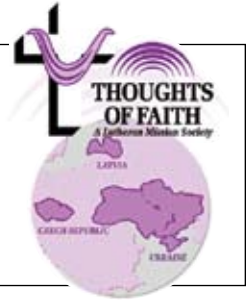


Thoughts of Faith

Thoughts of Faith is a confessional Lutheran mission society dedicated to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Latvia through printed materials and personal ministry.



August 2009
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Donations for the Lord's work in Ukraine, Czech Republic and Latvia may be sent directly to Thoughts of Faith. Please see the enclosed envelope to donate by check or by credit card.

Historic Ordination in Plzen

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7). These words of the prophet had special meaning for the 280 people in attendance at St. Paul's chapel, Plzen, Czech Republic, on June 7, 2009. Martin Vrsecky and Petr Krakora were ordained into the ministry of the Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church at the morning service. They are the first pastors of this fledgling church body, which has congregations in Plzen, Horni Briza, and Tlucna. There is also a preaching station at Rochlov.

The Rev. Mark Grubbs, who has served as a missionary in the Czech Republic since 1997, conducted the service and performed the rite of ordination. He also preached the sermon using I Corinthians 2:1-5 as the text. The theme was "Focus Your Attention on Christ Crucified." Participating in the laying on of hands were Pastors Matthew Luttmann and Steve Petersen, representing the Evangelical Lutheran Synod; Pastor Harold Schewe, a volunteer at Martin Luther School and a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod; and Gottfried Herrmann, Uwe Klarner, Jonas Schroter and Gerhard Wilde of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany. (There has always been a great deal of mutual support between the Thoughts of Faith Czech mission and the German synod. The success of Martin Luther School in Plzen encouraged the German synod to open its own Martin Luther School in Zwickau, Germany.)

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Flanked by visiting pastors, newly ordained Pastors Martin Vrsecky, left, and Petr Krakora prepare Holy Communion.

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Things Change – Things Stay the Same

Over the years, Thoughts of Faith (ToF) has expanded its ministry from first broadcasting radio programs behind the Iron Curtain to now supporting full-fledged Lutheran church bodies in Ukraine, Latvia and the Czech Republic. National pastors have been raised up and ordained in places long-starved for the Gospel. Missionaries, board members, administrators and support staff have come and gone, each making unique contributions of their own talents and gifts. Critical situations have arisen and donors have stepped forward to meet needs with special gifts. Things change.

Throughout the many changes that Thoughts of Faith has experienced, God's blessings have remained constant. The Holy Spirit still calls people to faith in Jesus through the preaching of the Good News . . . still gathers believers into congregations where they bring the Gospel to their communities . . . still sheds spiritual light in places where atheism once ruled . . . still sanctifies lives and hearts for service in the Church. Thank God his blessings on the preaching of the Gospel stay the same!

For many years Thoughts of Faith has enjoyed "church-related organization" status with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), sister synod of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Since Thoughts of Faith affiliates in Ukraine, Latvia and the Czech Republic are church bodies in their own right, it is proper that these organizations now relate to the rest of the world through a sister synod rather than through a mission society. Therefore, in June it was resolved that ToF "come under the governance and control of the ELS."

Another change – but really, things stay the same. In Ukraine, Gift of Life still provides public health care in poor villages and counsels pregnant women not to abort their babies. In the Czech Republic, Gospel outreach still centers around the growing Martin Luther School. In Latvia, national pastors still bring Word and Sacrament to the souls under their care. These vital ministries will continue on course, with the ELS Board for World Outreach happy to serve as partner.

Supporters of Thoughts of Faith should know that their contributions



Rev. Steve Petersen

are still critical to on-going work in Eastern Europe, to the ministry of the national pastors and churches there, and to the lives of our fellow-believers who depend on our support. The difficult economic times we face in the U.S. are compounded even more drastically for church members elsewhere, so we thank you in advance for your continuing support of the ministry of Thoughts of Faith!

*Rev. Steve Petersen
Field coordinator
ELS Board for World Outreach*

Ukraine

Graduation at St. Sophia Seminary

Every seat in the chapel of St. Sophia Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine, was filled on the warm sunny evening of June 17. It was graduation day. In a special service the seminary presented to the Lord and to His Church two graduates: Taras Bosiuk and Oleksandr Kulchizkiy. They were encouraged on the basis of Jeremiah 26 to tell all the people everything the Lord has commanded.

Taras has been assigned to serve as vicar in Sevastopol and Simferopol in the Crimea, Ukraine's Florida. Oleksandr will serve two groups in the Transdnestrian Republic of Moldova. The Transdnestrian Republic is a sliver of land on the eastern edge of Moldova. It has tried to break away from Moldova and return to Russia, but so far no one will let it do that.

Two other men were granted evangelist certificates. They were Dimitar Shishkov and Radoslav Radkov of the Bulgarian Lutheran Church (BLC). St. Sophia has been given the primary responsibility for the BLC's pastor training. The evangelist certificate signifies that these men have completed



At the graduation ceremony, left to right, are Bishop V'yacheslav Horpychuk, John Vogt, Dimitar Shishkov, Oleksandr Kulchizkiy, Taras Bosiuk and Oleh Yukhymenko, vice rector of the seminary.

at least half of the requirements of the full pastoral curriculum and are ready for increased service to their church.

*Rev. John Vogt
Rector of St. Sophia Seminary
Ternopil, Ukraine*

Theological Department Suspends Operations

In spite of our efforts to recruit students, the seminary faces the reality of having only one returning student, Volodymr Moskov. He is a very gifted young man and a good student. Unfortunately (for us) he is not from the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC), but from another Lutheran church, and does not intend to serve in the ULC. In addition, two young men have applied for the preparatory department. Both teens seem seriously interested, but they are much younger than our usual students and lack higher education and work experience.

For these reasons, the decision has been made to suspend the theological department (seminary level) for at least one year until the preparatory department can get some students ready. Other seminary services – the deacon education program, summer quarter, the youth forum, and some evan-

gelism projects – will continue. We welcome your prayers that the Lord will plant in more men the desire to become pastors – and make them ready to commit the time and effort that the training for this important office requires.

In the “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” department: We had to inform our one returning student that there would be no seminary next year. It was news he was not prepared for, but as always, God had a plan. Volodymr has been called to serve as pastor of a small congregation in his church body, so he will be able to immediately put to use the training we have given him.

In the midst of the changes and uncertainties of these days, we certainly are thankful that “*every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*”

(James 1:17)

Rev. John Vogt
Rector of St. Sophia Seminary
Ternopil, Ukraine

Faith in Hard Times

The Romaniuk family lives in a small town about 25 miles from Ternopil. The head of the family – Vasyl Romaniuk – underwent numerous operations, lost both legs and must use a wheelchair. For some time this family has been under the spiritual care of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC). Students of St. Sofia Seminary in Ternopil visit the family every Sunday.

As pastor of the ULC congregation in Ternopil I visit them from time to time and give them the Holy Supper. The Romaniuk family occasionally comes to Ternopil to take part in the worship service, though it is really difficult for brother Vasyl. Maria and Vasyl Romaniuk, together with their daughter Oksana, are confirmed members of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

Having withstood a challenging life test, every member of the family now draws strength from the Holy Word. Relying on the Savior has now become an integral part of their lives. Jesus brought to their hearts the true peace and hope through His saving Gospel. You can often see in their eyes the tears of thankfulness to God for the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

Love of our Lord and the Word gave them strength to overcome the challenges and to accumulate patience and love. Living in a difficult material situation, they are always hospitable to their guests and share with them their daily bread. God has blessed Vasyl and Maria with two daughters, a son and grandchildren. In their small apartment live Maria and Vasyl, their son, daughter Oksana with her husband and child, and Maria’s ill mother. Until recently, Vasyl’s mother, who was completely paralyzed after a stroke, also lived there.



The Romaniuk family, left to right, son-in-law Andriy, Maria, daughter Oksana, son Volodia, and Vasyl.

The young son of the family – Volodia – is in elementary school. He likes to read Bible stories and to draw. Taras Bosiuk, a graduate of the seminary, helps him learn English. Volodia likes to show his Christian magazines and colorings to his friends at school. In these hard times, the Romaniuk family relies on our Lord and, thanking Him for daily bread, praises the God and His Son who freed them from the power of sin and has given them eternal life and salvation.

Rev. Taras Kokovsky
Pastor of St. John and James Church
Ternopil, Ukraine

2009 VBS in Ukraine

The nearly year-long efforts of the nine-member Thoughts of Faith (ToF) Ukraine 2009 VBS Committee in the U.S. and the detailed efforts of Imilia Zinchenko in the office of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) came to fruition with 47 American volunteers arriving in Kyiv on July 1, 2009. The Ukraine Vacation Bible School program is supported primarily by the volunteers who pay their own expenses and by fund-raising by ToF from foundations and individuals. There was a day of touring in Kyiv and a day of orientation before the American volunteers, accompanied by members of the ULC congregations, departed by van, bus and overnight train to the 12 ULC congregations conducting the VBS program.

The purpose of the program is to help ULC congregations spread the gospel message. Also important is the opportunity for the Americans to visit historical and cultural places to learn more about Ukraine. Having Americans present is an attractive draw to the young people who also desire to learn some English. The VBS lesson plans are divided into four parts: a Bible study, a craft project that supports the lesson of the day, singing and English. The Americans teach in English assisted by Ukrainian translators. The translators



Pastor Husar encourages the reluctant boy to participate in the program.

repeat the information in Ukrainian or Russian and then tell the children's responses to the teacher in English.

Special thanks goes to Olya Tkachenko Elertson who translated the lessons from English into Ukrainian and Russian.



Olya Tkachenko Elertson leads a craft project.

Through the support of ToF, Olya was able to graduate from Martin Luther College and has taught at Luther Prep in Watertown and is now teaching at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. Olya's home is in Ternopil, Ukraine, and she was able to join the volunteers this year to teach VBS in her home congregation.

As former executive director of ToF, I was the chairman of the 2009 Ukraine VBS Committee and accompanied the group to Ukraine. In addition to leading the orientation in Kyiv, I visited five of the congregations in Western Ukraine that conducted VBS programs. One of the most interest-

ing situations took place in the village of Lazarivka. It has a population of about 450 people with 31 children in the local school. Of those 31 children, 26 participated in the VBS program. However, one boy about 7 or 8 years old was

seen standing on the narrow road about 25 yards from the church. He was certain there was something interesting going on inside but was reluctant to come closer. Pastor Aleksandr Husar went to him and asked him to join the group inside. The boy told Pastor Husar: "I am too late for today, but I will be the first one tomorrow morning!"

We thank the Lord for watching over all who participated in the program, both for the Americans who traveled there and the Ukrainian children who participated. Bonds of friendship and fellowship developed as time was shared with people of a different culture but with the same faith in Jesus Christ. Many who have participated in VBS programs in the past remain in contact with each other via the Internet.

Thanks to all who support the Ukraine VBS program. May God continue to bless the efforts of Thoughts of Faith and the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

Kermit Traska
2009 VBS chairman



Four students and a chaperone from Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis., tell the story of Pentecost at the Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Mykolaiv, a large shipbuilding city in Southern Ukraine. A total of 48 people attended the classes that ran from July 6 to 12. The Americans – left to right – Jackie Horton, Amelia Nemmers, Joel Hering, Paul Koester and Bethany Schultz – were among 47 American volunteers who fanned out across Ukraine for the annual VBS effort. In Mykolaiv, Pastor Alexander Sonne, reported that many of the children who attended came early and were reluctant to go home.

Gifts and Opportunities

“... when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work -- this is a gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 5:19)

Many people think that working as translators means losing ourselves in such a way that we become people without original thinking ability, people without personality, people without giftedness. During my six years of work at Gift of Life I have found quite the opposite is true. The gift of knowing a foreign language did not come to me full-grown. However, our Heavenly Father equipped me with endless resources to mature in my knowledge and skills. First, He gave me the gift of a wonderful education in my home country of Ukraine, then an opportunity to study as an exchange student in the USA, and finally the opportunity to practice English on a daily basis working as a translator at Gift of Life.

I am so thankful to God for showing me the joys of all the different tasks I have completed. I have experienced an excitement and special blessing to be involved in the ministry of the pro-life centers, Medical Clinic on Wheels and humanitarian aid distribution. Kindness was keeping all of us busy, and it made

my heart very glad. It was exhilarating to see children's faces light up as they were getting their first fluoride treatment at our clinic or to hear words of thanks from handicapped people and orphans who received used clothes absolutely free. And what a joy it was to translate stories about crisis pregnancy clients who attended counseling sessions at our pro-life centers and then decided to keep their babies! One of the special privileges was the opportunity to share Christ and information about the Ukrainian Lutheran Church with countless hungry souls who benefited from the work of our organization. There are still so many needs to be met in Ukraine that we can never get bored.

In his letter to the Colossian church, Paul says to “make the most of every opportunity” (Colossians 4:5). At this time of my life God opened a door to new opportunities for me and my family. On June 17th, 2009, my husband, Taras Bosiuk, graduated from St. Sophia Seminary and was called to serve as a vicar in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (more than 700 miles from the city where we live now). On the one hand, I feel sad about saying goodbye to the Gift of Life family who provided a lot of support, guidance and



Olya Tymchak

encouragement for me during the last years. On the other hand, it is exciting to know that God's love in Christ unites us as friends forever. It is even more reassuring to realize that we can rely on God even (and especially!) in trying circumstances. We will do our best to use our opportunities and gifts serving in this new capacity, and will pack our suitcases knowing that no matter what the distance, God will move with us.

*Olya Tymchak
Gift of Life translator
Ternopil, Ukraine*

Latvia

Latvian Lutherans Hit Hard by Worldwide Recession

For more than a dozen years the Augsburg Institute in Riga, Latvia, has served several noble purposes. Pastors, students of theology, parish workers and anyone who was interested were able to enjoy confessional Lutheran theology there. Professors from the United States and elsewhere had the privilege and honor to share the riches of the Gospel to young and old, to men and women. However, to make the voice of the Good Shepherd reach as many lost sheep as possible, the Latvian Lutheran newspaper was published. Its voice was heard and respected among those who appreciated and valued sound Christian teaching. All the good things mentioned were made possible by the generous financial donations provided through Thoughts of Faith. All who have been involved in this blessed work deserve gratitude.

However, the sad fact is that the situation has changed completely. As financial resources decreased, the Augsburg

Institute has been able to carry out fewer projects. The most painful loss, of course, was the newspaper. Since 2008 many readers (non-members of our church) have lost their only source of the refreshing voice of their gracious Savior.

All full-time employees of the Augsburg Institute have found other full- or part-time jobs. Their skills and achievements, however, have not gone unnoticed amidst the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference fellowship. Our pastors have been asked to present papers in world and European meetings. Lectures have been delivered also at the Biblicum Institute in Sweden. Special thanks should go to Rector John Vogt of St. Sofia Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine, who again gave the opportunity for Rev. Ilars Plume to lecture for a week in June. National pastors and students of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church appreciated the lectures and brotherly discourses held in Russian, which, by the way, was not a native tongue of listeners or the presenter. Some of our national pastors continue their academic studies at the university in Latvia and Helsinki University.

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Czech Republic

Historic Ordination in Plzen continued from page 1

At the close of the service, Martin and Petr particularly thanked Rev. Grubbs for the years of instruction he provided. He taught a majority of the courses they took on the seminary level. Also involved in their training were Pastors Luttmann, Schewe and John Petersen. Instruction was also provided by theological students Brian Diring, Christian Eisenbeis and Ben Foxen. They also took a course on Biblical interpretation at the Biblicum Institute in Sweden. Prior to seminary training, Martin studied at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn., receiving an associate of arts degree, and at Charles University in Prague. Petr received bachelor's and master's degrees at Western Bohemia University in Plzen. They began their seminary training in 2001. Their course of study included classroom instruction in all disciplines of theology and practical experience.

Following the service, Mark and Mary Grubbs received gifts of thanks from the members of the Plzen congregation for their many years of service to St. Paul's congregation and Martin Luther School. They retired from the mission and returned to the U.S. later in June. The remainder of the American staff has also departed, signifying the first time since the inception of the mission that there is no American presence. This will be a major transition for those who continue the work. We need to pray that the Lord will bless the efforts of Pastors Vrsecky and Krakora and those who assist them. We also need to pray for Milos Vrsecky, the director of Martin Luther School, as he seeks to continue to have the word of God taught there. The school will face a serious challenge



Mark and Mary Grubbs accept gifts presented for their service to the Czech Mission.

in this regard since American volunteers taught most of the religion classes in the school. Finding suitable and qualified replacements will be difficult.

The Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church is now in the hands of its own pastors and members. They still need your financial support to carry on the work. Please give generously. Pray that these new pastors will continue to preach and teach God's word in its truth and purity so many more people will hear the word of God and come to faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Rev. Matthew Luttmann
Former administrator of the Czech Mission
Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church
Vero Beach, Fla.*

Latvia

Latvian Lutherans Hit Hard by Recession continued from page 5

Thus we have many trained and well-equipped soldiers of the Lord who proclaim and defend the Christian faith in the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia. They have proven to be faithful stewards of the holy ministry entrusted to them. But they could do more if additional resources were available. Of course, our church realizes the necessity to be completely self-supporting. And as far as pastoral work is concerned it might become such in the foreseeable future.

However, due to the current economic and financial crisis we are not able to raise money ourselves for projects even smaller than the Latvian Lutheran. Unfortunately, our country has been smitten by the crisis almost to the point of default, so that our government is forced to borrow huge amounts of money from international institutions. It means that people, including our members and former subscribers to the newspaper, have considerably lower incomes even if they have not lost their jobs.

It sounds like a sad story, and in fact it is. So what is left for us if we want to make Lutheran theology accessible to a wider scope of people as it was when the Augsburg Institute had its office and library in Riga and when the Latvian Lutheran was published monthly and read widely? The answer is to pray that God provides generous donors who have hearts enflamed by the love of their Savior to support the salvation of people in a far away place called Latvia. Their good works that prove their genuine faith will not be forgotten when the Lord comes.

*Rev. Egons Mudulis
Riga, Latvia*

(Editor's Note: Reduced funding from Thoughts of Faith as the U.S. and worldwide economies soured has hit the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia particularly hard, especially in its effort to revive the Latvian Lutheran newspaper as its major outreach tool.)



The Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia comprises seven congregations, including this one at Kekava, a city of 4,600 in central Latvia.