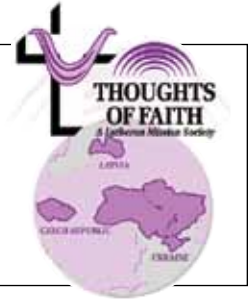


Thoughts of Faith

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.



February 2012
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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.



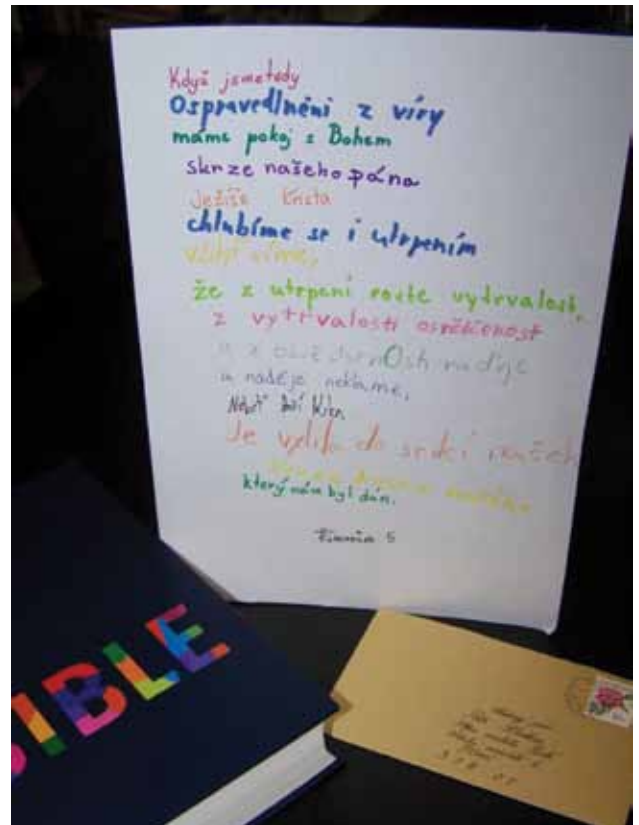
Children Encouraging A Seriously Ill Prisoner

It's hard to face prosecution for the wrong you have done. It's hard to be deprived of freedom of movement. It's hard to see your life going from riches to rags. It's hard to see your friends and family turning their backs on you. It's hard to bear the qualms of conscience. You start seeking God. And when you think you have found Him, you are told you have a tumor in your head. It's hard to live such a life, goes through the mind of a prisoner, Igor L. His letters reveal his thinking.

They reveal much more. Details about his crimes. Particulars about his family. Anticipation of changes in his lifestyle and worldviews. Concerns about his future. Gratitude for having a trusted friend to share himself with.

Though externally the letters' handwriting is remarkably fine-looking (see pictures on page 3), it was mastered by a hand of someone who now has a broken spirit.

It is both a task and a privilege for a Christian to serve people like Igor and to involve other Christians in offering their hands and heart. The writer of these lines has written many lines to Igor (the distance and legal matters preventing a personal visit), but also engaged others to write a few lines to him as well. The "others" were children from the Martin Luther School (MLS) in Plzen. We can't perceive how important such practical and real-life lessons in Religion are for the young souls of believers and seekers among the MLS students! Reading selected parts of Igor's letters to them; moving them to take the time to write him a piece of encouragement; seeing them beginning to care about people they would otherwise disdain—what a grace upon grace of our loving and caring Lord being experienced and put into action!



A letter written cooperatively to Igor by MLS' 4th grade students (The text is Romans 5:1-5).

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Congregational Blessings

Among the greatest blessings God has granted you: your congregation! Through it, your pastor serves you with Law and Gospel, administers the sacraments, teaches and counsels. In your congregation's sanctuary, you gather for worship and fellowship with other believers. With other congregational members, you raise funds to support missions and ministry. For your congregation's outreach program, you pray that God would touch and turn hearts to faith.

Pastoral services, church facilities, stewardship, education, outreach—these are congregational blessings. And as you read in this Thoughts of Faith newsletter, these same activities are carried out by Christians and blessed by God among our affiliates in Ukraine, Czech Republic and Latvia and among our supporters here in the US. Yes, there may be some differences in custom and language, but the purposes which guide congregational work, both in Europe and in the United States, reflect what St. Luke wrote about an early

Christian congregation: *They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.* (Acts 2:42)

As we pray that God would bless our own local congregations and their ministries, let's remember to pray also for their counterparts in Europe. Thanks!

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



Rev. Steven P. Petersen

Thank You

During this past year, and especially in December, Thoughts of Faith received generous support from many donors. For this we are deeply grateful! Please be assured that we work hard to manage the funds we receive carefully and responsibly. The American dollar goes a long way in Eastern Europe right now, and our affiliates there appreciate your continuing support.

At present, we have a remarkable opportunity for those who have not supported Thoughts of Faith for some time. A generous grant contributes \$2 for every \$1 we receive from new or renewing (those whose last gift was prior to 2011) supporters. If you are in that position, please know that your gift can triple in value at this time.

Thrivent members: Deadline for directing 2011 Choice Dollars is March 31, 2012.

20th Anniversary Celebration Gift of Life – Medical Clinic on Wheels

**Sunday, April 22, 2012
Holy Cross Lutheran Church
2670 Milwaukee Street
Madison, Wisconsin**

Services of Thanksgiving 8:15 a.m., 10:30 a.m.
Gift of Life presentations 9:30 a.m., 12:00 noon
Ukrainian Luncheon 12:30 p.m.

Guest preacher, Rev. Steven Petersen
Nicholas and Kerry Laper, administrators
Followed by guest speakers and information on
special projects

*Madison area friends of Gift of Life are cordially invited.
R.S.V.P. for Ukrainian luncheon by April 17 to (608) 835-2121
or email richard.waldschmidt@thrivent.com.*

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Do you know, dear reader, that you can also be engaged in Christ-like serving and even engage others in the same? In Jesus, you have received all that you need for it!

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” - Rom 12:15

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” - Pr 22:6

Petr Krakora

Pastor in the Czech Lutheran Church

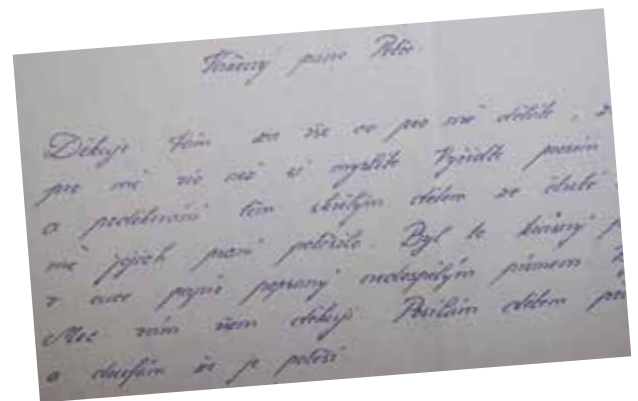
Religion teacher at Martin Luther School

Plzen, Czech Republic



A letter from Igor L. showing his neat calligraphy.

The response letter of Igor L.



Dear Mr. Petr,
I thank you for everything you have been doing for me; it means more to me than you think. Please send my regards and thanks to those wonderful children from fourth grade – their writing pleased me so much. It was a lovely feeling – to hold in my hand a paper overwriten with their immature script. Yet there was truth in it. I thank you all a lot. I am sending the children a card for St. Nicolas', hoping it will make them happy."

A WELS Church Sending Their Gift Of Love To MLS Students

While serving as volunteers in the Czech Lutheran Church and Martin Luther School (you can read about their work in the previous issue of this newsletter), Rev. Harold and Jeanne Schewe initiated another across-the-ocean project.

Turning to their home congregation, WELS' St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Watertown, WI, they had succeeded in generating interest among its members to collect, prepare and ship their gift of love to the students of Martin Luther School. It took the form of English children's books for the school's English library, Bible story booklets for religion instruction, and Bible story posters to enrich narration of Bible stories to the children of all grades.

Although a direct thank-you letter has been sent to that congregation, our Czech church and school would like to extend our sincere gratitude to them once again via this newsletter, also in hope of encouraging you, the readers, and your own home congregations to seek and try new ways of helping or enhancing the proclamation of the good news of God's grace in Jesus among the lost souls around the globe.



Four 5th graders holding Bible story posters donated by St. Luke's members.

We in the Czech Republic do appreciate your continual interest and support!

Petr Krakora,

Pastor of the Czech Lutheran Church

Seven Years Of Prayers Answered

Is having its own church building important for a congregation? For a long time, many congregations have to rent a place to conduct worship services, Bible classes and Sunday school. In such circumstances, we should be thankful to God. And we do thank him.

Renting a place to worship very often becomes a problem, which is difficult or impossible to solve, because the rent price is constantly rising. Also, there are not many places that can be rented and used for the worship services and Bible classes. Suitable places are in the hands of commercial organizations, which use them to get maximum profit. Moving to a new building usually results in the loss of members, especially in cities.

Besides, people in Ukraine are cautious about congregations without their own church buildings. People think that such congregations are sects and believe that they will exist only temporarily. To overcome such ideas, we need our own church buildings. If we have the buildings, we can state that we are here seriously and for a long time. We need church buildings not only for this reason. Its own church building gives the congregation a chance to be free from rent. It also gives the chance to conduct all necessary activities during the week. In my opinion, there is one more advantage to having one's own church building: the congregation practices sound stewardship. The members concentrate on those things that are necessary to support the building; they spend time and give offerings that testify that they are devoted to the Lord and to Gospel service and they are concerned about new members in the church. Also, the members can invite their relatives and friends to church.

How long does it take to build a church? One or two years? This depends on many different factors. It took more than ten years for Ternopil's St. John and James congregation. There were many obstacles along the way, from consideration that the congregation was a "non-traditional confession" to bureaucratic hesitations. In 2003, I received the call to serve in the Ternopil' congregation, and since then I have spent much time in solving the problem of the church building. I applied for help to the president of the congregation (V. Tkachenko, later M. Andruntsiv) and the Church Council. Also, I got help and support from the Bishop V'acheslav Horpynchuk.

Finally, we solved the problems and restored spoiled relations with the town authority. We have never lost hope. Every Sunday, the congregation prayed and believed that eventually the Lord would answer the prayer. We had to wait for the answer for seven years. Is this a long or short time? It is a moment for the Lord; for us it is time when we practice patience and trust in God. Finally, in the end of 2010, the very long-awaited day came—we put the cornerstone of our own church building. We wanted our building to be a bit different than what we are getting, but circumstances and obstacles did not permit that. However, our new church will have everything necessary for the full life of the congregation.



Church under construction in Ternopil.



Future sanctuary.

Our new building is almost complete now. The builder will turn over to us a building with an unfinished interior. Before us lie the tasks of painting walls and ceilings, installing plumbing and electricity, and getting furniture, church

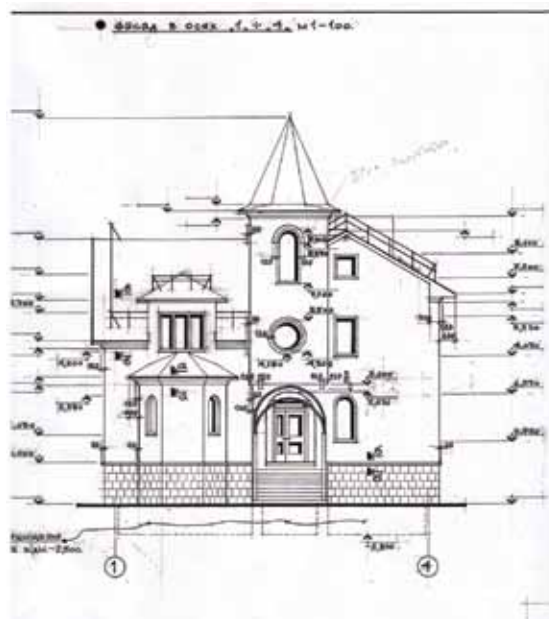
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benches, an altar, and so on. The congregation has started a special building fund, which is constantly filled with donations from the members. Nowadays, like other Ukrainians, our members are in a difficult financial situation, though they understand that they should be thankful to God, who has answered their prayer. Their gratitude is shown in the support of the Gospel through their offerings, talents and time.

We thank our American brothers and sisters, who helped us in such a difficult time. We thank those who supported our building project and those who will assist us in the future. We thank our young helper Amanda, granddaughter of Seminary Rector John Vogt, who started her own project to assist us. Together and with God's help we will complete the building. Then our grateful prayer will rise to the Lord and our joyful singing will resound with "In Christ Jesus' name, Amen!"

*Pastor Taras Kokovskiy,
Ternopil', Ukraine
St. John and James congregation*



Front elevation.

Amanda Reaches Her Goal

Amanda Herman, the eight-year-old who set out to raise \$2,000.87 for the new worship facility in Ternopil', Ukraine, has reached her goal and forwarded her gift! She wants to say "thank you" to those who helped her in Michigan, Nebraska, Wyoming, Florida, South Dakota, California, Wisconsin and Virginia. It took her just nine months, in which time she sewed and sold 104 bags—to be exact, 50 bags/purses, 33 rice bags, 19 wallets and two cell phone bags. Amanda has received a mountain of donated fabric remnants and hopes more orders will enable her to give even more.

This project has made Amanda a bit of a celebrity. The local newspaper did a story on her and her project, including a couple pictures, and placed it on the front page of section B. In one of the pictures, she wore her new Ukrainian outfit, which the Ternopil' congregation had sent as a thank-you gift. The local TV station saw the newspaper story and invited Amanda to come down to the station in her outfit. They did a four-minute feature on her for the evening news. Amanda's newspaper story also made the December 7th edition of the WELS: Together webpage and at least one congregation's bulletin insert.

In the TV interview, Amanda revealed the secret of her strange goal of \$2,000.87. She said, "I wanted to raise more than \$2,000, but didn't want to look greedy."

Amanda's father and mother, Kris and Rebecca Herman, encouraged their daughter, but the idea and all the sewing came from Amanda. They are members of the Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, the WELS congregation in Traverse City, Michigan. You can contact Amanda at amandasews8@yahoo.com.

Amanda can serve as an example to us all and inspire each of us to ask, "What can I do to help share the Gospel?"

Proud Grandfather John F. Vogt, Rector of St. Sophia Seminary, Ternopil', Ukraine



Amanda displays her creations.



Amanda in her Ukrainian outfit.



Amanda at work.

Where Flowers Go To Die

America was founded by a general; Ukraine was founded by a poet. Flowers are showered on statues of poets in Ukraine and bank notes are as likely to bear portraits of poets as they are of heroes or heads of state. Taras Shevchenko, poet/painter (1814-1861), is called the father of Ukraine because it was he who taught its people not to be embarrassed if sophisticated Russians said they had “peasant concerns,” like sunsets, motherhood, childhood and the beauties of their wonderful country. Ukrainians love poetry, but, like jokes, poetry often doesn’t translate (try rendering “Fuzzy Wuzzy” into German or French). A visiting speaker in China told a joke. The audience laughed enthusiastically. Afterward, the speaker, realizing that the joke was a play on the sound of English words, asked the translator, “However did you translate that joke?” The translator said, “I didn’t; instead, I informed the audience that you had told a joke and that they must laugh.” So it goes with jokes and poetry – they sometimes don’t translate.

But not this time!

The following poem was written by a young Ukrainian boy who had been at the Medical Clinic on Wheels (MCOW). He is an orphan, a member of pastor Zonne’s Gamove congregation, who has rarely seen a physician or dentist. Pastor found an old bus and transported the congregation children to Shyrokyi Lan, where the clinics were located. It was rainy, muddy and slippery, dogs barking in the distance, the kids were scared. They didn’t arrive on time, but MCOW staff could not refuse these dear children – they worked into the late evening to accommodate them all. Deaconess Ludmyla ushered them inside and told them that they should not be afraid, because Jesus, “The Good Shepherd,” protects His sheep, and they grew calm. She then told them that their pastor, Zonne, shepherds his little flock spiritually and cares about them temporally.

Although some of the meter and depth of the poem was lost in translation, much of the poem translates well and



Shevchenko monument.

We express our gratitude for the medical and dental aid provided to the children from Shyrokyi Lan internat and the children from the Gamove ULC religious congregation. This poem is for you:

To Our Dear, our Kind Doctors from Ternopil
When we hear words “disease”,
“Doctors”, “hospital” and “care”
We have strong pain in the teeth,
stomach, heart and everywhere.

Even though we understand
That doctors bring results,
We have fear that we can’t stand-
Little children and adults.

So why are we so frightened
When we are coming here?
Knees are knocking, teeth are clenched,
To visit a doctor for many a year!

Now all the fears have disappeared
And everything has changed –
Kind doctors treat us kindly
And our health is rearranged!
They are nice and sweet and kind,
Some are young and some are not,
With high spirit, goal and mind,
They are traveling a lot.
They show love, concern and patience,
They diagnose, treat and teach,
For that reason we, the patients,
Appreciate this outreach.

Please come and visit us in future
To screen and check each pounding heart,
The information you are teaching
Is so important to impart!

Милі, добрі наші лікарі із Тернополя.
Коли чуємо «хвороба»,
«Лікарі» чи «лікарня»
Вмить болить в нас голова,
Зуб, живіт, - все марно.

І хоча ми добре знаємо,
Що лікують лікарі,
Всеодно їх всі бояться
І дорослі і малі.

То ж чому бере нас страх
І тремтять в нас ноги?
Коли ми переступам
Лікарень пороги?

А тепер усе гаразд,
Де й страхи ті ділись.
Бо у наших глухих селах
Добрі лікарі з’явились!
І веселі, і привітні,
Молоді і трохи літні.
У вагончиках лікують,
Україною мандрують.
Вони діток оглядають,
І хвороби виявляють.
І за це їм вдячні ми
Діточки і їх мами.

Приїздіть до нас щороку
І усіх перевіряйте,
І про те, як будь здоровим
Діточок усіх навчайте!

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conveys this young boy's idea.

Pastor Zonne takes advantage of the opportunities given by Gift of Life. He strengthens his congregation by proclaiming God's Word, advocating Christian love and a wholesome life, especially for the family of believers! Such an offering of souls to Jesus is more precious both to Him and to them than flowers withering on dead poets.

Nicholas and Kerry Laper
Gift of Life - Ukraine



"Smiles" due to care at MCOW.

Latvia

From The Recently Dedicated Church In Latvia

(Editor's note: Our newsletter readers are aware that the church building in Ozolnieki, Latvia was dedicated in June 2011. Following are excerpts from several letters received from the pastor there. We have not edited the text for grammar, so you are reading the words of one who is not a native English speaker.)

During last months after dedication there were some observable activities. Some good and enjoyable but some not so good or even grievous.

Good is that a kindergarten before (nearby) our church is almost completed. Another joyful event is that a family joined with us which came from state church. Besides we confirmed a young fellow. Finally I am now a double grandfather. My daughter gave a birth her firstborn - a son. Parents named him as Janis (John).

We had two good services on Christmas. Both were with very good attendance. After Christmas Eve service our organist and her boy-friend presented us some musical presentation. On Sunday 25th we baptized my grandson Janis Ekimanis. After the service we had an agape meal.

In the Sunday before Christmas Eve a man did enjoying gift to our church. He is blacksmith. He makes lantern of metal. He made a pair of them for our church. Looks very nice.

Unfortunately there were some grievous thinks. A young lady would like to joined with our congregation. She was

baptized but not confirmed. She would like to take a confirmation class. But lately it turned out that she had Hodgkin's disease and she might go through chemical therapy. We still pray for her. Her name is Anete Kuive.

There is an old lady in our congregation. She had a grandson. He is married with a young lady. There is a son born in that family. It turned out that cancer touched face of the new wife. She is just 21. As a result she had to pass through very serious surgical intervention and she lost half of upper jawbone. She have to use prosthesis. It is so awfully. Her name is Dace Kaklautina. We still pray for her, too. We all hope on our Lords mercy.

Maybe you are informed about a hard economical situation in our Country. Thousands of Latvians has left their own country. People are very depressed. Maybe that is reason why people were looking towards the church on the Christmas Eve. Our Lord knows. But what I know is that I had a good opportunity to tell Christians about brotherly love which built a nice church for the congregation in Ozolnieki. There is no crisis for Christ's love toward His believers. Christmas Eve was another opportunity what our Lord has given to all who proclaim our Lord's Gospel.

Rev. Uldis Fandjevs
Ozolnieki, Latva

From Heaven Above At The Presidential Palace

It came unexpectedly. My wife received a phone call in the middle of last December. A lady from Chancery of the President asked her if we were coming to the Presidential Palace (the Riga Castle). As we had not checked our post office box for a week, we did not know about the invitation that was waiting for us.

As it has become tradition of the Riga Castle, President of Latvia Andris Berzins and First Lady Dace Seisuma had invited 19 families from Latvia's cities and regions to take part in the lighting of the castle's Christmas tree on December 14. The chancery chose us out of three families suggested by our Līgatne Administrative District we live in.

It was expected that each family gives a short performance according to their ability and wishes. As Latvians love to sing, many did so; however, others recited poems. A couple of families sang Christian hymns and we were one of them. In his speech, President stressed that children are the dearest thing one can have in the world. Contrary to many other politicians in Latvia, the President has openly said that he is not a Christian. He also does not use Christian churches and their festivals, like Christmas, to raise his political

popularity. So I said that this was an appropriate time— as Christmas is coming closer— to remember a very special child as the biggest gift one can have. Then our family sang several stanzas from Luther's well-known chorale "From Heaven Above."

I have to add a couple of other things. The population in Latvia dies out at a rate of approximately 0.5% per year. To find a job to support their loved ones, people go to another countries, mostly to Great Britain and Ireland. It has been calculated that, during the last 10 years, about 200,000 people, or about 10% of the population, have left Latvia. It is expected that a recent census will show that only 2 million of us are left in the country. As a result, our family of five— two adults and three children— is considered large in Latvia.

Obviously, it influences our comparatively small congregations, too. Besides, people from rural communities move to cities for better jobs. That was the case also with the Cesis congregation. Fortunately, most of them joined our congregations in other places.

Unexpectedly, in the beginning of 2010, the Cesis congregation was asked to leave the chapel of the Cesis Hospital, where our services were held. It was despite the fact that some

10 years ago, about \$20,000 was donated from the WELS world relief program to cover the hospital's debt to suppliers for medicine. The hospital told us that the premises would be used for other purposes. That proves that ingratitude is the way of the world. Due to the fact a couple of members joined another Lutheran congregation that has a nice church.

Now, besides my extended family of seven, there are several elderly people left in Cesis who meet in a private apartment. On a regular basis, at least monthly, we have a communion service there and I have the opportunity to talk to them and answer their questions. As our pastors, including me, serve bi-vocationally, there are fewer opportunities to spread the Gospel. As a reporter of a business newspaper, I rarely have a chance to talk to people I meet on a daily basis, such as colleagues, businessmen, politicians or civil servants, about sin, God's grace and salvation. So our pastors try to use any opportunity to reach people in a decent way, like our family had a chance at the Presidential Palace.

*Egons Mudulis
Pastor of Cesis congregation, CLCL*



Pictured (left to right): President Andris Berzins, First Lady Dace Seisuma, and Mudulis family: Andrejs (10), Magdalena (15), Inga, Egons, (in front) Jekabs Sebastians (5) receiving the President's gifts.