our Seminary in Siberia. Your donation will make a difference.

Please mail donations to:

The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society

Bob Kiefer, Ascension Lutheran Church

8811 St. Joe Road

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(Please designate for "Save the Seminary" on your check)

<https://siberianlutheranmissions.org/>

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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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