

Friendship English Language Camps in Russia May 28-June 18

Short Term Missions in Russia - A Report by Paul and Carol Anderson and Steve, Barb and Rachel Goodspeed

The Friendship English Language Camp (FELC) mission trip May 28-June 18 sponsored by East European Mission Network (EEMN; www.EEMN.org) was blessed beyond expectations, and the time we spent with Nadia and Alex Krongolm who are working in youth ministry in Karelia and the Lutheran congregation in Petrozavosk more than confirmed and validated their ministry and that our support is essential and bearing much fruit. This is a summary report of the short-term mission trip:

Getting there, and on to the Kondopoga FELC - We arrived with 30 others on the EEMN team in St. Petersburg May 30, where we boarded a bus for the short drive to the ELCIR (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia) seminary in Koltischi just outside of St. Petersburg. Off we went by bus the next morning for the 8-hour trip to Petrozavodsk where we unloaded supplies at Lyceum #1 and were met by our host families. After a couple of days of preparation and orientation we were met by Oksana Dyba (public school teacher, member of the Kondopoga Lutheran Church, and works as a reporter for the ELCIR in Karelia) and a van from Kondopoga; the 7 of us from Duluth, the “Kondopoga Team” (us from First Lutheran Church plus Alicia and Laurel Siffring from Anchor Point EF) and our gear were jammed into the van with Oksana for the hour ride to Kondopoga, where we unloaded at School #3 and met our hosts (June 2). That evening we met with the new deacon, Vadim, from the Kondopoga Lutheran Church, and their youth group; Vadim graduated from seminary with Alex in January and will serve as a Deacon before being ordained. The next morning we attended church and practiced music after lunch, discovering that Vadim is an excellent guitar player, which led us to ask if he’d help with music at the Camp—he agreed and this turned out to be a godsend! We packed a lot into the week besides the Camp itself, including, e.g., a picnic with home hosts, an evening with the local English Club, a concert by a terrific choir on which Vadim was a member, and walks with youth in our groups. We left Friday June 10 at 4:30 p.m. amid sad farewells to meet at the Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church that evening with others from the EEMN team and Russian teacher/translators who were going to work together in the Lutheran FELC the next week. Whew!

On to Petrozavodsk and the “Lutheran” FELC - The next morning Carol and Paul were up early with Alex Krongolm to go by bus to the village of Derevjanka where Alex conducts services for the little church. After church (12 older folks) and a visit to the outhouse amid the cows, they caught the bus back to Petrozavodsk where they were invited to dinner with Alex and Nadia and a wonderful and important time of visiting and learning about their ministry and situation. The Goodspeeds and others were on various excursions that day. The next day we met Nadia and Alex for lunch and attended the Russian service at the Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church at 2 p.m., and then joined other EEMN folks for a wonderful Karelian folk concert. Thirteen of us served as the American team at the Lutheran FELC the subsequent week, held at School #42, again being involved in various activities in the evenings, which for Paul and Carol, as in Kondopoga, included keeping up with all the organizational stuff as the American Directors; Nadia made all arrangements for getting Lutheran kids to and from the Camp and for activities in the evenings, including kids from other churches in Karelia, e.g., Pitkaranta, Chulna, Olynetz, etc., as well as translating at Assembly, etc. After Camp on Friday June 15, we participated in a very meaningful and worshipful youth celebration service at the Lutheran Church, hurried back to our hosts across town for dinner, and departed by train at 11 p.m. for St. Petersburg (seminary). Saturday was a day of sightseeing topped off with a wonderful ballet concert that night. Sunday we worshipped at St. Mary’s Lutheran Church (headquarters of the ELCIR), where we were met by Nadia who had come down Saturday night to join us.

Going home with a humbled spirit - That evening we had a devotional debriefing with the Moberly’s (EEMN Directors) and the entire EEMN team with heartfelt sharing by Nadia before most of us left the next morning (June 18) for home (others were going on to programs in Latvia, Ukraine, Poland). What is difficult to convey is the physical exhaustion of long days, the absence of hot water in Petrozavodsk while we were there, the hectic pace, the challenge of getting around by public transportation in the “Mishutkas” or in “risking-your-life” taxis, the difficult economic situation for many contrasted with

great wealth for a few, etc., yet the very close fellowship of our teams, the genuine and very warm hospitality of our many Russian friends and hosts, the joy of the youth in the Camps, and the sense of being used by God in this relational ministry - of growth in faith, of being humbled by the richness of the faith of many in Russia!

Kondopoga FELC - This was a new Camp for EEMN. We had 6 “classes,” two were 7th and 8th grade, 4 were 10th grade. The curriculum was good, based on the life of Christ; the kids spoke reasonably good English. The translators were great. One shared that she was there to both practice English and to learn about God; she wasn’t a Christian, but was very interested. Several began the week skeptical about religion, but became very open about faith by Friday. At the farewell gathering the sharing was genuinely and deeply heartfelt, leaving all of us in tears - one translator said “You have left us with new understandings about God - thank you!” Vadim was a big hit, and the exposure provides him opportunity to engage the youth. Oksana, who is a teacher and also works with the ELCIR, noted “. . . our Kondopoga Camp was a great evangelical event . . . it was a first faith seed. And we know that one day some of it will bring a large harvest. Thank you very much!” It was truly a humbling experience - the Holy Spirit was certainly present.

“Lutheran” FELC - This was another truly blessed week. There were ten groups, eight to nine kids in each, from 4th grade to college (or even older in Steve’s group!); the Russian Director from School #42 was a teacher from School #42 who had visited Duluth in 1993 and was a guest in Paul and Carol’s home one evening - a valuable ally! Besides the regular Camp during the day, different members of the EEMN team visited with the kids at the Lutheran church in the evening, a time of sharing, singing and testimony. Time and space don’t permit sharing about the wonderful fun experiences with our groups, the good conversations, working on dramas to be presented the last day, singing led by Jean and Alicia with Vika from Olynetz and Alex (who, like Vadim in Kondopoga, is an excellent guitar player and was at the Camp all week) on guitar. Some were friends who weren’t Christians, all had a great time together. Nadia wrote that “Five people dared to say that they accepted Jesus Christ. One of them even said: ‘I came here alone, but leave with God.’”

Nadia and Alex and the Petrozavodsk Church - Nadia’s ministry continues to grow; with Alex out of seminary and working in Karelia as youth Pastor, they now function much of the time as a team. There is no doubt that we are supporting two gifted, humble, spirit-filled young people of great faith and devotion to Christ. A message after we got home noted they had just returned from a youth camp in Sortavala, were headed for a youth camp at Sergezia that week and then at Kem the following week - a remarkable couple being used by God! And, this is the future of the Ingrian Lutheran church. The “Russian” membership in the Petrozavodsk church, served by Pastor Andre (who receives no salary and supports himself with a business), is small but growing, mostly as a result of the youth ministry work. Similarly, other Ingrian churches in Karelia are being renewed by youth disciples by youth workers and pastors like Alex and Nadia in Petrozavodsk, Vadim in Kondopoga, Vika in Olynetz.

Mission Tours

Two group visits to new and reborn congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia May 17-26 and May 28-June 5, 2007, led by Antti Lepisto

Group Visit #1. A nine-member group visited congregations in northern and southern Karelia as well as the St. Petersburg area. Led by driver and guide Pastor Reino Letonsaari who has assisted us in many ways since 1995, we traveled in a ten-passenger van. Our first stop was in Kajaani, Finland, with the leadership of the local congregation with which we collaborate in funding a church building project in Segeza, north Karelia. We were hosted at the congregation’s retreat center.

The next day we entered Russia near the city of Kostamus and traveled 160 kilometers on gravel road north to Kalevala where we were hosted by Pastor Ari Huotari and the parish women. After dinner, we enjoyed the parish sauna and stayed in guestrooms in the church. Our group included Pastor Rollie Bockbrader and his 14-year old daughter Hannah from Kalevala’s friendship congregation, Our Savior’s

in Cloquet, MN. On Sunday morning Pastor Bockbrader preached with translation. Two teenage girls were baptized without family present. They sought baptism after attending children's and youth activities. A retired teacher was recently appointed parish worker and a recently-ordained deacon will be assisting the parish. Pastor Huotari serves other cities and villages over a broad area.

Sunday afternoon involved a 190-mile ride to the city of Segeza and an evening worship on the second floor of a community center (the tenth location the congregation has rented in its 13 years). Gail Saari and Mary Sedin of Peace Lutheran in Poplar, WI (Segeza's friendship congregation) were part of the group. Both at Kalevala and at Segeza, gifts were exchanged and Pastor Bockbrader and Gail brought financial support as well. These visits strengthened and enriched these friendship congregations.

The following morning we continued south to Medvezegorsk to visit the town from which Janet Hodnik, a member of our group, and her husband Tim McCarthy adopted a young Karelian girl several years ago. We then went to Kondopoga (Kontupohja) where we attended an evening event in the church and met Vadim Lysenko, a newly-ordained young deacon. This church was assisted in its building project by friendship congregations in Finland and Zion Lutheran in Fairport, OH. Our home hosts were remarkable.

The next day we went to Petrozavodsk to see the new church building project which has a completion target date of September 2009. We met the congregation staff including newly-ordained deacon Alexei Krongolm and his wife Nadia, a youth worker. They and Vadim are a part of the new generation and future of the Ingrian Church. Their outreach to folks new to Christianity and their work with high school and university students are impressive.

The following morning we drove to Tsalna, a small congregation in a humble village, which has an impressive ministry of feeding children and providing food assistance to the elderly and shut-ins. The support funds they receive are all used for this program and are well documented.

We then continued to the Sodder/Novie Peski parish of seven poor villages. Hosted in log homes in a low-lying swampy area, we attended a wonderful presentation by six little children and their teacher. Pastor Pekka Palosaari explained the nature of ministry and social assistance done by a support group in Finland. He has driven 750 kilometers each month for 13 years to serve these folks. Remarkable!

We continued to Olonets (Aunus) 200 kilometers south, were warmly received, and heard of the work of this eight-village parish and its 12 Sunday schools. Again, a son of the parish was just ordained a deacon and will serve the largest of the outlying villages. The rest of the day was spent driving to Kolutshi (Keltto) to the Theological Institute. There and in some satellite locations in Russia, all types of congregational staff are trained: pastors, deacons, Sunday school superintendents, musicians, youth and children's workers, diaconal leaders and family and marriage leaders.

Finally, after a visit to St. Petersburg, St. Mary's church and its remarkable street children's and other ministries, and local museums, we returned to Helsinki.

Group visit #2. A 29-member bus tour group began in Helsinki, stopped in Viborg (Viipuri) at the local church and then went on to St. Mary's Church in St. Petersburg and heard a fine presentation by Pastor Aleksei Uimonen, mission director of the Ingrian Church, before dinner. The next day we visited the Russian Museum and the Hermitage and had housing and meals at the Ingrian Church Theological Institute. There we met Bishop Aarre Kuukauppi and Rector Tapio Karjalainen of the Institute and Kaija Karjalainen, chair of the Women's and Family Ministry Committee. We learned about the rebirth of the Ingrian Church since 1990 and the need for passionate congregation staff willing to serve with the limited resources and salaries the church can provide.

The next morning we drove to Olonets and there a young woman named Julia explained the ministry of the eight-village parish and the 12 Sunday schools which serve in the area. We also met her husband who had been a key local official who assisted the congregation in securing a lot and needed permits. The congregation women served us a fine meal. That evening we drove to Petrozavodsk and visited the new church project. After a stay in a hotel, we met with the staff of the congregation (friendship congregation of First Lutheran in Duluth), including meeting Alexei Krongolm, the recently-ordained youth pastor for

the Republic of Karelia. Later we met his wife Nadia. They are doing remarkable ministry in reaching youth and university students and in doing children's and youth retreats in congregations. They have also arranged marriage and family retreats which have attracted non-members.

We then went to a small village of Tsalna where we were warmly received by Pastor Juho Pakkari and his wife and the women who provide a warm meal for village children each Saturday and food packages for elderly and shut-in folks in the village. Four women carry out this food ministry each week with their wood-fired kitchen stove and keep complete records of how all support funds are used in this ministry. Again, we were served a fine meal. Kenwood Lutheran in Duluth is a friendship congregation. We proceeded to Kondopoga, an industrial town nearby, where we were housed in members' homes and apartments. This gave us a personal understanding of life in this town. Once again, the hospitality was magnificent. We met Vadim Lysenko, a recent graduate of the Theological Institute, who is serving as a deacon in this parish.

The following morning we drove through many humble villages where bitter battles were fought between Finns and Russians in 1939-1945 to Pitkäranta. (This town was formerly a part of Finland.) There we stayed in the local hotel and had an opportunity to walk around the town. The next morning (Sunday), we attended worship at the beautiful log church where the local choir sang and a fine sermon by a visiting pastor from Finland was translated into English and Russian. A fine meal was prepared by congregation women and served by youth of the parish.

Heading west, our next stop was Läskelä where we met with congregation members, including the mayor of the town, to discuss the possibility of building a small church for Läskelä and a central gathering place for five area villages. The town is offering a lot. This was followed by a visit to the village of Harlu where we participated in a worship service in a small rented building. Once again, the hospitality of these poor villagers took our breath away. Finally, that evening we drove to Sortavala where we were ensconced in a local hotel. The next morning a part of our group went by hydrofoil to visit the Orthodox monastery on the island of Valaam and the rest visited the local Ingrian congregation and made a bus tour of the city and visited an orphanage. That afternoon we stopped briefly at a log-building firm and then, before crossing the border to Finland, we stopped to see the new retreat center being built by volunteers at the little village of Ruskeala.

In Finland we traveled south to the Oronmylly retreat center where we spent a wonderful evening and night, again with good meals and a final worship experience before heading back to Helsinki to complete our pilgrim tour. On this final leg of our journey, group members made commitments of \$36,500 toward the Läskelä church building project and four members of our group agreed to serve for fundraising for this project. Some folks remained in Finland to visit relatives and friends and some visited Estonia and other countries before returning home. It was an inspiring time.

Mission to Central Russia June 18-July 1, 2007

*Pastor David & Stephanie Carlson, Report 7/19/07
(12-Member Mission Team)*

MOSCOW (MOSCOW DEANERY)

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 111020 Moscow, Nalichnaya ul., dom 1, stroyenie 1 (RUSSIA)

Tel. (7-495) 360-53-87, Fax. (7-495) 962-56-45, Email: holytrinity@lutheranchurch.ru

Pastor Igor Alisov, Assistant Pastor Andrey Yurtaev, Deconess Nina Yurtaeva

This congregation is blessed with a pre-Revolutionary church building (1911) as well as a parish hall across the cemetery, formerly a building for the cemetery caretaker. The parish hall has good spaces to host people and conduct events; it is also a good location – relatively close to downtown and train stations. But the upkeep and renovation of both buildings is a financial strain. The leaders say they are

very happy to host visitors from the U.S. It is a little more expensive to stay at this church than in Yoshkar-Ola or Birsk, but that is due to the higher cost of living in Moscow in general.

Our group participated in the last day of a seminar on women's work, which Nina organized for the deanery. After brief introductions, we shared about ministries involving women, families and children in our churches in MN, and then we heard from other participants. Holy Trinity in particular is involved in many outreach ministries – ministry to Afghani refugees (coordinated by a young woman, Marcella, who herself was a recipient of some of the services they provide, such as Russian language classes), ministry to hearing and speech impaired children, ministry to people in Armenia (one member makes an annual trip there), ministry to school children and to others in need. It was impressive to us that in receiving some gifts from our group (e.g. crafts, school supplies, quilts), they asked permission to give some away to these ministries.

The congregation has about 100 members on the roll and an average Sunday worship attendance of 30. Leaders said they are eager to establish a friendship relationship with a congregation in the U.S. Challenges continue to be funding building renovations and reaching new members. Pastors usually need to supplement their salaries with other jobs, and younger members sometimes leave Moscow to study abroad (e.g. Finland). Still, Nina thinks the situation in the churches seems to be getting better each year.

The Moscow Deanery is made up of five congregations (it used to be eight but three are now in a different deanery, "Under the Volga" Deanery). Two congregations in Moscow, and others are up to 200 km away. Pastors in the deanery used to get together every few months, with funding from the LCMS, but now once or twice a year because pastors must pay their own transportation. Once, the deanery received a visit from Robert Kolb, a professor from Concordia Seminary (LCMS), who provided funds for their seminar time together. It was one of the happiest times Igor can remember in the deanery. Igor said their contact with Lutherans in the U.S. has been mostly with the LCMS (the previous senior pastor was an LCMS missionary), but said he was thankful to have this connection now with the ELCA. Andrey, Nina's son, speaks English and accompanied us on our day trips to the city center. All the leaders were friendly and gracious hosts. Andrey and Nina were able to act as a sort of travel agency for our time in Moscow. They arranged all of our transportation, tours, guides (including Nina's daughter-in-law Maria), and even purchased our train tickets from Moscow to Yoshkar-Ola. They sent us a proposed schedule and budget, were open to our suggestions and revisions, and then received the money from us by wire to the church bank account to pay for everything we agreed on. This worked well.

YOSHKAR-OLA (URAL DEANERY)

Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross, 424003 Yoshkar-Ola, ul. Oktyabrskaya 43 (RUSSIA)
Tel. (8362) 73-42-00, Fax. (8362) 63-44-43, Email: luter@mari-el.ru
Pastor Vladimir Bochkov, Pastor Juha & Anu Valiaho (Dean, Finnish missionaries)

The Missionary Camp was organized by Vladimir and attended by church leaders (lay and a few clergy) from around the deanery. It included Bible study, worship, singing, discussion groups, good food and fellowship. Pastor Robert Kleinke shared about his work with youth at Duluth's Woodland Hills both in a plenary session and seminar, and Pastor David Carlson gave a plenary Bible study, "Faith Comes by Hearing," led a seminar on evangelism to adults, and preached at the Sunday worship service. Other members had opportunity to hear all plenary presentations and participate in seminars on youth work, alcohol and drug addiction, and women's ministry. Juha said visits like ours that coincide with the Missionary Camp (held annually at the end of June) are desirable. In fact, gifts raised by our group funded the Missionary Camp this year, and both Vladimir and Juha said they were unsure how they could have had the camp without those gifts. The Missionary Camp is an annual project that could be funded in the future.

Accommodations at the "Missionary House" (dormitory that houses 30 people) are very comfortable. Since 2005, the dormitory has been completed. On the second floor it has a small common area as well as several sleeping rooms for 2-4 people each. Additional sleeping space is on the first floor. There is a shower and bathroom on each floor and the first floor also has a kitchen.

After starting the Yoshkar-Ola church and serving there for 12 years, Juha and Anu moved on to Birsk two years ago after Vladimir Bochkov graduated from the seminary in Keltto/St. Petersburg. It was good to see stability and continued good work in Yoshkar-Ola after that leadership change. The church there seems to be on solid footing with a number of long-time lay leaders to work with Pastor Vladimir. Juha told us that of all the Ural Deanery churches this one is also the most financially secure.

Shuarsola is a collective farm village near Yoshkar-Ola where the parish has at least 50 confirmed members. Its church structure is partially built and Finnish builders will continue in the fall, but more funding is needed to complete construction. One of the sons of this village, Sasha Mityakov, 27, was commissioned as a catechist at the Sunday worship service in Yoshkar-Ola. He accompanied us on our travel to Bashkortostan and works in Udmurtia, a neighboring province, with emerging Lutheran churches.

Project Maria. Juha and Anu are raising funds privately to purchase a small apartment for a church member confined to a wheelchair, her husband, and 2-year-old daughter, Maria. They currently live in a banya/sauna. Some of our group members have contributed to this project.

BIRSK (URAL DEANERY)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Birsk, Tel. (34714) 31-4-31, Email: birskprihod@mail.ru
Pastor Juha Valiaho, Deaconess Anu Valiaho, Slava Abdullin (2nd year seminary student)

Outside Mari El, Birsk (pop. 40,000) has one of the largest concentrations of Mari people in the region. In January 2000, Juha and Anu conducted a worship service in Birsk for the first time at a school during the winter break. Slava Abdullin was baptized then and he began to help with ministry work in the villages. Slava and his family lived in a dormitory and he met with people in a tiny log church building as well as in their homes. The parish's baptized membership now numbers over 200. Since 2005, a great deal of construction has taken place. The new parish hall was dedicated in August 2006 by Bishop Aare Kuukauppi. The main floor includes a sanctuary and restrooms; the second floor an apartment with two bedrooms, a living room, small kitchen and bathroom; and the basement a dining room, kitchen, and church office. Our group slept mainly on mattresses on the floors of the sanctuary and dining room. In addition, they have completed constructing a garage and laid the foundation for a Missionary House similar to the one in Yoshkar-Ola to accommodate many visitors at a time more comfortably. Through the purchase of adjacent land, they have been able to expand the once tiny property into a larger church complex, including a house where Slava and his family live, garden space, and a well. Our synod's offerings to Birsk are contributing to these building projects, and it was impressive to see the results and progress made.

We had expected to conduct a day camp for youth and families similar to the one we did in 2005, but several factors led to a different agenda the days we were there. Slava had invited a Finnish couple he met at Keltto to lead seminar sessions on marriage and families, in which several from our group also participated. He also invited four young adults from St. Petersburg who were interested in working with youth in the villages. They ended up helping others from our group with the handful of youth who came to the church during those days. For the number of leaders present, attendance from the parish members was low, which was disappointing.

The hospitality of the church in Birsk was memorable. When we arrived, we were greeted by church members dressed in national costume and bearing traditional gifts of bread and salt, which everyone tasted as we shared our greetings. In addition, because of the changes in the agenda, several in our group were able to have home stays with church members in villages near Birsk. For some, this unexpected opportunity turned out to be the highlight of the whole trip. Some members visited farms and workshops, went fishing, experienced a Russian banya, and saw the daily life of church members. As a group, we also took an excursion with several members to the foothills of the Ural Mountains. There, we visited an Orthodox monastery, crossed a hydroelectric dam, and picnicked by the beautiful Black River less than an hour from the Continental Divide.

Juha and Anu are technically on furlough this year, fundraising in Finland and Estonia. When we met up with them, they had just come from a Finnish Missionary Society festival where they and others played music and shared about the missionary work in the Ural Deanery among the Mari people. In January 2008, they will return to Birsik for two more years and then Juha plans to retire. Many people we met throughout the region look to them as their spiritual parents, though Juha and Anu have long been preparing local leaders to carry on the work after them.