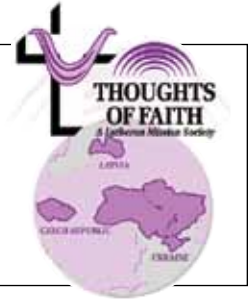


Thoughts of Faith

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.



June 2010
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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.

Youth Gathering "Just Fantastic!"

Youth Forum 2010, held May 1-3, brought an invasion of 73 young people from across Ukraine to the Black Sea city of Sevastopol. They came from 14 congregations, many travelling more than 24 hours by train each way. All will tell you the weekend was "just fantastic!" They came eager to learn the Scripture and share the good news about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The weekend gave them many opportunities for that, as well as excursions, entertainment and the chance to enjoy their special closeness as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord blessed the forum with warm, sunny days, a pleasant respite from the cooler weather in much of Ukraine.

The most important part of the forum was the study of the Word of God. Victor Paschenko, pastor of the Sevastopol congregation, gave the opening devotion and welcome. After that, Oleksander Zhakun, president of the Simferopol congregation, and others from his congregation organized a get-acquainted activity. A Bible class followed titled "I Am Ready for Everything for Your Sake, Lord." It was prepared by St. Sophia Seminary student Volodymyr Maskov. After the class, the youth relaxed with their choice of ice-skating or bowling. The ice rink was a real treat on that hot May day.

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The young people gather on an overlook above an inlet of the Black Sea.

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Good News from Thoughts of Faith

Summer sunshine has come again to brighten the skies and warm the days in North America and Europe (except when volcano eruptions in Iceland spread clouds of ash into the atmosphere!). After the cold dreary days of winter, how we enjoy clear sunny days during the summer months.

We are appreciating some bright spots at Thoughts of Faith these days, too! For example, in the Czech Republic, Pastors Petr Krakora and Martin Vrsecky celebrate the first anniversary of their ordination on June 7. Recently Martin Luther School in Plzen elected a new school board comprised of parents, teachers and pastors.

In Latvia, though the pastors are working bivocationally (in secular jobs as well as in their parishes), they are serving faithfully and even occasionally publishing newsletters as when the Augsburg Institute regularly published *The Latvian Lutheran*. Finishing touches are being added to the church at Ozolnieki and a new front door will soon be installed at the church at Jelgava.

In Ukraine, Vacation Bible School will be conducted this summer by 30 American volunteer teachers among the ten congregations hosting the program. Rev. John Vogt reports that 73 people attended the Youth Forum and that Summer Quarter will be held at St. Sophia Seminary to enhance theological training for pastors of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. We are happy to report that seminary training resumes this fall for several new students.

Here in the U.S., we are coming to the end of the first year that Thoughts of Faith has functioned under the supervision of the ELS Board for World Outreach. Though support has been reduced from our major funder, contributions from donors like you remain steady. Your gifts enable us to continue to support the ministries mentioned above.

It is our prayer that God will brighten your days this summer! May he prosper the ministry of your congregation, just as he blesses the work of Thoughts of Faith.

Rev. Steven P. Petersen
Administrator
Thoughts of Faith



Rev. Steven P. Petersen

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Vicar Taras Bosyuk ended our first day with evening prayer and worship.

The second day, Sunday, began with most of the youth doing evangelism by inviting people to join them at church. Then all gathered in Sevastopol's unfinished church building for the worship service and the Lord's Supper. The text for the sermon was John 15:5: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* The sermon noted that branches of the true vine had gathered in the church this day from all parts of the country. A Bible class followed, conducted by Vicar Oleksander Kulchizkiy and brother Oleksander Zhakun. It discussed the influence of Islam on modern Christian Europe.

An excursion to the Khersones National Reserve filled the afternoon. This is the remains of a city founded by ancient Greek colonists 2,500 years ago. In 1996, UNESCO placed it on its list of the 100 most remarkable world cultural memorials. A devotion was conducted there by Pastor Oleksander Feschenko. At a short business meeting the youth discussed Youth Forum 2011 and several congregations offered to host it. The group also decided to ask Ukrainian

Lutheran Church officials to organize a youth committee and offer a course for youth leaders. The day ended at a movie theater where the group watched "The Last Gift." Prior to the movie, Vicar Bosyuk asked all to pay special attention to the gifts which the Lord gave to the hero. The movie was discussed the next day.

On the third day of the rally, the group travelled to the picturesque town Balaklava. It had been the home of the Soviet Union's submarine fleet and is now a popular resort city. There was an excursion around the town and a climb to Chembalo, the 14th century fortress overlooking the town. Pastor Vadym Zinchenko conducted the devotion near the fortress. Vicar Bosyuk conducted Bible class on the rocks overlooking the sea. The group discussed the movie and compared the gifts which the Lord gives us in our Christian lives.

Perhaps the best present of the retreat was the request by young people from several congregations to conduct an extra, unscheduled Bible class on the topic "The Lord is My Shepherd." This was done on Monday evening after the forum had officially ended.

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The organizers summarized the weekend this way: "The important thing is that the Lord himself was with us. He was with us in Word and Sacrament during the worship service in Christ the Savior congregation. He was with us during the devotions and Bible classes. He was with us during prayers and worship as we glorified his name and sang hymns accompanied by guitars. God's presence blessed this forum. The 73 young people returned home waiting for the next meeting! Great thanks to the donors who helped us with this youth forum. May the Lord bless you!"

Editor's note: Youth Forums 2009 and 2010 were planned and carried out as service projects by the students and vicars of St. Sophia Seminary in Ternopil. Financial help was provided by gifts from U.S. congregations and the ELS Board for World Outreach. Each youth also paid a fee to attend. An additional \$3,500 in special gifts covered the remainder of the cost. Youth Forum 2011 will also be dependent on such gifts. If you would like to help, please send your gifts to Thoughts of Faith, 6 Browns Ct., Mankato, MN 56001.

Rev. Victor Paschenko, Vicar Taras Bosyuk and Oleksander Zhakun

Scenes from Youth Forum 2010



Communion is celebrated in the unfinished church in Sevastopol.



Bowling was one of several activities.



The youth group visited Khersones where tradition says the Apostle Andrew founded a congregation.



The group studies God's word near the ruins of Chembalo, a 14th century fortress in Balaklava.

The Best Baby Clothing

One of the most memorable and happiest times of your life was the birth of a child. Right? It is God's gift, the happiness of being a mother and a father. There are problems, but many are pleasant problems like looking for clothing and finding a name. You realize that you are responsible for this new life and it makes you very excited. But we Lutherans know that a baby comes into the world spoiled by sin, without Christ, and therefore under God's condemnation. How can we protect a baby from evil, diseases and violence? Where do we go for support? Who can we rely on?

Svetlana and Volodya did everything possible so that their baby was well and happy. Even when it was "under the mother's heart" they talked to the baby and expressed their love. They attended the School of Motherhood and the Fathers' School at our Gift of Life Center. During one of the Bible studies Svetlana asked the pastor to pray for her pregnancy and successful delivery. The pastor explained how important it is to baptize babies. Svetlana and Volodya were told that in the sacrament of Holy Baptism "God gives us the best clothing – the clothing of his righteousness that makes us look pleasing in God's eyes."

Finally, after all the problems, complicated delivery and first tears of happiness, the young family took care of the most important thing, the Baptism of their son. As our liturgy says, "Everyone who has been baptized is now clothed in Christ." It's the best clothing – for a baby or anyone else. We heard God's life-giving word spoken by Pastor Taras Kokovsky: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." A newborn receives the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He becomes a precious child of God and the Holy Spirit gives him faith. Svetlana, Volodya and the baby's godparents heard God's directive from the pastor to nourish this newly born faith with sincere prayer and God's Word every day and to look at their child's life through the eyes of hope, faith and love.

Nadiya Khominska
Gift of Life counselor
Ternopil, Ukraine



The family of the newly baptized baby and Pastor Kokovsky.

Seeds of Love Sprout as Good Deeds

Nowadays it is easy for young people who have left home to get lost in the world. But our loving and caring heavenly father brings all his children to his family. He guides us through life, gives us strength, assurance and blessings.

During difficult and trying times in her life, Olya felt God's love through his word as she attended Bible studies at the Ternopil Life Center and received the support of Gift of Life counselors. Now Olya has a nice family. God blessed her with two daughters and a loving husband. Olya is thankful to God for his love and grace. Now she wants to serve other people and is volunteering at the life center.

Jesus Christ came into the world to serve us, to save us from sin and give us eternal life. He showed us how to serve each other and help each other with the gifts we are blessed with by God. The Apostle Paul says: ". . . those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone." (Titus 3:8)

Nadiya Khominska
Gift of Life counselor
Ternopil, Ukraine



Olya and daughter Tanya.

Another Bell Rings for Christ in the Czech Republic

All of us have probably heard a bell's distinctive sound. I don't know of any other instrument that makes the same kind of sound. Like the trumpet or horn in Bible times, the bell has been widely used in more recent centuries to arouse people's attention. "A bell calling people to worship symbolizes the need of priority for the things of God over the secular. In general, (it represents) the sounding forth of the Word," explains Carroll E. Whittemore in her booklet "Symbols of the Church."

Our St. Paul's church in Plzen as well as our St. Peter's in Tlucna have bells. They ring automatically at noon and six p.m. The bells also ring a half hour before our Sunday services and then just before the start. Our bells let the people within their reach know that there are churches where they can hear the saving Word of their maker. The bell's sound is especially important for believers too, for it reminds them that just like this sound overrides all the noise of this world, so God's Word, his eternal will and his love in Christ, override all the passing snares and worries in their earthly lives.

Now, our preaching station in Rochlov also has a bell. The bell is just outside of the chapel. It is manual, not automatic. When it was dedicated on Easter Sunday, about 25 people attended and heard about the bell's symbolism. Those hearers were alarmed by God's Word of his fierce anger over their sin and were assured of God's undeserved forgiveness in Jesus, who suffered in their place. A small part of this deaf world was at that moment invited to save their souls by believing in the Savior of the world.

The Czech Lutheran Church is grateful to our Lord for the occasions he provides us to speak on his behalf. And our church is grateful to all of you for the support that enables us to ring "the bell that gives hearing" to the deaf ears of our neighbors.

*Rev. Petr Krakora
Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church
Plzen, Czech Republic*



Pastor Krakora rings the newly dedicated bell in Rochlov.

Hope for the Future in Kekava

The congregation of Kekava, Latvia, is very blessed with everything God has provided. It is our eighth year in our own church building and the number of members continues to grow. Recently our congregation established our own newspaper and it has become well-supported by all of our members. For the 13th anniversary of our congregation we would like to publish a book about Jesus Christ and include sermons and articles about our Christian faith. But for now we lack the money to publish.

In addition to our weekly service on Sundays and our Catechism study before each service, we also hold a Bible study on Wednesday nights. Every year, four weeks before Easter, we review Martin Luther's Catechism and his teachings.

We recently started painting our church tower and – depending on our finances – we hope to complete a couple of repairs to the building this summer. We are also hoping for new church organ. The one we have is old and the sound is not as bright and sharp as it should be.

One of our church members, Madara Matveja, just finished her junior year at Bethany Lutheran College and is looking forward to graduating in a year. Her major is social studies with a minor in mathematics. She is a member of Bethany's soccer and tennis teams. She is very happy about being given the opportunity to study in a Christian environment and be part of the Bethany community.

Our congregation in Kekava and the entire Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia feels blessed that the true Word of God is with us in such a small country like Latvia, knowing that most of Europe is losing its Christian roots.

*Juris Matvejs
Kekava, Latvia*



Pastor Ilars Plume performs a Baptism.



The bright interior of the Kekava church.



The church building in Kekava is eight years old.