

The Russian Project

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY – 1996-2026

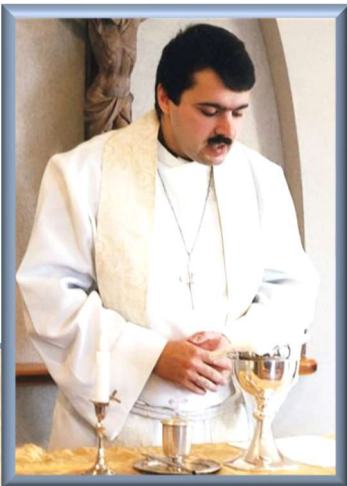
BISHOP LYTKIN: 'ONLY THE LCMS CAN HELP US IN SIBERIA'

In April 1996, Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, the newly elected president of Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne (CTSFW) and Concordia's academic dean, Rev. Dr. William Weinrich, were asked if the Fort Wayne seminary would accept a significant donation from the Schwann Foundation to develop what would become "The Russian Project."

As the project began, Concordia-Fort Wayne called Rev. Dr. Timothy Quill to oversee this new initiative.

The Russian Project charter included three goals:

1. Preparation of men for the pastoral ministry on the Fort Wayne campus to replace the hundreds of Lutheran pastors killed by the communists.
2. Assist Lutherans in Siberia in establishing a seminary for training pastors and lay leaders.
3. Work with the Siberian Church to organize evangelism/catechetical summer seminars.



Wenthe and Weinrich subsequently met with then Synod President, Alvin Barry, and received his heartfelt approval to move forward with the project.

THE BISHOP'S LETTER

On September 19, 1996, Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, then president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, received a letter from Pastor Vsevolod Lytkin, now Bishop Lytkin, written on behalf of the West Siberian Christian Mission. Pastor Lytkin wrote:

"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 the 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 religious freedom will last in our country. So, we need to start the education project here as soon as possible.*

NOVOSIBIRSK SEMINARY POSITIONED AMONG THE BEST

"We in Novosibirsk are convinced that in our day, serious seminary training comes closest to the meaning of Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2: 2. It is neither lay discipleship training nor short-term leadership preparation, but a serious effort that



makes demands upon both teacher and student. After all, the apostles themselves spent three years in the 'seminary' of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rev. Dr. Alexey Streltsov

*Rector of the Lutheran Theological Seminary
Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia*

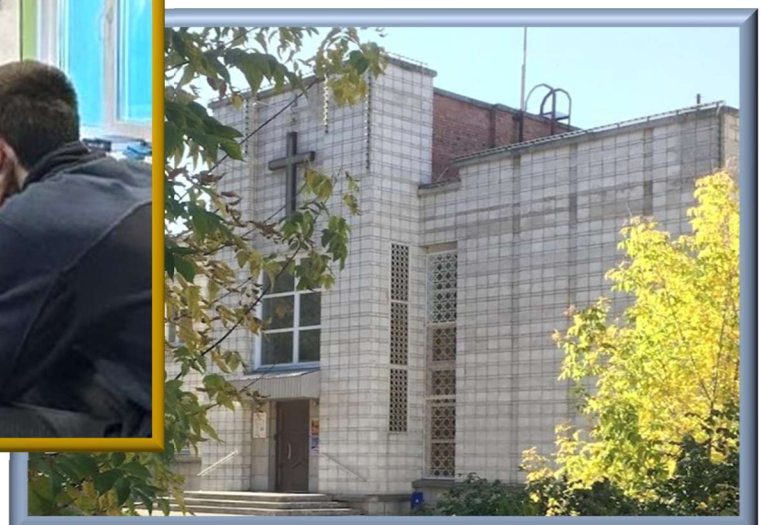
**AND WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD FROM ME
IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES
ENTRUST TO FAITHFUL MEN WHO WILL BE
ABLE TO TEACH OTHERS ALSO.
(2 TIMOTHY 2:2)**

Building a seminary is a formidable task. In 1996 Rev. Alexey Streltsov was charged to work with Concordia–Fort Wayne to establish a seminary in Siberia. The job involved recruiting students, locating facilities to house them and their families, designing curriculum, building a library, identifying and scheduling short-term visiting professors, and a multitude of other tasks. A house was purchased, remodeled, and dedicated in July 1997 as the seminary's first home.

Today, the seminary is located in a former bank building (pictured below) in Novosibirsk's "Academic City." It houses the seminary, church offices, and St. Andrew parish, where Bishop Lytkin serves. Classes began in October 1997 with visiting professors from the LCMS. In 1998, Rev. Alan Ludwig, a pastor from South Dakota, was called to serve as a full-time professor, a position he held until his retirement in 2016.

The year 2010 proved to be a highly significant year for the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the seminary. With the election of Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison as synod president, the LCMS and the SELC declared long overdue fellowship with one another.

The Novosibirsk Seminary has built an excellent reputation. It is now one of just two of the 11 confessional Lutheran seminaries founded in the 1990s still fully operating in Russia and other nearby countries.



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IS RETURNING TO RUSSIA

The Siberian seminary is blessed with a faculty of well-educated, world-class Russian professors, deeply committed to preparing the best pastors possible to faithfully preach, teach, conduct the liturgy, care for the faithful, and reach out to the lost throughout Siberia and surrounding areas. The classrooms, offices, technology, and student services are excellent, and the seminary now has the best theological library in Russia when it comes to supporting Lutheran curriculum and research.

While the seminary in Novosibirsk is academically strong, the sole drawback threatening its stability and survival is financial autonomy. Although it is growing, the Siberian Church will be unable to support the seminary on its own for many years.

Consequently, The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society was established as an outgrowth of the Russian Project in 2002. The initial purpose of the SLMS was to raise financial support for the new Fort Wayne and Novosibirsk Seminary graduates being sent to preach the Gospel and plant new mission congregations among the lost souls scattered across Siberia. Today, the SLMS supports both the pastoral work of the Siberian Church as well as the Novosibirsk Seminary.

In 2017, LCMS President Harrison, and the Church Relations Office, asked the SLMS to secure funding for the long-term financial stability of the seminary. In response, the Mission Society established an endowment to fund seminary operations for years to come. In addition, the Mission Society also provides \$250,000 annually to finance the seminary's operating expenses.

PAST HARDSHIPS BEING REPLACED WITH PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

Prior to the Russian revolution in 1917, the Lutheran Church was the second largest Christian denomination in Russia. The first Lutherans had arrived there shortly after the Protestant Reformation and accounted for more than three million people at the time of the 1917 communist revolution.

The communists were especially brutal, killing or imprisoning virtually all pastors and destroying or confiscating Lutheran churches for other uses.

Lutherans endured persecution, but today, the church is making a comeback. Nowhere is that more apparent than in eastern Russia—in Siberia—where many Lutherans, especially those of German descent, were deported during the communist purges of the 1930s.

Through the efforts of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and its seminary in Novosibirsk, the Word and Sacrament are again making their way to the long-repressed Russian people and those in surrounding areas.



TRAVELING SIBERIA FOR THE GOSPEL

The commitment to confessional Lutheran teaching is as strong as ever as the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church leaders and professors at the Novosibirsk Seminary press on with training and ordaining pastors to carry God's Word and Sacrament to people repressed by communist tyranny for so many years.

Today, the Siberian Lutheran Church has more than 25 pastors, serving parishes and preaching stations in cities and towns from Moscow east through Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. The church has about 2,500 baptized members.

Siberia covers a huge expanse of land, perhaps more than most people imagine. With an area of 5.1 million square miles, Siberia accounts for more than three-fourths of Russia's land area and is home to about 33 million people, one-fourth of Russia's population.

Reaching many of those living in Siberia requires traveling long distances. For pastors, travel is a reality they must seriously plan for as they spread the Gospel and give pastoral care to God's people in this vast land.



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The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society
8811 St. Joe Road | Fort Wayne, IN 46835
Email: Questions@SiberianLutheranMissions.Org
Website: SiberianLutheranMissions.Org

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