

Summary of and Reflections about the 2008 Friendship English Language Camp, in Kondopoga, Russia (June 2-23)

by

Paul and Carol Anderson, Steve and Barb Goodspeed

Our Dear Friends,

*From the day that we met you
we knew we were blessed.
For you and we to be this close
we never would've guessed.*

*You've been here for us
through the good and the bad.
We are able to vent you
when others make us sad.*

*You're all that makes us happy,
all that make us smile,
even though we have known each other
for a very short while.*

*This is for you,
our dear friends ever.
We just want you to know
we WILL LOVE YOU FOREVER.*

—with LOVE, Russian teachers

The poem in the box was read to us by our Russian teacher/translators at the celebration ceremony the last day of our two weeks of Friendship English Language Camp (FELC) at School #3 in Kondopoga, Russia; the first week was with 5th – 8th graders, the second with 9th -11th graders. The truly heartfelt poem reflected our sentiments to the teachers, as well. To be sure, this relationship of trust, respect and love with the Russian teachers began last year when we (with three others, including Steve and Barb's daughter, Rachel) conducted one week of the first-ever FELC in Kondopoga at School #3, which had been well received by the Principal and Russian teachers and resulted in their request to East European Mission Network (www.eemn.org) for us to do the regular two consecutive weeks of Camp this year. But, familiarity and more time together firmly cemented the bonds of friendship and trust this year. And, the teachers shared with us that we needn't be apprehensive about sharing the Gospel and Biblical teachings in this public school setting, since the foundation for the moral and ethical values presented in the curriculum, which they value, emanated from Christian faith. These same relationships developed quickly with our groups of kids - as one youth said, "We can go to other English programs, but here we also learn about God."

The daily program included a lot of singing, a curriculum of

English lessons based on Biblical stories about David, sports time, and crafts and dramas also based on stories about David, and each week ended with each group presenting a drama of a Bible story and a celebration ceremony. The theme for the week was "Living in Hope," each day reflecting a different aspect of David's life with which we can identify where he needed hope (faith-based versus worldly hope). There were about 50 youth each week, so about 8-10 in each of the 5 small groups, each of which included a Russian teacher/translator. There were 6 on our Kondopoga team, we plus Sandy Nys from Immanuel Lutheran in Proctor and Rachel Siffring from Tennessee (her mom and sister were with us last year); over the two weeks seven Russian teacher/translators plus Russian FELC Director Tatiana Ivantsova and Assistant Principal Ludmilla worked with us. (Another 24 Americans were with EEMN's FELC teams in four schools in Petrozavodsk.)

Vadim Lysenko, a young Pastor at the Kondopoga Lutheran church played guitar for our singing. Vadim graduated from seminary with Alex Krongolm and is serving as Deacon ("Associate" Pastor) at the Kondopoga church with Pastor Jorma who is from Finland and whose visa allows him to be in Russia only three out of each six-month period; interestingly, they must communicate through a translator because one speaks Russian, the other Finn! Vadim also sat in on Paul and Carol's "class" and interacted well with the kids; his presence added much to the program and the program opened ministry opportunities for him.

We also experienced rich and meaningful interactions and conversations with our very gracious Russian host families; Sergei, the father in Sandy and Rachel's host family, was quite interested in learning more about



Kondopoga FELC Mission Team and Russian teachers with the banner made during craft time, reflecting the theme of the week—"Living in Hope." Each painted wood block has a synonym word for God.

the Lutheran Church in Kondopoga. He, as well as one from each of the other two host families, worked for the large paper mill (produces 30% of the newsprint in Russia) - Kondopoga, a “village” of about 40,000 population, is a “Company Town,” like Grand Rapids, but without equivalent salaries (salaries are in the range of \$300-\$500/month, yet cost of living is comparable to the U.S.)

Our itinerary included flying into St. Petersburg where we then bused to the ELCIR seminary at Kolitschei for an overnight stay, followed by an eight-hour bus trip to Petrozavodsk where our Kondopoga team stayed at the Youth Flat (two small rooms and a small kitchen, wonderfully hosted by Nadia Krongolm and her youth leaders) for the Lutheran Church for three days for orientation with EEMN. We then bused 30 miles north to Kondopoga where we met our hosts and the teachers for our own orientation, worship at the Kondopoga Lutheran Church, and two weeks of FELC (a mile walk from our host flats). Almost every evening involved some kind of activity, e.g., meeting with the English Table, attending an organ concert, touring the Youth Center, meeting with youth at the church, followed by getting ready for the next day—we were really pooped by the time we departed to Petrozavodsk for the train to St. Petersburg and two days at the seminary for debriefing, worship, relaxing and some sightseeing before flying out.

Other highlights reported elsewhere, related to the Companion Synod relationship between our Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) (www.nemnsynod.org/elcirmin.html), included good informational meetings with Pastor Pentti Smeds, Chairperson of the Youth Committee of the ELCIR (Alex Krongolm is under this Youth Committee) and Pastor Arre Kugappi, Bishop of the ELCIR. These conversations amply confirmed our conviction that Alex and Nadia Krongolm, whom our church is partnering with others to support and who visited here in April/May, are emerging as important and respected young spiritual leaders in the ELCIR and that our support is essential and fruitful; the need to identify funding for purchase of a car for Alex was also confirmed.

We feel very blessed by all that occurred at the Camp this year, sensing that there are great opportunities for future sharing of the Good News in Kondopoga and helping the church there to continue developing an inviting and respected presence in the community. Besides the poem above, here are two anecdotes reflecting this sense of being blessed. We share these as an encouragement to others and out of a sense of gratitude and humbleness for the privilege of being trusted friends:

- Katya, who substituted two days for Steve’s teacher/translator and whose son Vitya was in Paul and Carol’s class, wrote the enclosed four-page letter to Steve about her experience with him and 4-page letter to Paul and Carol about her son’s class experience.
- Olga Gritsenuk, Carol and Paul’s translator this year and last year, wrote a note to be opened when they got home: “Meeting you has become very important for me. You are the first true Christians who showed me what real faith is. I highly appreciate your lessons. Your work here is very significant. I do believe your ideas will enlighten others people as well. I have enjoyed the time we spent together. I hope we will be able to see each other next summer. I wish you good health and happiness. Thank you for what you are and what you do. Love, Olga.”

*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!*

The Kondopoga Friendship English Language Camp May 25 to June 15, 2009

By Sandy Stephenson Nys

This year 28 Americans participated as volunteers in East European Mission Network’s Friendship English Language Camps held in Petrozavodsk and Kondopoga, Republic of Karelia, Russia. I was the only one representing the Northeastern Minnesota Synod and the ELCIR Companion Synod Task force (and missed last year’s teammates, the Andersons and the Goodspeeds).

We left the United States on May 25, 2009, arriving in St. Petersburg, Russia. After a night at the ELCIR seminary in Koltushi, we boarded a bus for Petrozavodsk. Pastor Alex and Nadia Krongolm along with Vika Chinaeva met the Kondopoga team at Lyceum (school) Number One to drive us to the youth flat owned by the Lutheran Church. Vika had studied at a Lutheran Bible School in Plymouth during the 2008-2009 school year. The first evening in Petrozavodsk,

the team was invited to attend the Youth Group meeting in the flat. The next two days we joined the Petrozavodsk team for training.

After the first day's meetings, three of us from the Kondopoga team rode with Pastor Alex to the church in Derevyanka, located to the west of Petrozavodsk. Alex wanted us to see the church and show us where they hoped to place a fence around the property to protect the wooden church from being accidentally set afire by people using the porch as a place to smoke and consume alcohol. When we returned we stopped to see the new Petrozavodsk Lutheran church that was under construction. The final evening in Petrozavodsk Nadia, Alex, and Vika shared stories, noting that now that Alex has a car (which the Northeastern Minnesota Synod helped to purchase), they can take clothing and shoes to children in villages when they travel to Bible camps in the summer.

On Saturday Pastor Vadim Lysenko and his wife Olga from Kondopoga and Alex drove us and our gear to Kondopoga. The team included Dennis Parker (Columbus, Nebraska), Ken Stewart (Burnsville, MN), Nancy Kruse (Hutchinson, MN), Julia Osthus (second week only, Eagan, MN) and myself; Julia is related to Pastor Mark Osthus, Immanuel Lutheran in Proctor.

The theme for this year's FELC was Living in Faith with the theme verse Hebrews 11:1 – *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*. The curriculum for the week was based on the stories of Joseph in the Old Testament beginning with Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers and ending with Joseph's family reuniting in Egypt during the famine. Although he was a slave in Egypt, Joseph remembered his God and had faith that God was with him. God gave Joseph wisdom to help Egypt prepare for the famine.

Approximately 90 students attended the two week-long Language Camps in Kondopoga. Younger students (grades 5-8) came the first week and older students (grades 9-10) the second week. Working with us were 6 Russian English teacher translators, an assistant principal, a sports person, a crafts helper plus Oksana Dyba (the assistant director, member of the Kondopoga church), and Tatiana Ivantsova (our Russian director) – each made a valuable contribution to the team. Pastor Vadim Lysenko, of the Kondopoga Lutheran Church, assisted us with music. He also spent a day in each classroom getting to know the students. As a bonus, Vadim's English improved as well! When student's left at the end of the day, the Russian and American teachers met to discuss the day and the curriculum, a practice begun by Paul Anderson the previous year, which gives ownership of the FELC to everyone. The principal of school #3, where we were at, Armas Pipirainen, strongly supports the program and officially extends the invitation to EEMN to have the Camp.

The daily schedule included three English language sessions, sports, a morning snack, crafts, music, lunch, and drama practice. The Russian teachers worked with the students to prepare a drama based on Bible stories. The drama was presented in English at the closing program Friday afternoon. The American teachers ate lunch with their students each day. Although half an hour was scheduled for lunch, students ate quickly and waited outside our doors 5 to 10 minutes before the afternoon English session was to begin.

During snack time, each American teacher visited another classroom so students and Russian translators had opportunity to get to know each of us. Many questions were repeated from classroom to classroom: How old are you? What countries have you visited? Do you like Kondopoga? Do you have children? What are your hobbies? Do you have a pet? On the last day of our two weeks in Kondopoga, one of the translators asked me, "When did you come to faith in God?" Then she asked, "Did you ever lose faith in God?"

Both Sundays the team worshipped at the Lutheran Church in Kondopoga. The first Sunday I presented a cash gift to the church on behalf of the Suomi Conference. The second Sunday Pastor Jorma Sade from Finland joined us for lunch in the parish hall. He sent greetings to Paul and Carol Anderson and Steve and Barb Goodspeed, who had been at the Camps in 2008 and 2007, as well as all the Americans who help the Kondopoga congregation with gifts and prayers. Pastor Jorma attended our celebration program on the last day.

As we worked with students in Kondopoga, we knew that we were planting seeds of faith which would need to be nurtured by others through the Holy Spirit. Because of the trusting relationships established the previous 2 years and our awareness of our prayer partners back home and their continued prayer ministry for us, the team felt free to share the Gospel in both the large group and in the classroom; we felt increased freedom in sharing, more interest in spiritual things by the Russian adults, openness to the Bible stories by the students, the strengthening presence of the Holy Spirit in our morning devotions.

My teammate Nancy told me that in Kondopoga we worked in community. Daily events were planned for the team so we would get to know Kondopoga and develop good community relationships. In the process we also came to know each other better. Our host families and/or Director Tatiana joined us for many events. We had a Russian barbeque dinner at the Kivatch waterfall site with our hosts and other friends. One Saturday we visited the new Orthodox church and its icon painting workshop – hosted by the head priest of the church. In addition we attended a concert by a male chorus from Finland, an organ concert and a folk dance concert at the Palace of Arts, a Children's Day program, participated in an English Cub for adults, and enjoyed a farewell dinner at a restaurant.

When Pastor Alex Krongolm drove us to one of our destinations, he told me that in Russia, you do not ask someone, “How are you?” unless you have an hour or two to listen to the answer. Taking time for others, listening and sharing, is the key to building relationships. Before bedtime each evening, my host family prepared tea so we could end the day with conversation. The unexpected outcome in traveling to Russia on a mission trip was the development of special relationships with adults in the community, especially my host family (but others as well). My hosts, Sergey and Alya, said that God brought us together. Three different times during the stay in Kondopoga, the Russian teachers wrote poems and recited them for us in English. On our last day, we heard this:

Thank you for everything
 The words just cannot convey
 The depth of gratitude
 Of all our loving thoughts

We offer these common words
 And say ‘thank you’ once again
 We trust you will know how much
 We are glad to be your friends.

—FELC 2009 With love from Kondopoga

An added note—it seems that along with financial support for the Ingrian Lutheran Church and Alex& Nadia’s ministry with youth and children, we need to be continually in prayer for the Ingrian Church, its pastors and its lay leaders. The ELCIR is a young church body experiencing growing pains in a culture unaccustomed to supporting a church. Good steps are being taken. Yet, often church leaders have dreams which cannot come true due to lack of funding and personnel. I saw a need to pray for church organization, church leadership at all levels, stewardship, young pastors and mentor programs. As a companion to the ELCIR, I hope that all of us in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod will be in prayer for our brothers and sisters in Russia.

(After leaving Russia, I traveled to Kajaani, Finland. There I met with three members of the Kajaani congregation to discuss the building project for the church in Segeza, Russia. The information received in that meeting was given to Pastor Antti Lepisto, President of the Suomi Conference.)



Clockwise: Armas (Principal), Dennis, Sandy, Nancy, Tatiana



My 2nd -week class (Upper left: Olga, my translator friend; Lower left: Sandy