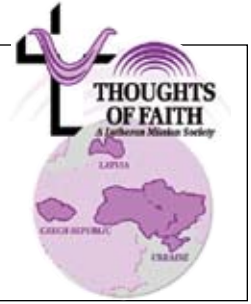


Thoughts of Faith

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 2008

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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.

Do You Know How You Began?

When exactly does human life begin? As a pro-life counselor I often ask this important question when giving presentations, providing individual counseling and especially when working with crisis pregnancy cases. When invited to conduct meetings with school children and university students, the topic often is "The Healthy Way of Life." I always start from the beginning – the story of the miraculous development of an unborn baby.

Gift of Life has very interesting materials, films and models that help me make these meetings bright and unforgettable. These days it has become easy and pleasant for me to retell the story of the beginning of a human being. From conception to birth, it is a miracle of God! Having the opportunity to share the "Good News" with the confidence that each of us -- from the very beginning -- is a unique and blessed child of God, makes me happy.

Good cooperation with educational and medical institutions, social services and civil organizations extends the boundaries of our pro-life activity. For example, in Kyiv at the end of April 2008, Gift of Life was invited to take part in a series of lectures for school children. The lectures were devoted to the formation of a positive family model and preservation of reproductive health. Students from neighboring villages came to attend the lecture that I conducted. At first these quite ordinary boys and girls (aged 14-15 years) thought they would not be told anything new or interesting and seemed bored. They did not imagine that life before birth can be so gripping! Noise in the classroom calmed down with the first minutes of the film about a child's development inside of the mother.

The fetal models that illustrate this development drew the biggest interest. Everybody wanted to touch these small babies. These teenagers -- and it was a real miracle -- seemed changed after touching those small babies and wanted to share these new impressions with their friends. They began to realize that each of them is a person from the very beginning;

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Ukrainian teenagers are fascinated by fetal models used in Gift of Life presentations. This session took place in Kyiv.

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From the Executive Director

It was my privilege to participate in the sixth triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference June 3-5, 2008, in Kyiv, Ukraine. Convention participants included representatives from the countries where Thoughts of Faith (ToF) works: Ukraine, Czech Republic and Latvia. There were opportunities to speak with friends, old and new, from around the world. The convention is described further in another article on this page

During the convention, representatives of Thoughts of Faith, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) discussed how to best utilize the services of Rev. John Vogt, the rector of St. Sophia Seminary in Ukraine. Rev. Vogt previously served the WELS as head of the Biblicum Seminary in Sweden. During his tenure in Sweden and Ukraine, Rev. Vogt developed extensive summer-quarter studies for men from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia. This places St. Sophia Seminary in an important role for theological education throughout this region.

Currently, WELS does not have a “friendly counselor” for Bulgaria. Rev. Vogt has spent time in Bulgaria providing classes for the pastors, and some of the men have studied at St. Sophia. So the suggestion was made that Rev. Vogt formally take on some of the responsibilities for the work in Bulgaria through an agreement between the WELS, ToF and the ELS. For those services provided to Bulgaria, WELS will reimburse Thoughts of Faith for 25% of Rev. Vogt’s time.

This is a positive step for cooperation in the region. In a time of tight budgets, it is important to use our resources wisely and not duplicate efforts. Your generous support of



Standing left to right: Rev. Steve Petersen, ELS mission counselor; Kermit Traska, ToF executive director. Sitting left to right: Scott Uecker, WELS Europe Administrative Committee; Rev. John Vogt, rector of St. Sophia Seminary; Rev. Dan Koelpin, WELS foreign missions administrator.

Thoughts of Faith and St. Sophia Seminary provides for the training of current and future pastors serving confessional Lutheran congregations.

May God continue to bless our work together with the national church bodies to spread the gospel message in the countries that suffered for generations under atheistic Communism.

Kermit Traska

Kermit Traska
Oregon, Wis.

Ukraine

CELC Meets in Kyiv

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) hosted the triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) at the Tourist Hotel in Kyiv June 3-5, 2008. Rev. V’yacheslav Horpynchuk, head of the ULC, and Ihor Rudzik, secretary of the ULC, coordinated much of the planning. Rev. John Vogt, rector of St. Sophia Seminary, and Rev. Richard Warnke, Thoughts of Faith’s pastor mentor, provided additional help to the ULC. Rev. Vogt had experience planning a CELC conference, helping with the 2002 meeting in Sweden.

Attendance was about 80, with representatives from 15 member church bodies from around the world, as well as observers from six other sister church bodies. The conference heard five essays that encouraged the

participants to “Make Known God’s Manifest Wisdom.” These essays were presented by pastors from Ukraine, Norway, Russia, Japan and Peru. The CELC also established a commission to coordinate global theological education among its member church bodies.

A highlight of the convention was the program on two evenings when a representative of each church body told about its work – including the joys and difficulties it faced. Pastor “Martin Luther” Kim from South Korea stole the show with his exuberance and enthusiasm. He emphasized that he wanted



Rev. Horpynchuk leads the opening service.

to be called Martin Luther because our world is desperately in need of a second Reformation. He reported that his church has about 250 members, of which 50 are studying in the United States.

Rev. John Vogt

Fund Established to Build Ukrainian Churches

When it comes to worship, a Christian congregation may gather to hear the Word and bring its prayers and praises in almost any kind of a building. Small Lutheran congregations in the United States and elsewhere have worshipped in community centers, funeral homes, school gymnasiums and rented rooms in strip malls. At times, the church services have even taken place outdoors.

A church building is not necessary for a Christian congregation to be formed, for it to grow or for it to thrive. The Bible says that it is the Word of God, and by implication not church buildings, that converts people to saving faith in Jesus.

In Ukraine, most of our congregations use rented or borrowed quarters. Often there will be some sort of worn auditorium seating. But sometimes the setup may include rearranging the furniture in an apartment's living room. Typically, much work goes into creating an attractive atmosphere in the makeshift worship facility, and usually the result looks great.

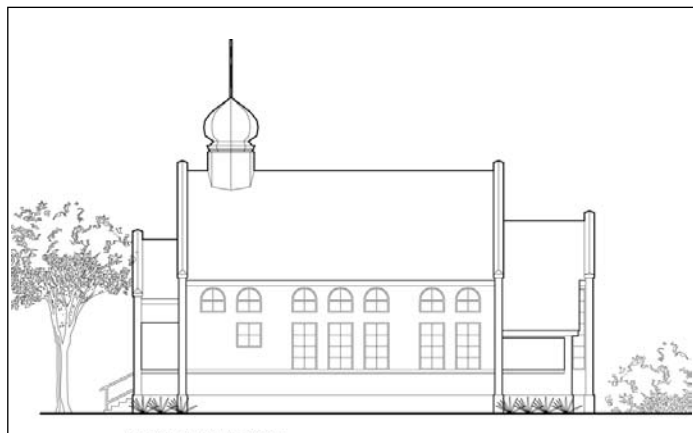
Nevertheless, the young congregations here aspire to have their own building on their own land, the place they can call "God's House" and really mean it, because it is there that the Lord comes to them through the Word and they speak to him in their prayers.

Probably the biggest difference between the aspirations of a Ukrainian congregation for a church and the similar hopes of an American congregation is the prospect for the future. In the United States, Lutherans supporting Thoughts of Faith are members of synods that have orderly procedures by which young congregations can obtain loans for land purchase and church construction. The system works well. Within 10 years of its founding, a young congregation likely will have its first building and may even have expanded that building. The infant congregation I served at the beginning of my ministry was able to purchase land even before it was formally organized. Three years later, the congregation had a beautiful chapel it could call its own.

But in Ukraine, there has been no orderly procedure for young congregations to obtain loans or subsidy for chapel construction. Because of this, only five of the two dozen congregations of our fellowship have any sort of a building -- and obtaining those churches has been a mixed bag, to say the least.

In the farming village of Ivanivka, Lutherans constructed a chapel well over a century ago. When the communists gained control, that solid stone edifice was converted into a dance hall. With the fall of communism, the little congregation tried to obtain ownership of the building. Some years ago, the authorities finally returned the church to the Lutherans, to the joy of God's people.

Mikolaiv is a large



Here is a side view of the prototypical chapel design that can be economically built in many locations.

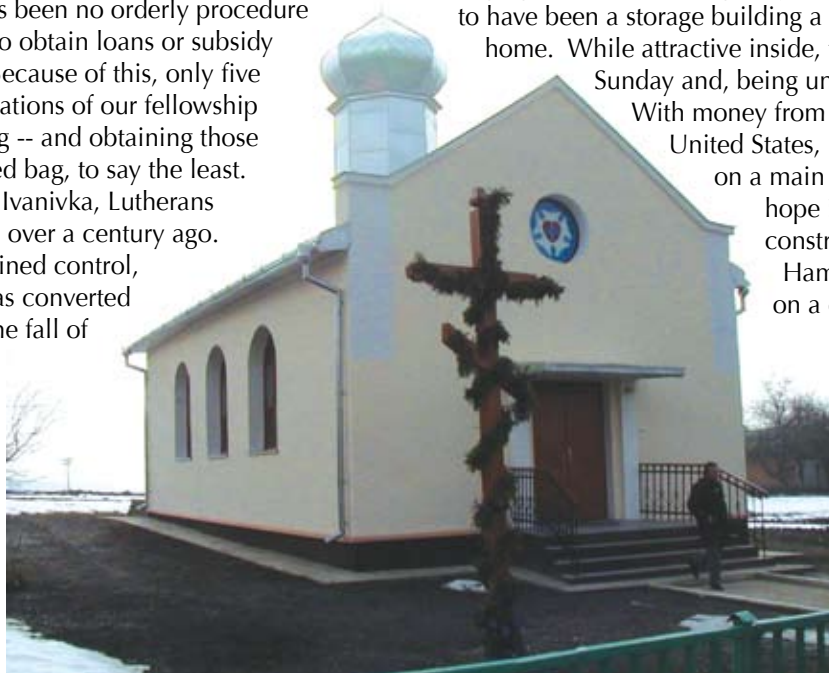
city in southern Ukraine. There the Christians scraped together whatever money they could, purchased the fourth floor of a building, and remodeled and appointed it for worship. Of course, the elderly among the members struggle every Sunday to climb the six flights of stairs. But they have their own house of God.

In the port city of Sevastopol, generous gifts and loans from America allowed the congregation to begin construction of a beautiful church. But there were massive cost overruns when it was discovered that expensive pilings would have to be put in because the site was in an earthquake zone. The money ran out. Today, the congregation worships in the basement of its partially completed building, inches forward with construction from local funds and donated labor, and longs for the day when it will be able to complete the structure. Similar unique stories could be told about Lazarivka and Kremenets, the other two cities where ULC buildings are located.

In the small, dusty, slightly remote city of Berezhneuvate, the congregation has done a great job beautifying what appears to have been a storage building a few feet from the pastor's home. While attractive inside, the room is crowded on Sunday and, being unheated, cold in winter.

With money from a generous donor in the United States, land has been purchased on a main street nearby. Now the hope is for outside help with construction.

Hamove is a small village set on a dirt road amid massive grain fields in southern Ukraine. Many of the town's younger adults have migrated to the cities. So Hamove is shrinking and littered



The congregation at Lazarivka worked hard to restore this chapel.

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The Lord Always Provides!

Due to sudden changes in Czech visa laws, the six American volunteers serving in the Thoughts of Faith Czech Mission for the 2007-08 school year were forced to return to the United States in February and March. Among other things, this meant our mission had to quickly find a way to provide substitute teachers for nearly 40 weekly classes in religion and English – all of which had been taught by the volunteers who had to leave. To help with this emergency, our two Czech seminary

students, our two Czech volunteer teachers, and many others took on as many additional classes as possible. But we were still unable to cover all the classes.

However, as the title of this article reminds us “the Lord always provides.” He provided for our need by sending an additional “emergency” teacher, Janice Wehausen, from Tucson, Ariz. Janice had served as a volunteer teacher in our Czech mission during the 2006-07 school year. When she heard that six of our volunteers had to return to the U.S., Janice volunteered to return to Plzen and help us until the end of the school year. Janice took on

a very challenging schedule, including choir work and teaching religion and English in several grade levels. Her help was invaluable. And once again, by leading this volunteer to return to the Czech Republic, we are reminded that “the Lord always provides.”



Janice Wehausen

Pastor Mark Grubbs

Way More than Friends – Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Twelve students from Trinity-St. Luke’s Lutheran School in Watertown, Wis., spent about two weeks in June visiting the Thoughts of Faith mission in Plzen, Czech Republic. They lived with Czech families, worshipped with our Czech congregation, sang their confirmation hymn during one of our Sunday services, witnessed one baptism and two confirmations, and joined us as we celebrated the Lord’s Supper. They also visited nearby castles, took a train trip to Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, sampled traditional Czech foods – and even learned to speak a little Czech.

These American students were participating in the second part of a Czech-American student exchange program. Last year in May, our Christian school in Plzen, Martin Luther School, sent a group of Czech students to Watertown. In Wisconsin, they attended classes and chapel services, sang for worship services and lived with American host families. They also got a chance to visit Wisconsin’s capital, Madison, to learn to play softball, and to discover just how good brats and burgers taste right off the grill.

In some ways, our Czech-American student exchange program is like countless other exchange programs: Students and their parents pay the expenses and the students experience a foreign culture and form close friendships with one another and with the members of their host families.

But our student exchange program is very different from all others because it has a much more important goal – a spiritual goal. Very few Czech students come from Christian homes. Living with Christian host families in Watertown gave them the opportunity to experience firsthand the blessings of Christian family life. The host families also provided Christian encouragement to the visiting Czech students. It is very significant that four Czech students asked to be baptized shortly after returning home.



Czech and American students and their chaperones gather in the chapel in Plzen, Czech Republic.

Visiting the Czech Republic – where only a tiny percentage of people are Christians – also served as a reminder to the students from Trinity-St. Luke of the crucial importance of supporting mission work and being involved in personal witnessing.

The Czech students and their American friends said good-bye at the Prague airport. Saying good-bye was not easy. All of the students realized that they had become very good friends. But they realized something far more important. Through their shared faith in Jesus, they were way more than just friends. They were also brothers and sisters in Christ.

Just a couple of days after the Americans returned to Wisconsin, I received an e-mail from Sue Boulden, one of the chaperones who accompanied the students from Watertown. She wrote, “Our prayer will be to meet again, if not on this earth, then at our Savior’s feet in heaven. It is there we will enjoy the Feast together!”

Way more than friends . . . Brothers and sisters in Christ!

*Pastor Mark Grubbs
Plzen, Czech Republic*

Latvijas Luteranis Hopes to Start the Presses Again

For nearly 12 years the Augsburg Institute published monthly newspaper the Latvijas Luteranis (the Latvian Lutheran). A lot of work was put into this important mission and many skills and talents were developed. This project was made possible by financial assistance from Thoughts of Faith.

After the fall of the Soviet Union one of the greatest problems for the Lutheran Church of Latvia was a lack of Christian literature.

When the work of the Augsburg Institute started in 1996, it was decided that one way to spread the Gospel was to develop a confessional Christian newspaper. Since the Latvian people are not easy to approach and are not

eager to discuss matters of faith openly, a confessional Lutheran newspaper turned out to be a good mission tool.

The newspaper achieved much over the years. First, it was a banner for confessional Lutheranism at the time when the Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia was in its infancy and when it was crucial to explain our

faith, convictions and differences from other church bodies. Second, it was an effective mission and educational tool. Third, the Latvijas Luteranis had an impact outside of our church because many readers were from other denominations.

In addition to teaching and preaching the timeless Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we also wrote about current issues in Christianity and society to

help believers understand the signs of our time, keep the faith and guard against false teachings. Over the years, the Latvijas Luteranis published a huge amount of good Lutheran

literature that helped fill the void created by the Communist period.

The greatest review we received from our readers was gratitude that for the first time in their lives they understood what the Gospel is and what Christ is all about. Now there are many more Christian publications in Latvia, but from time to time our readers remind

us how important it is for them to have the clear voice of the Gospel found in the Latvijas Luteranis.

Unfortunately, due to financial problems, we had to suspend publishing. Since then we have received countless calls inquiring about the Latvijas Luteranis. When hearing the news, some people even cried, some offered donations and others said they will pray for our newspaper. But they all expressed hope that the newspaper can be restored. The writers and editors of the Latvijas Luteranis – mostly pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia – pray for this also.

By the grace of God and thanks to funding from Thoughts of Faith, plans are to now publish the Latvijas Luteranis quarterly.

*Pastor Ugis Sildegs
Riga, Latvia
Editor of the Latvijas Luteranis*



Ugis Sildegs



Copies of the Latvijas Luteranis

Ukraine

From Spring into Summer at St. Sophia Seminary

Another school year came to an end at St. Sophia Seminary in Ternopil on May 30. The last course was on worship and liturgics taught by Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. There were lively discussions as the professor introduced new musical pieces and different liturgical forms. All of St. Sophia's students take weekly voice lessons so they were well-equipped to experiment with the new music. The students also serenaded the professor with Ukrainian hymns.

With the school year's end came the end of studies for one senior, Dmytro Didkivskyi. He will now serve a four-part call as his vicar assignment from the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. He will be responsible for two small congregations near his home, help at one congregation in Kyiv and make monthly trips to Minsk, Belarus, to assist the two congregations there.

Next year, one student in the preparatory department will

move up to fill Dmytro's desk in the seminary. There have been inquiries from six other men – three former students who have expressed interest in returning to the complete their studies, and three who have asked about beginning their studies in the preparatory department. God willing, the seminary will have its three continuing students and perhaps three or four others.



Professor Lyle Lange teaches sanctification during the summer quarter.

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This is the restored interior of the century-old chapel returned to the congregation at Ivanivka.

Ukrainian Churches continued from page 3

with abandoned buildings. But a dedicated group of Christians there gathered gifts for the Lord and purchased land with a collapsed house on it. Right now, the tiny congregation crowds into the living room of one of the members each Sunday as Pastor Oleksandr Sonne drives to Hamove and nearby Ivanivka to lead the worship after conducting the morning worship in Mikolaiv. A chapel in this village would not be costly. But it would be appreciated very much by the saints who gather weekly.

With a view toward the day when church construction for the Ukrainian Lutheran Church can move forward, Thoughts of Faith commissioned MSAADA, an international architectural firm specializing in church construction, to prepare a prototypical chapel design based on churches found throughout Europe. The firm came up with a 1700-square-foot design that could be built economically in many locations.

To take the next step to lead to chapel construction, the Thoughts of Faith Board resolved to establish the Ukraine Revolving Building Grant Program to assist the Ukrainian Lutheran Church in meeting the costs. The fund is to make grants to congregations seeking to buy land or build a chapel.

Under the provisions of this fund, a committee of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church will use an objective set of standards to determine which congregations receive support for land purchase or church construction. The congregations will be expected to contribute toward construction and repay at least a portion of the grant for use in other chapel projects.

With these moves, for the first time it appears a significant number of the Lutheran churches in Ukraine may have the opportunity to have their own houses of worship. The main thing needed is money for this fund. If you would like to assist your brothers and sisters in faith in Ukraine, please consider a gift to Thoughts of Faith designated for the Ukraine Church Building Fund.

May God bless our efforts to build churches throughout Ukraine.

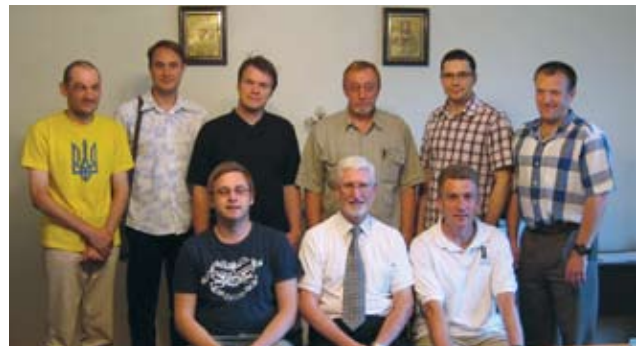
*Rev. Richard Warnke
Thoughts of Faith
Pastor mentor to the Ukrainian
Lutheran Church*

St. Sophia Seminary continued from page 5

St. Sophia's two-week summer quarter ran June 9-20. Professor Forrest Bivens of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary lectured on the theology of the early church and Professor Lyle Lange of Martin Luther College taught sanctification. They split the 22 pastors and seminarians who attended the first week. Pastor Ilars Plume from Latvia delved into the writings of Martin Luther for the 15 men who attended the second week.

Once again, the summer quarter drew an international group, with three students from Germany, two from Latvia and one each from Sweden, Norway and Russia. Thirteen Ukrainian pastors attended. That's more than half of all of them. Courses in the summer quarter ran for a week, with full days of six class-hours.

*Rev. John Vogt, Rector
St. Sophia Seminary*



Professor Forrest Bivens, seated center, with his students.

How You Began continued from page 1

that everyone is unique and created as a beloved child of God.

I brought pins of a baby's precious feet with me and the students received these small symbols of uniqueness and the value of a human life as a memento. I prayed that I not only provided them with new information about biological development, but also helped them understand that human life begins from conception and that a human being is a human being from the very beginning and should be protected. It seems to me that this information can also have a big impact on the preservation of reproductive health and a healthy way of life. I am blessed to have the opportunity to do so.

Do you know how you began and when exactly human life begins? If not, maybe it is time to get interested. If yes, then maybe our Heavenly Father wants you to share that with others who do not know.

*Anna Kuchma, counselor
Gift of Life – Kyiv*