

Summary of and Reflections about the 2010 Friendship English Language Camp in Kondopoga, Russia (May 26-June 14)

by

Carol and Paul Anderson

A relationship of trust, respect and love with the Russian teachers of English in Kondopoga began four years ago when we, along with five others, conducted the first Friendship English Language Camp (FELC) there. That FELC was well received by the Principal and Russian teachers and resulted in their request to East European Mission Network (www.eemn.org) to do the regular two consecutive weeks of FELC each year since. This good relationship continued in this year's FELC, the first week with 5th-7th graders, the second week with 8th-10th graders; the Kondopoga FELC team this year included us from First Lutheran Church in Duluth, Cindy Klug and Martha Hanson from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Two Harbors and John Schleisher from Trinity Lutheran Church in Crookston (their first FELC mission trip), and Sandy Stephenson Nyes from Immanuel Lutheran Church, Proctor.

This year we had twelve 5th graders the first week and eleven 10th graders the second week—they all really captured our hearts. The 10th graders, especially, spoke English fairly well and we were able to have quite meaningful dialogue about the implications of Jesus' life and ministry for our lives.

The daily program each week is reflected in the pictures (next page). The curriculum was excellent, the theme being "Living in Love," each day reflecting an aspect of the life of Christ. Each of the 5 small groups each of the two weeks included a Russian teacher/translator and 10-12 kids. Our Russian colleagues were really wonderful—they truly loved the kids and without them our work would have been impossible!

Vadim Lysenko, the young Pastor at the Kondopoga Lutheran church, played guitar for our singing and sat in on many of the groups; he also helped ferry us around. Vadim interacts very well with the kids and his presence adds much to the program. We had excellent Russian hosts, all of whom had some connection to the FELC, and staying with them adds much to the value of the mission trip. Our itinerary was essentially the same as in 2008.

The folks we've met in Kondopoga have become good friends and we feel very blessed to have been able to share the love of Christ. Sentiments such as these quotes this year by our Russian teacher friends affirm that the oft-stated axiom that "...when you go on a short-term mission trip, you receive much more than you give..." is most certainly true! ☺

"...I'd like to write (that) since you've started our course, a lot of things have changed concerning our faith. Thank you for making it possible for me, teachers and our students."

"I admire you. Each day with you has been a revelation to us. For all this week you have been leading us, teaching. We have been following you, listening, thinking, imitating. I'm sure you've made our way to God shorter. Thank you for your kindness, patience, generosity, understanding. God bless you."

"Dear American friends! You have become real friends and helpers to our children and teachers! This is the main result of your work. Thank you for your help and kindness. I wish you grateful students and loyal followers."

The other 24 Americans on EEMN's Russian FELC teams were in two schools in Petrozavodsk (30 miles away), including the Lutheran Camp. Several were from our N.E. MN Synod: Sonja and Jorgen Baertsch and Kathy Morris from our church (who were with the Lutheran camp week one and at Lyceum #1 week 2 – see there reflections below) and Mary Metzger from St. Andrews Lutheran in Grand Rapids; Pat Becker from Bethesda Lutheran of Malmo was at the new FELC near St. Petersburg the week after our FELCs.



Our FELC team, devotions, meeting at 8 a.m., Tatiana, others often joined us.



Assembly at 9 a.m. – singing, theme for the day, skit by our team, short discussion of its meaning.



Carol sharing a story in English with our 5th-graders, Lirisa offering assistance



Paul in conversation with our 10th-graders Nadia offering assistance



Crafts were related to the lesson—Russian kids are very good at crafts, even 10th grade boys enjoyed crafts



All five groups had lunch together This is Carol with our 5th-graders



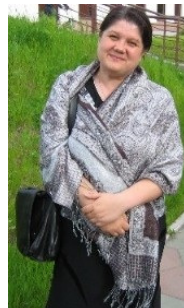
Sports—a time to let off energy! Here Vadim enjoys a form of dodge ball with the kids



A time of singing. This is a great way to practice English AND to learn Biblical principles



Groups created a drama based on one of our Biblical stories—presented on Friday afternoon before “graduation.” Above: angels at Jesus birth



Tatiana Ivanstova, translator & our very capable Russian FELC Director



Vadim Lysenko, wife Olga, holding 3 week-old Mark!! Their first child—brought him for all to see on the last day!!

Reflections by Sonja Baertsch – Lutheran Camp and Lyceum #1 in Petrozavodks

“Zdrahfstvyjti”!!

That is “Hello” in Russian – a bit hard to write with the English alphabet. Unfortunately, It doesn’t look any easier using the Cyrillic alphabet. It rolled off our tongues everyday, however!! :)

It seemed like it took a little longer to adjust to the time change upon our return than it did going. Both Jorgen and I have been tired late afternoon and waking up early in the mornings. Getting better every day though. We are in WI on the Brule River now - a very good place to rest. (I am home today for a soccer game!)

As you could see from the emails that were sent, we were BUSY while in Russia. No time to be tired – mind over matter! An incredible experience on so many fronts – very hard to summarize.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

We answered a call and literally found ourselves on the other side of the earth spreading the Gospel to peoples whose Christian roots have been severed and a dark void has developed. We asked ourselves many times - “What impact am I having?, What are the kids learning? Do they understand?..... The answers did not come clearly. Perhaps our faith grew stronger in the not knowing “the result”. We were planting seeds. We were reassured often to have confidence in the Holy Spirit to water them. Now we are home and wondering.....

In our preparations for this trip, we read and completed a short term missions workbook. There was a section about God inviting us on a treasure hunt. It suggested as we go to Walk with humility, Embrace with affirmation, Live with vulnerability, Practice flexibility, Live as a student, Work as a servant, and Speak as a storyteller – letting the Spirit tell God’s story through you. We did all these things and more.....

There was much diversity within our team but incredible support and unity in purpose. We faced challenges of many sorts offering opportunities to witness, deepen our faith and trust, and remind us that God is always at work among us.

We lived with families who opened their home andhearts to us. Jorgen and I lived with a woman and her 13yr. old son in a very small flat. This was their first time to be a host family. They greeted us each day when we returned from school with greetings, smiles, and most days..... Food. Ilya (the son) spoke English so the four of us were able to communicate pretty well. If he was not in the room Ira and I struggled a little with our dictionaries in hand. We spent a lot of time at the table, getting to know each other, learning Russian and English, playing games, and of course drinking tea – lots of tea. Ira and Ilya kept us busy in the evenings (when we did not have other things scheduled) with walks, meeting their friends, bowling, and lots of talking. They believed in God but didn’t go to church. Ilya helped Jorgen and I with some of our classroom preparations and helped me translate our Birth of Jesus skit. He visited my classroom the second week and we talked a bit. I asked him if he wanted to take a Bible. He hesitated and said, “No” but I know he was thinking.

The first week Kathy, Jorgen, and I taught at School #33 and the Lutheran Camp (which is really just one camp – kids mostly come from School #33 and the others are from Lutheran Churches in the area that Alex and Nadia work with) I had the young kids – 9 – 11 years old. A couple of them spoke English pretty well, the other’s English skills were limited. Monday, I started with 7 students in my class. Things were going pretty well and then late morning, 4 boys from Chelna (a small village outside of Petrozavodsk) joined us and everything changed. By the end of the

day, I was exhausted and concerned about how I would hold up for 4 more days!! Alex changed classes and became my translator. He knew most of these kids and his presence alone helped maintain control (kept the pot to a simmer) so I could teach the class. I received much support and prayer from the others in our group, Nadia, Vika, and others. There were many dynamics going on within our classroom and by the end of the week, Jorgen and I had figured each kids out..... a little bit anyway. The second week of camp, my class was much calmer and less willing to engage. I found myself thinking be careful what you wish for. My translator week 2 was not a Christian. She was shy and soft spoken but shared how much the week with me and Jim the week before had impacted her. She saw joy and love here and she told us her mother had never seen her so happy. Before the train was about to leave on Friday for St Petersburg, she appeared on board the train for a final good-bye.

Both weeks of camp reinforced to me that this was and is God's work. Jorgen and I were able to talk about God's love and show the kids and translators that love. I find now after being home for a week thinking of so many things – our host family, Nadia and Alex, Ilona (my translator), Russia, and all the kids especially those little boys from Chelna– so rough and tough on the outside but I know a soft heart on the inside. I think we touched it, I hope we did.

We learned a lot about Russia - the places, the people, the culture..... I find myself yearning to know more. It is hard to describe the impact this trip had on Jorgen but it was good – very good. He was a great support to me in so many ways, he engaged with the kids, translators, and other members of our FELC group. He probably learned and spoke the most Russian at least of the first timers and is set on learning more Russian. He is inspired to read his Bible from cover to cover. And he wants to go back.

This is just a snapshot into the 3 weeks we had there but I hope gives you a sense of the experience/mission. Thank you all for your support, encouragement, and prayers!!!

Sonja

Reflections on my Friendship English Language Camp Mission Trip in Petrozavodsk, Russia, May 25-June 14, 2010

by

Kathy Morris

A kaleidoscope of feelings and images come to me as I think about my experiences in Russia as part of the Friendship English Language Camp team. I felt love, affection, enthusiasm, anxiety, inadequacy, excitement—all at the same time. It was a wonderful experience for which I feel very grateful. But it was also hard work with a number of challenges.

My first class was made up of six 7th-9th graders from the Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church, one 7th grader from a Lutheran church outside of town, and two 7th grade girls from the school (Public School #33). I had classes well planned, but I still felt really anxious the last two days before starting to teach. Once I got into the class, I quickly grew to love the kids. The continual challenge was balancing allowing them to talk about spiritual things in Russian and keeping them practicing English. This first class loved to talk and the majority knew each other well. There was a lot of spiritual interest and one of the gals from the school who did not know much about God was very interested in having Him be part of her life. I connected her with the youth leaders (from Nadia's youth ministry program) there so they can continue to nurture that seed. It was so hard to say good-bye. There were hugs and tears.

I went to a youth group meeting at the Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church one night. I was so impressed at how Alex was able to keep a group of 30 people, ranging from about 8 to 25, in the palm of his hand for 45 minutes.

The second class I taught was in the top academic school in Petrozovask, Lyceum #1. It is amazing how different two classes can be! Getting them to talk was like pulling teeth, but they liked reading in English, doing worksheets, looking up Bible verses and reading the Bible in English and Russian. I learned that confiscating cell phones on the first day was much more effective than ignoring them or asking them to be put away.

Living with a Russian family was very special. My host mother taught English so her English was great and she was able to tell us a lot about the culture of Russia. She really misses communism. I was very moved by the different sense of living space that I found there in Russia. I was feeling confined even though I was living in the largest apartment of anyone else on the team. I am so grateful for my space now as I walk from room to room in my house. I was confronted by how small my faith is with my own sense of inadequacy. Having grown up during the Cold War, I often felt amazed that I was standing there teaching about God in a public school. I felt the greatness of God in opening that country to learn more about Him.

I set up a side trip to the university and spent two hours talking with five faculty from the psychology department. It was very interesting, and I left with an invitation to come back and lecture if I should choose to do so.

As I reflect now after returning home, I have to say that my strongest connection is with the Lutheran Church there in Petrozavodsk. I think about Alex and Nadia and those kids with all the challenges they have. They work to share the Gospel with so little resources for the church and for themselves. They are bright, energetic, creative, and so caring. I miss them.



Students in my "Lutheran" class



Two of my girls from Lyceum #1