

Article written by Nadia Krongolm about the Friendship English Language Camps

A “Friendship English Language Camp” took place at School #42 in Petrozavodsk from 11th to 15th of June. Each year this program is an “Event” for its participants. Exactly so-with capital letters! To understand why, read the article below.

In the Beginning

The Friendship English Language Camps (FELC) are sponsored by the organization **East European Mission Network** (EEMN, www.EEMN.org), which was founded in 1992 by Pastor Don Richman, from Minneapolis, Minnesota in the United States. EEMN is an inter-Lutheran mission organization that helps connect believers together for rebuilding and equipping the Body of Christ in Eastern Europe and Russia. EEMN was first invited to offer a FELC in Petrozavodsk in 1995 by Lyceum #1. The purpose of the week-long FELCs is to provide an opportunity to practice English with volunteer friends from the United States using a curriculum based on the Bible. Pastor Richman first visited our congregation ten years ago and began communicating with Nadezhda Krongholm (who later became a youth leader of the church). He told about the success of the FELCs in the schools of Petrozavodsk. In October 2003 Pastor Richman suggested the possibility of conducting a FELC for youth from our church and other area Lutheran churches as a great opportunity to attract youth to the congregations. This was the beginning of our involvement with the FELCs; the first “Lutheran” FELC was held in June of 2004.

Language Barrier... Is It a Barrier?

Someone may ask, “Why is the camp called a ‘language camp’?” The answer is that inquisitive Russian people are interested in learning something new about other countries and cultures from the native speakers of those countries and cultures. It is true that there are a lot of people who have no possibility to travel to the USA to communicate with Americans. However, English language is very important nowadays, so the FELC provides a great opportunity.

It might seem that a week is too little time to learn or improve your English. But this is not the case. For example, if you know a few phrases, such as “My name is...” and “Good morning!”, the first day will be quite difficult for you. At the second day you decide to pay attention to what is said. Later you begin to understand something. By the end of the week it is possible to speak some English boldly, both in conversations with the Americans and in a drama you present with your group on stage, as a biblical character. Moreover, there are people who feel that through these Camps God gives them an ability to learn the language, they study more thoroughly, try to prepare for the Camp during the whole year to show their success in the summer. The parents of one girl, who were believers themselves, were praying for her so that she started receiving higher grades at her English classes.

However, the most important thing in the camp is that we are visited by a united Christian team from the United States who are ready to share their faith with a warm and friendly attitude towards each other, the youth at the FELCs and the Russian translators who help in each group at the Camp.

United Team

This year's camp at School #42 was a special one. Most of the translators were Christians and we were able to create an atmosphere of friendship. It was touching to realize that these people came from the USA, which is so distant, just to get acquainted with us and tell about Christ. Let's consider Paul and Carol Anderson, for example, who have served as the “American Directors from EEMN” of the “Lutheran” FELCs (they work with Nadezhda Krongholm, who serves as the “Russian Director from the Lutheran Church”). As a girl from their group said, they were so attentive and careful to the students, that you could feel yourself a member of their family and see your importance for them. They have shown true Christian life: goodness in the eyes and sincere interest to everyone. Besides, Paul, a Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, shared how he became a Christian and how that is the essence of his life. Unintentionally, you can start thinking, “How can I doubt if a scientist was able to believe?”

We should also say a few words about Sidney Teske, who was... a clown! Just imagine, a real clown, just like in the circus. This is the way he serves God. In Latvia he teaches other people how to tell kids about God in this way. He illustrated for us in one of his performances the meaning of the Gospel: burdened with sin and sorrow, a man came to the Cross. That brokenhearted man repented and stuck to the Cross little pieces of paper, each symbolizing one of all those things in our lives that grieve

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God. Then, one little spark and all those pieces of paper burned and disappeared! Now he is free, full of joy and saved. Christ says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

More Than School

The fact that the "Lutheran" FELC is conducted not only in schools for students but also on the basis of the Lutheran church provides a great opportunity. Now we have possibility to invite youth from different congregations of Karelia, Vyborg and Saint Petersburg. We are trying to arrange participation so that about a half of the youth are believers and the other half are those who just came to the church, those who hadn't been there before and those who hadn't probably even heard about God. Thanks to our American friends, many of them have an opportunity to learn about the Good News of the Christian faith and about the Lutheran church, get interested in it and continue to come to the church as a place to learn about Jesus.

During the FELC, which ends each day at 3:30 p.m., a program, having the same aim, was held every evening at 6:00 p.m. at the Parish House of the Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church (where many of the youth from other churches ate and slept). Visitors from other places could learn more about the young people of the Petrozavodsk congregation. Those who considered the church as something extraneous and strange had an opportunity to see it and its life and work first hand. Not only biblical stories of the Annunciation, birth and ministry of Jesus Christ were considered here, but people were able to look at themselves, think over serious questions in *our own* lives: why do we lose faith? Why is God silent? Why do I live? Why do people commit suicide? With the tasty supper and this informal, easy atmosphere, youth participation in carrying out these programs was not unproductive. First, they could see that they can not only listen, but also can do something in the church. And second, as camp participants themselves say, God answered their questions during biblical lessons. Pastoral care was present. Five people were bold enough to say that they accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. One of them even said: "I came here alone, but leave with God". Many began to think, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

What's next?

Of course, many things can be done to make the FELCs even better. This was discussed during meetings of Russian and American teachers and children were also asked about suggestions for improvements. It would be quite good to make the camp longer, as very often it happens that the students just get accustomed to the program and get acquainted with others and make new friends and the camp ends. It is also important to achieve good understanding between Russian and American teachers who work together in the small groups, and that takes time, too. By the example of the elder group and the opinion of the younger ones, we can say that sometimes free communication and discussion of topics that are really interesting to the students are much preferable to scheduled topics. It is also very important for the translators to deliver not only the information, but also the feelings and living Word of God. It is also important for the "Russian teachers" to be an example for children, the one who could *teach* them respect and sincerity. But the main emphasis should be on the relationships between students, especially between those who believe in God and those who make first steps in discovering God. It is important because teenagers are more likely to ask for advice from people of the same age rather than from the elder ones.

Sight from Within

Nina Kopylova, a former teacher from school #42, had worked in the FELCs for 8 years as a translator. This year she was not a translator, but served as the "Russian Director from School #42." Nina said: "This camp left great impressions. There were two groups, first there were some children from our School #42 only and then many children from the Lutheran congregations. The work of a "united team" was evident, a team that is united by a great purpose, a team where everyone understands why they are doing the Camp. Even the Principal of the school noticed that the groups were more disciplined. Students liked the way they are taught, and they liked crafts and sports."

A youth celebration worship service was held at the church at the end of the last day of Camp with some of our American friends attending. You can just close your eyes and listen to the beautiful music, these songs... And the soul is praying! Here you can feel yourself connected with something Higher, with something important for your soul. And the Parish is sincerely glad to see you. They seem to say to you: "Yes, God loves everyone, He loves you. You are special".