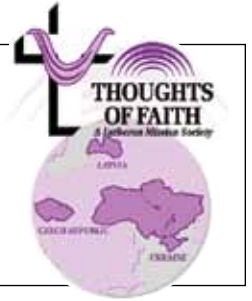


Thoughts of Faith

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 2011
In This Issue:

Page 2

From the ELS

- Ministry to Families

Ukraine

- Ukrainian Youth Forum

Page 3

Ukraine

- Amanda's Project

Thank You!

Page 4

Gift of Life – Ukraine

- Spiritual Milk
- Life at Resurrection Is Full of Action

Page 5

Czech Republic

- Weddings Recognized by God But Not the State

Page 6

Marriage Announced

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.

After Seven Years, a Church Is Dedicated

"Today is a great day for the whole Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia and for the Ozolniecki Lutheran congregation especially. We have come together in order to solicit the blessing from God to this house which he in his grace has granted the congregation. It is not only we who rejoice about the 'day the Lord has made' for us. Many other brothers and sisters in faith share this gladness, some of them overseas. Nevertheless, they are close to us in spirit, having rejoiced together with us. It is a privilege that Christians are glad about success of other Christians even in foreign lands. They not only rejoice, they also lend a helping hand by unselfish work on behalf of others."

These were some of my opening remarks as pastor of the Ozolniecki congregation on Pentecost – on a day when our new church building was dedicated. This is a message about the great day that our Lord gave the congregation. Although you will find here many words about human endeavors and efforts, this message is a song of praise for our Lord Jesus Christ and what he has done here. Nothing can happen without the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pentecost always has special meaning for our congregation. It was on Pentecost in 1999 when the Holy Supper was celebrated here the first time. And the most recent Pentecost was special in many ways. It started unusually. Two young boys walked to the altar to give the first "sermons" in their lives. Perhaps the first steps were with timidity. The older is eight years old and younger just six. However, encouraged by Jesus Christ, they moved toward the altar and turned to the members and guests.



The newly-dedicated church in Ozolniecki, Latvia.

Continued on page 6



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Thoughts of Faith - Ministry to Families

The Thoughts of Faith affiliates in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Ukraine minister to families, just as our congregations do here in the United States. Babies are baptized...as the children grow, they are instructed in God's Word...when young adults marry, their unions are blessed in the church... pastors of local congregations preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments to families in weekly worship services...Christian counseling and loving care are provided as members journey through life...and at the end, when families gather for funerals, their spiritual shepherds comfort mourners with the promise of resurrection and new life.

Customs may vary among our cultures, but the family remains not only the fundamental element of any society, but also the primary focus of the Church, for the family is the creation of

God who provides abundant blessings of body and soul through it. No wonder St. Paul praises our "Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." (Eph. 3:15) We children of the heavenly Father have much to thank him for!

As you read the articles in this issue of our newsletter, perhaps you will compare and contrast family life in the European churches with what we experience here in the U.S. Our needs are similar: forgiveness of our sin, direction for living, encouragement to faithfulness. These blessings are provided to members of ToF affiliate congregations by pastors who take seriously the need to minister to God's people, just as the pastors of our own congregations serve us. May God bless your family, all those in your parish and all those of our brothers and sisters in Europe!



Rev. Steven P. Petersen

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

Ukraine

Ukrainian Youth Forum

Fifty-two young people attended the three-day Youth Forum held the first weekend of May in the town of Kamyanets-Podilskiy in western Ukraine. They came from nearly all of the congregations of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

On the first day of the forum, they toured the city. Unfortunately, it began raining and they were forced to take shelter. After the rain stopped, they walked through the old city and visited the ruins of the old Dominican monastery, remembering that the Dominicans worked hard to refute Luther's 95 Theses and destroy the Lutheran church. They also saw the former Moslem minaret that now has a Christian statue on top of it. On this first evening, Rev. Alexander Feshchenko led a Bible study on the Law. The evening concluded with the singing of Christian songs.

The youths joined the congregation for worship on the second day, Sunday. After the service, they spent time in a city park for an evangelism project. Each young person took four ULC magazines to share with passersby. Then they toured the amazing castle built across the valley. The Bible study for the second day was on the Gospel. After the workshop, they enjoyed a Bible game that had been prepared by one of the St. Sophia Seminary students. The evening ended with the film "Amazing Grace."

The Bible topic for the last day was titled "Blessing." It was prepared by three young men -- two seminary students and a deacon from the Kyiv Resurrection congregation. It



The young people inspect a ruined castle.

included sections on the Word of God, on prayer and on the importance of the church in our lives.

This year's rally was financed in part by a gift from the young people of the WELS Northern Wisconsin District. We thank you very much!

*Serhiy Berezin
Student at St. Sophia Seminary
Ternopil, Ukraine*

Amanda's Project

"Grandpa, I want to do something for the church in Ukraine, and I've got an idea," Amanda began her phone call. She went on to explain that she wanted to use the sewing machine she got for Christmas and her love of sewing to make cloth bags, purses and wallets. She would donate the materials (with help from her mother and father) and then offer them for sale for a donation with all the proceeds going to the building fund for the worship facility being built in Ternopil.

Amanda was seven years old at the time; she celebrated her eighth birthday on June 8. When I explained that the congregation would get the building unfinished on the inside, she said she'd like to help buy paint, plaster, hinges, etc. Although her parents tried to keep her from setting her sights too high, she decided on a goal of raising \$2,000.87. She hasn't revealed why she choose that odd amount.

She's been busy at the project ever since, at times sitting down at the sewing machine while still in uniform and shin guards after a soccer match. Amanda has made small coin purses, women's handbags of various sizes and large shopping bags. She has made some special to order. Others she's created using old denim jeans or heavy drapery materials. She has sewn about 20 so far and raised about \$600.

Amanda received a letter of thanks from Bishop Vyacheslav Horpynchuk of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. He wrote: "Please thank Amanda on behalf of the whole ULC (as the bishop, I have rights to say that). What a great work for Christ she does!"

Pastor Taras Kokovskiy of the Ternopil congregation wrote: "I am deeply touched with the help you kindly propose to support our building project here in Ternopil. I highly appreciate your Christian gift of love and thank you on behalf of the congregation. Please thank for me all who have sent and are now sending their donations. May God keep you and bless you." The congregation has also posted Amanda's picture and an explanation of the project on the bulletin board in the hall where they presently worship. Several members of the congregation also have asked us to pass on their personal thanks to her.

The undersigned has received word that Amanda has now expanded her line of merchandise. She is also working a table at a garage sale which includes cookies, Kool-Aid and home-sewn rice bags which can be put in the freezer



Amanda at work after a soccer match.

or microwave to soothe aching muscles.

If you'd be interested in encouraging Amanda and helping complete the worship center in Ternopil, you can contact her at: hermanb27@yahoo.com. Put "Ukraine" or "bag donation" on the title line.

Amanda's efforts have inspired her cousins Samantha and Alexandra. They want to do something for missions too and are working on a special project for the school children in the jungles of Peru. This proud grandpa hopes to be able to write you about that project once it is approved by the ELS Board for World Outreach.



Amanda displays her latest creations.

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

Thank You!

- To our generous donors - especially to the anonymous American benefactor of the church in Ozolniecki, Latvia, without whose support the building could never have been constructed.
- To all who donated to the Tlucna, Czech Republic, bell project, including the family of Paul and Jen (Harper) Kelm, who taught at Martin Luther School in Plzen for many years. Any surplus donations will be used for Czech capital improvements.
- To supporters of Gift of Life, St. Sophia Seminary and the bi-vocational pastors of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, as well as their bi-vocational brothers in the Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia.
- To Rev. Paul Schneider (ELS, Midland, Mich.), who served as chairman of the ToF Board of Directors for many years, and who has now retired from service to our organization.
- To St. Sophia Seminary Rector John Vogt for 40 years of faithful service in the public ministry.

Spiritual Milk

“The Gospel...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .” Romans 1:16

A human being needs food for the body, but people need more than just bread for real life. A human being also has a spiritual side that demands nourishment. This nourishment is offered to us by God in his Word and Sacraments. Spiritually, each of us could be compared to a baby who gets milk at first. As the baby grows it needs to get solid food and not just small portions of milk. Those who are “grown up” spiritually seek more nourishment through God’s Word and Holy Communion. This food from our loving Father gives us the strength to overcome temptations and endure sufferings that arise in our lives.

During trying times, Kateryna Kobysh received God’s help through his Word heard at Bible studies conducted at the Gift of Life counseling center in Ternopil. Later she felt God’s power when attending services of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. Sown seeds often grow and she became stronger and stronger spiritually. We didn’t have to wait too long for the fruit. Kateryna responded to God’s Word during instruction by Rev. Taras Kokovskiy and after being confirmed came to take Holy Communion at St. John and St. James congregation in Ternopil. With other believers, Kateryna came to the Father’s table where with the wine he



Kateryna Kobysh and her family with Rev. Taras Kokovskiy.

gives us his true blood and with the bread gives us the same true body which he gave on the cross for forgiveness of our sins. We are ready to take this blessing of Holy Communion when we believe that Christ’s body was given for us and his blood was poured out for us.

*Nadiya Khominska
Gift of Life counselor
Ternopil, Ukraine*

Life at Resurrection Is Full of Action

The celebration of Easter at Kyiv’s Resurrection congregation started with a solemn profession of faith by sisters in Christ, Oxana Sira and Iryna Myrskyh. Before the women received Holy Communion for the first time they successfully completed an extensive course on Christian faith. This course was conducted by two Ukrainian Lutheran Church deacons and included other clients of Gift of Life’s Kyiv Left Bank Life Center. Oxana and Iryna have large families, so their day-to-day life is intense, but they were still able to devote a couple of hours each week to catechism classes. It was so pleasant to see them touch Christ the Savior in the Sacrament of the Holy Supper!

“...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Gala-



Oxana Sira (second from left) and Iryna Myrskyh and her children Anna and Oleksiy just before the baptism performed by Bishop Vyacheslav Horpynchuk.

tians 2:16). This is the truth Oxana Sira and Iryna Myrskyh learned and by declaring it joined the Apostle Paul. The Lord found them in this world full of pain, sin and temptation, but stretching out his pierced hands he took their sin, and all people’s sins, on himself and offers the free gift of salvation.

The liturgy continued with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism through which two children were born into the heavenly kingdom. They are the children of Iryna Myrskyh, Anna and

Oleksiy. It was so exciting and wonderful to see how children saved from abortion also became saved in Christ through Holy Baptism. Many members of Resurrection congregation started to cry from happiness when they heard “Mnohaya Lita.” This traditional Ukrainian song sung at important events translates as “May you live many summers!”

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

People stood and solemnly sang from the bottom of their hearts to honor the confirmed sisters and the two baptized children. Many clients of Gift of Life’s Kyiv Left Bank Life Center witnessed this event and also attended Bible study where they learned, among other things, of Christ’s resurrection.

A wonderful performance by the church theater group followed, with the church choir singing hymns. Witold Kubik, a guest from Poland, greeted the members on behalf of our sisters and brothers in Poland. Then, according to tradition, everybody shared treats which they brought from home and rejoiced because Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Life at Resurrection is full of action with evangelism opportunities provided by Gift of Life – and because of Jesus, our risen Savior, we will have eternal life – at our Resurrection.

*Svitlana Leshchenko
Gift of Life Counselor
Kyiv, Ukraine*



Children of clients of the Kyiv Left Bank Life Center attend services at Resurrection congregation.

Czech Republic

Weddings Recognized by God But Not the State

The Czech Lutheran Church is not among the 17 church bodies and religious organizations that are “registered” in the Czech Republic, i.e. recognized by the state as “official” and “unharmful to democratic principles.” Though our church has been working towards registration, as of now we are not eligible because we don’t have enough members.

One of the privileges a registered church or religious organization is permitted to enjoy is the eligibility to perform wedding rites that the state officially acknowledges as valid. What about our church members who want to get married in church? We had to come up with a way for them to experience and have the benefit of a church wedding service, and at the same time, to have their new wedlock accepted by the state authorities. The special procedure they undergo is a sort of “double wedding” – one in church, another in the city hall.

This double wedding is practiced in the following fashion: The couple, along with the wedding guests and other church members, first gather in our St. Paul’s church for a worship service led by one of our pastors; later the same day, the group moves to the city hall for a state marriage ceremony conducted by a magistrate.

In both places a speech is addressed to the spouses. It has become a popular custom for the state official to speak about what well-known people were born or got married or what amazing events in the history of mankind took place on the day the couple picked for their wedding. In contrast, at our church the pastor speaks about how special and unique their new life together is, as they are united in a marriage bond and blessed by their creator and inventor of marriage. And the most special event in the history of mankind is always exalted, though we don’t know exactly on what date it took place: namely our redeemer’s sacrifice for the sins of all – including those gathered for the rite. Jesus



Rev. Krakora officiates at a church wedding prior to the civil ceremony.

has really brought us all a new life, whether we choose to spend the earthly side of it united in marriage or not. And the new life is in him and we enjoy it as we are united with him by faith.

Thank you all for recognizing our church’s important role and for helping our church offer to the Czech people what the Czech state never can.

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

They used these words from Psalm 118:19-20: *“Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.”* Then the men’s choir performed Schubert’s “Heilig.” Thus began the dedication service.

This day also reminded us about another event seven years earlier. It was Jan. 25, 2004, a cold and snowy day. Members gathered for the groundbreaking. Some young members woke early to clear snow from the building site. The president of the congregation had made a symbolic cornerstone of concrete and a message in a container was inserted into it. We did not know then that we would have to wait for seven years before our church would be dedicated. Today the cornerstone lies under the altar.

Although we had to wait seven years until this great day, those years were eventful. The Gospel was preached and the members gradually became strong in their faith and today they are the heart of the congregation around whom new members gather. The children who were baptized came of age and were confirmed. A year ago, the first marriage occurred. It was the newlywed’s idea to make an avenue of trees planted by newly married couples. Their tree will serve as the first fruit in the “avenue of new couples.”

There is a need to tell a brief story: Our former organist was a young woman who could no longer play for the services because of pregnancy and motherhood. Every pastor knows how difficult it is to conduct a liturgy without musical accompaniment. For a while it was so. But there was a 12-year-old girl in the congregation who was studying music. After I called her and with the encouragement

of the members, she started her ministry as an organist in the congregation. Today she is a student at the Academy of Music of Latvia and still serves as an organist in our congregation. Her mother was one of the first members of our congregation.

As construction of the building progressed, I saw a transformation in the attitude of our members. The construction process turned into a changing process: from a simple gathering of people into becoming a church of Christ Jesus, from self-concern to common interests, from selfishness to Christian love.

And we were impressed by one man’s generous aid – such amazing Christian love! We were spiritually inspired by this example and it moved us to work harder toward finishing the project.

This building is a gift from our Lord. And members know this building does not belong only to them. It is a gift to the whole Ozolniecki community, which can gather here to here the Gospel of Christ. That is our prayer: that our Lord blesses us and strengthens our faith so that we never fail to reach those who are lost.

“This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, save us; O LORD, grants us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.” Psalm 118:24-26. We are thankful to our Lord that he gave us the opportunity to know Christian generosity and brotherly love. We are thankful to all those brothers and sisters who helped us with their financial resources, with their talents and with their hard work.

Rev. Uldis Fandejev
Pastor of the Ozolniecki Lutheran congregation



The altar, below which lies the symbolic groundbreaking cornerstone.



Iryna and Christopher Wichmann.

Marriage Announced

Iryna Tkach, a long-time employee of Gift of Life and one of the first Ukrainians to become a member of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, was joined in Holy Matrimony to Christopher Wichmann of West Bend, Wis., at St. James and St. John Church in Ternopil on July 2, 2011. Rev. Brian Diring of Our Shepherd Lutheran Church, a WELS congregation in Lancaster, Calif., officiated. Nicholas Laper and Oksana Diring were the best man and matron of honor. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Wichmann.