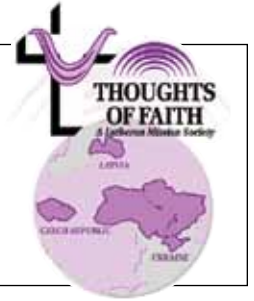


Thoughts of Faith

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 2011
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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.



A Bridge for the Ukrainian Lutheran Church

St. Andrew dropped everything to follow a fiery preacher -- John the Baptist. He introduced his brother Peter to Jesus and the brothers abandoned their successful fishing business to become Jesus' students. After graduation, Andrew started churches in Turkey and Ukraine -- along the Black Sea as far as the Volga and what became Kiev. (Ukraine is mentioned in the Bible, but is called Scythia.) Later, St. Andrew was crucified at the city of Patras in the Peloponnese (southern Greece).

Fast forward through a bazillion Byzantine moments to Vladimir the Great, who instated Christianity in Kievan Rus in 988 A.D. and made Ukraine a Christian nation. Keep going

through hordes of Huns who nearly collapsed Christian civilization in Eastern Europe. Slow down in 1760, about the time Rip Van Winkle took his 20-year nap. At that time, Catherine was Empress of Russia. She was called "The Great" partially because she was smart enough to invite German farmers to immigrate and teach the backward Slavs the latest in agricultural science. (Slavs were backward because the Mongolian Empire stopped progress for 200 years.) Germans moving to Russia got interest-free loans to buy homesteads and German Lutheran teachers were offered free land.



Julius Von Buelow and family.

Long before Americans used them, white billows of German covered wagons made the year-long trip to settle in what is now Ukraine. This was not a few odd settlers. In the Crimean peninsula alone there were more than 6,000 German colonies by the 1800s. Teachers and pastors were trained at a German Lutheran Seminary in Ukraine. But problems were brewing and by the early 1900s many Russians were unhappy under the rule of Tsar Nicholas. The seeds of communism were planted during this time.

The following is an account of two typical immigrant families, the Van Buelows and the Knulls. These families had produced teachers stretching back to Luther's time and they were among those who arrived in present day Ukraine to found the colony of Wladmir Wolhysk. Bernard Von Beulow, son of Julius, began working in

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Be Faithful!

When you study the spectrum of what is identified as “Lutheran” today, you’d better be prepared for a jolt. Things have changed! Commitment to the authority of Holy Scripture seems to be optional for some Lutherans. Pluralism in doctrine is accepted, almost as if what we believe doesn’t matter. Laxity in practice is applauded, and things that were once recognized as sinful are now celebrated.

Against this backdrop we have good reason to thank God for the adherence to confessional Lutheran theology we observe among the churches supported by Thoughts of Faith. In Latvia, Ukraine and the Czech Republic, our brothers remain faithful – in spite of daunting challenges like:

- opposition to the church by the government,
- the coldness of an atheistic society,

- the difficulty of bi-vocational ministry.

It is our privilege to stand with our colleagues in Europe, to support their ministries with our prayers and contributions, and to encourage their steadfastness, even as we ourselves are reminded of our Lord’s promise: *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.* (Rev. 2:10)

As you read of the historical and current Lutheran identity of the Thoughts of Faith affiliates, perhaps you’ll pause for a prayer of thanksgiving for all who are faithful to the Savior and to his saving Word!

*Rev. Steven P. Petersen
Administrator
Thoughts of Faith*



Rev. Steven P. Petersen

Czech Republic

Our Current Need – Would You Like To Help?

The Czech Lutheran Church uses a small chapel in the village of Tlucna. St. Peter’s is the name of the congregation there, as well as the name of the chapel’s bell. Last fall the bell stopped ringing after almost a decade of faithful service. The bell company, following a careful inspection, recommended that we replace the electric motor, its control unit, gear system and condenser. The cost of the work and the new equipment is about \$2,850.

Since the chapel building is owned by the village and our rental contract expires in 2021, we turned to the local government for assistance. Because several other projects are being funded by the village (e.g., a new school building), the governing officers were only able to grant us \$550 for the bell repair. Consequently, the church members decided to set up a special bell offering drive during the Lenten season. All the members of our church body (three congregations) were invited to contribute, as well as the children and their parents from our Martin Luther School in Plzen.

As the drive continues, we explain the useful function of bells in churches to those who attend our churches, to the children of our school and to the readers of our church newsletter. If you, dear reader of this newsletter, would like to join in this project, we kindly encourage you to do so. Specific donations can be made to Thoughts of Faith. Thank you!

May the sound of the Word of our God ring in your ears and hearts like the loudest bell ever!

*Pastor Petr Krakora
Czech Lutheran Church
Plzen, Czech Republic*



The chapel with a serviceman on the roof inspecting the bell.

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the colony in 1905. His responsibilities included teaching in a one-room school, playing the organ and preaching 48 sermons a year. He also baptized babies and conducted funerals.

When the parsonage he lived in burned in 1912, he decided to cut his losses and leave. Unable to afford passage for his wife and children, Bernard left for America alone. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Bernard's wife and children tried to escape the fighting in Russia via the Baltic Sea but ended up walking through war-torn Europe, eventually reaching Bad Odesloe, Germany. Bernard's father, Julius, was arrested after a letter he wrote complaining of conditions in Ukraine was intercepted by the authorities. He was tortured and died in prison.

The Knull family remained in Ukraine where a family member, Edmund, fought for the Russian Army during the war. Under the Bolshevik communists, Germans were still allowed to preach and teach the Gospel for a time, and the Knulls continued to teach God's Word. But after World War II broke out, Hitler broke his peace treaty with Russia. He blitzkrieged Russia and chaos was everywhere. The Nazis mistreated Ukrainians and Russians and when the tables turned, "Russian" Germans, even those who had helped the Soviet Army against Germany, were ordered to leave Ukraine. Suzanne Knull's sister was shot in her bed at the age of 74. Gustav was shot in the back as he was fleeing and Edmund was killed between the retreating Germans and the advancing Soviets. During and after the war, Stalin murdered between 35 and 60 million citizens, including

11 to 20 million Ukrainians. Churches all over Russia and Ukraine were destroyed or turned over for government use. Workers confessing to be Christian lost their jobs and most were imprisoned, not in a centrally heated jails, but more likely in Siberia.

End of story?
Not quite!
Several decades later, radio waves were beamed into Ukraine by the Lutheran mission, Thoughts of Faith, proclaiming the Gospel message. Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 as communism collapsed. That same year, Dr. Stephen Dudiak and Pastor John Shep, both Ukrainian Americans, met with financier Marvin Schwann. They implemented a plan to establish humanitarian outreach to assist those displaced by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. They called this project the Medical Clinic on Wheels (MCOW). It purchased two huge medical/dental vans and office space in Ternopil.

In April 1992 the clinic buses were airlifted to Ukraine by the largest cargo plane in the world. An often forgotten fact is that early Lutheran missionaries were allowed to enter Ukraine only because the collapsing govern-

ment desperately needed the doctors, dentists, medicines and computers of MCOW. These became a bridge for the Lutheran church to become re-established in Ukraine. When the govern-

ment learned it could trust MCOW it allowed missionaries to enter the country under visas obtained through MCOW. The first Ternopil missionary recalls that the Medical Clinic on Wheels opened many doors for his work where there otherwise might have been suspicion. MCOW became Gift of Life and added pro-life work. Together the components of Gift of Life still provide evangelism opportunities for the

church. The Ukrainian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession was reorganized in Ukraine in 1994 as the Ukrainian Lutheran Church and legally registered in 1996. It has a seminary and 30 parishes. Gift of Life and the Ukrainian Lutheran Church have had a long, fruitful and blessed association. Thank you for helping to make it happen!

*Nicholas and Kerry Laper
Gift of Life
Ternopil, Ukraine*



The Knull family.



Toothbrushes and Paste Needed

The Medical Clinic on Wheels needs toothbrushes and toothpaste to give to people who visit its dental clinic. If you would like to donate these items, please see its Web site for information on shipping them to Ukraine: giftoflife.org.ua.

One of the MCOW buses and the plane that carried it to Ukraine.

A Difficult Road for Ukrainian Lutherans

Lutheranism is not a totally new religion in Ukraine. It was here already in the 16th century, that is since the time of the Reformation. Ukraine was part of the Polish Kingdom at that time and Lutheran congregations covered quite a significant part of that country's map. The Counter Reformation, and what is called in Ukraine the Liberation War in the 17th century that followed the Counter Reformation, had disastrous consequences for churches and for the Ukrainian population. Quite a large part of Ukraine was joined to Russia and for a Ukrainian to be a Lutheran was often regarded as a crime. Germans and Swedes could be Lutherans; Ukrainians were supposed to be Russian Orthodox. Religious persecutions were quite common during all of the Russian reign and Communist rule was no exception.

What I call the Ukrainian Reformation happened in 1925 when Western Ukraine was again under the Polish government. At that time the Uniate (Eastern Orthodox in ecclesiastical union with the Roman Catholic Church) decided to follow a practice of unification: introducing the Western rite and Latin into Ukrainian churches that traditionally for 1,000 years followed the Eastern rite (St. John Chrysostom Liturgy). That caused resistance and a search for true piety that was found in Lutheranism. Traditional liturgy was cleansed of things that contradicted the Scriptures and in 1933 the Ukrainian Evangelical Service Book was published. Other books in Ukrainian were published as well: a

hymnal, Luther's Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, etc. To Rev. Theodor Yarchuk belongs the honor of being the most significant leader of the Ukrainian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession from 1925 to 1941. He, as well as many others, became a martyr for our Lutheran faith when the Soviet Union occupied western Ukrainian lands and the Soviets began a vicious extermination of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church that by 1941 included nearly 20,000 believers.

In 1993, through the Thoughts of Faith mission society, two congregations were started in Ukraine: one in Ternopil (Rev. Roger Kovaciny) and the other in Kyiv (Rev. John Shep). Soon (in 1994) the seminary was established and its first rector (Rev. Jay Webber) did his best to bring in faithful teachers to train Ukrainian pastors. The Schwan Foundation (Larry Burgdorf) was absolutely instrumental and vital for Lutheranism's rebirth in those years and its support continues to be of chief importance for us now. One of the old buildings was reclaimed in the village of Lazarivka and refurbished. The story of a faithful deacon from that village church, Stepan Cheremkhivka, who survived 17-years of imprisonment in a Soviet concentration camp in Siberia, yet remained faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and our dear Lutheran confessions, deserves a separate page in the history of our church body as well as on pages of this respectful journal.

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Vacation Bible School in Kremenets always boasts a large enrollment.

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From 1994 until today many congregations were founded and many people became believers in Christ through proclamation by ULC pastors. Today the Ukrainian Lutheran Church is located in many regions of Ukraine and has 30 congregations and mission congregations that include about 1,200 members served by 25 national pastors. The Ukrainian Lutheran Church is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. The Ukrainian Lutheran Theological Seminary of St. Sophia (Rev. John Vogt, rector) has renewed its activities and has two students from Ukraine and one student from Belarus. The ULC has its periodical *The Banner* and can enjoy nearly 50 good confessional Lutheran books published for it by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LC-MS, Rev. James Fandrey). Ukrainian Lutherans also enjoy the excellent and confessional *Good News Journal* (Rev. Dr. Wallace Schulz). Vacation Bible School is another activity that takes place every year in many ULC congregations, and ELS and WELS students and pastors lead them in Ukrainian villages and towns. The most successful Vacation Bible School was led by Rev. Neal Schroeder and had 250 children in attendance in Kremenets. The Gift of Life charitable foundation (Nicholas and Kerry Laper) serves as a humanitarian representative of the church in Ukrainian society. We thank the Lord for our U.S. brothers in



Rev. Theodor Yarchuk and his bride.



Bishop Horpynchuk performs a baptism at the Easter service at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Kyiv. The congregation was founded in 1993.

the WELS and ELS who continue to help our church body. Such men as Larry Marquart, Tom Medema, Neal Schroeder and Mark Schwan (all from WELS) deserve our special thanks for their support of the Gospel cause in Ukraine.

With the recent world crisis and a disastrous drop of support from our U.S. brothers almost all the pastors have to find a secular job and work all week long to provide for their families, since ULC congregations cannot provide for their pastors enough means for survival. This is the major challenge for us because if pastors will not tend congregations with the Gospel on a constant basis, that will cause spiritual hunger and attached illnesses. Another challenge is the lack of our own buildings. We have only six church buildings for 30 congregations. Soon another building will appear at the expense of giving away part of our property in Ternopil. Ukrainians look at churches without buildings as sects

and it is extremely difficult to invite people to Lutheran worship services with such a reality while numerous other denominations' buildings, as we say in Ukrainian, grow as mushrooms after a summer rain. Yet despite of all this, our faithful Lord continues to call people to the Ukrainian Lutheran Church through the Word and Sacrament. To Him alone be all the glory!

*Bishop Vyacheslav
Horpynchuk
Ukrainian Lutheran Church*

Editor's note: The cut in subsidy Bishop Horpynchuk refers to is the reduction in support from the ULC's long-time generous benefactor due to the recent downturn in the U.S. economy.

Lutheranism in Latvia

Latvia has been a predominantly Lutheran country for many centuries. The Reformation gospel was preached in Latvia, particularly in Riga, as early as 1523 when two preachers arrived with the recommendations of Luther and his associate, Johannes Bugenhagen.

The nobility of Livonia (the ancient name of the present day Latvia and part of Estonia) accepted the evangelical faith, as Lutheranism was called at that time, though the message itself was appreciated only in Riga at that time.

Soon after followed bloody wars between the Livonian Knightly Order, Poland and the Moscovite czars, which devastated the country for about a hundred years. At the end of the 16th century Livonia was overrun by Jesuit monks who tried to reinstate the authority of the Roman church.

In 1621 the city of Riga surrendered to the king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, who was a defender of the evangelical faith. The Swedish administration outlawed the Roman Catholic Church and all priests and monks, especially the Jesuits, were ordered to leave. During the hundred years of Swedish rule Lutheranism was promoted.

But for many years, Latvia was ruled by a German aristocracy and a great gulf existed between them and the native people of Latvia, which one scholar has compared to apartheid in Africa. Most of the pastors who felt responsibility to take care of their Latvian sheep were not local Baltic Germans but came from Germany.

It took a long time before we can start speaking of Latvian Lutheranism. The first Latvian Lutheran pastors, after graduating from Terbata (Dorpat) University, were accepted as congregational pastors by the German nobility beginning in the 19th century and only after they married into German families, adopted German culture and forgot their own nationality. Only late in the 19th century did more and more Latvian national pastors serve congregations.

The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran church was founded in 1920 when the

Latvian nation regained independence after 700 years of mostly German rule. In November 1919, with the defeat of the Germans in World War I, the Latvians themselves became responsible for their spiritual affairs. When the University of Latvia was founded in Riga one of the first departments was that of theology.

Much could be told of how the Latvian Lutherans developed their theology, and how Latvian rationalism replaced Lutheran orthodoxy, later to be followed by the pietistic movement of the Herrnhut Brethren and how the higher criticism of the Bible found its way into Latvian Lutheranism. Moravian and German Herrnhut Brethren came to Latvia in the early 18th century and worked shoulder to shoulder with Latvians, who immediately responded to their brotherly approach. A school was established at Valmiera from which many Latvian evangelists graduated and started the so-called houses of gathering (the pietistic "church within the church") which lived beside the official Lutheran congregations.

Some Baltic German pastors supported the Herrnhut movement, seeing that this might be beneficial for their flocks. Yet many strongly opposed that movement, not so much on theological grounds, but rather fearing that this movement might lead to the awakening of their serfs as an independent nation which far outnumbered their Baltic German masters. This actually happened. The movement of the Herrnhut Brethren gradually grew into Latvian Lutheranism. If the theology of the brethren congregation could be criticized for its subjectivity, the movement should be praised for its genuine Christian love and care for the neighbor. This movement, according to Professor Roberts Feldmanis, brought the Latvian nation out of its "historic anonymity" and started to form "a genuine Christian character of a nation."

Another phenomenon which should not be left unnoticed in speaking of the roots of Latvian Lutheranism is Lutheran pastor Ernst Glick who came from Germany at the end of the 17th century. He was a linguistic genius and quickly mastered Latvian. In a few years he translated the Bible into



The Latvian congregation in Ozolniecki enjoys worship in this new building.

Latvian from the original Hebrew and Greek and founded a school for Latvian evangelists. During the Great Northern War between Sweden and a coalition led by Russia he and his Latvian stepdaughter Martha were captured and taken to Moscow. Glick enjoyed a very good reputation with Czar Peter the Great and Glick's stepdaughter Martha married Peter and later became Catherine the First.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Thoughts of Faith looked at former Soviet republics as places where there was a possibility to promote confessional Lutheranism. In 1990, Professor Erling Teigen made contact with conservative Lutherans in Latvia and was invited for several years to present theological lectures. Later he was joined by Professor Mark Harstad. As a result, Gundars Bakulis studied at Bethany Lutheran Seminary and with others organized the Augsburg Institute, which published translations and a religious newspaper, and organized the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia (CLCL). At present, eight CLCL pastors serve approximately 800 souls in eight congregations, each man receiving a modest stipend from Thoughts of Faith and relying to a great extent on bi-vocational, secular employment.

*Rev. Gundars Bakulis
Superintendent, Confessional Lutheran
Church of Latvia*

Thanks to Professor Erling Teigen for editing.