

# Daniel S. Johnson

## - Catechist to Siberia & Baltic Churches

Garbė Dievui aukštybėse

ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται

Χριστος Воскрес!

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### the Mission – east Siberia

In late March, Rev. Dr. Matthew Rueger (St. John – Hubbard, IA) and I accompanied Bishop Lytkin on his episcopal visits to the Eastern Siberian congregations. I have reprinted an edited version of the SELC “Faith & Hope newsletter #229,” which addresses the trip.

*Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
May we bring to your attention the story written by Rev.  
Daniel Johnson who (together with Rev. Matthew Rueger)*

*accompanied our Bishop Vsevolod during his last travel to the Eastern Siberia:*

“When I first visited Chita and Buryatia (I first visited Siberia in 2000 and Buryatia in 2004), I was immediately overwhelmed by the experience. The contrast between economic poverty and the richness of faith was stark. Those who live on a meager pension of \$50 per month



**Maria waves after Bp. Lytkin visits to serve her, and her husband, Holy Communion.**

may appear to live a very simple life, but their constant liturgical prayer and sacramental worship places everything into a proper perspective. In purely economical terms, it is true that Americans living in poverty, experience a higher standard of living than the average Buryatian. Russia may be considered a ‘nuclear power,’ but outside the cities, the majority of the country lives in an impoverished third world economic setting. I do not think that Americans understand this about Russia and the people of Russia. Two excellent documentary videos describing the standard of living for the Siberian people are ‘The Mission – Siberia’ and ‘The Other Half of the Truth.’ Both of these documentaries are available on the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (SLMS) website (see, [www.siberianlutheranmissions.com](http://www.siberianlutheranmissions.com)).

“Ultimately, most satisfying of all, is the level of pastoral care given by the SELC pastors. These are men who have left behind, in most cases, a lucrative job for the life of a parish pastor. The task of pastoral care is never a part-time job. In every case it is a 24/7/365

vocation. However, due to low salaries (or in some cases, no salary) the Siberian pastor is forced to work a secular job to feed his family and support the work of the ministry. Yes, the people do what they can, by providing some financial support. In the villages, most of the people have no money to give, so they deliver food grown in their gardens and other staples, to support the pastor and his family.

“Except for the language difference and the socio-economic setting, the corporate liturgy and shut-in care provided by the local pastor is no different than the care provided by faithful Lutherans anywhere else in the world. When providing shut-in care, the SELC pastor walks into the home, greets the people, empties his portable communion set of bread, wine, chalice, paten, altar cover, veil, candles and crucifix. He prepares a ‘makeshift altar’ on the top of a washing machine or small kitchen table, or wherever

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he has room. He then vests in alb and stole. When he enters the room vested for liturgy, the people stand, out of reverence toward the Holy Office. The candles are lit and the pastor begins the holy liturgy, as the people make the sign of the Holy Cross: ‘In the name of the...’

“The similarity in pastoral care exists because we all exercise a common confession. We are Lutheran. We do not



**Bp. Lytkin and Rev. Johnson serve The Sacrament in Chita.**

Church officials from the Lithuanian, Latvian and Siberian Lutheran churches frequently visit the United States. If you wish to invite one of these church officials to visit your congregation, please contact me at: [Daniel.Johnson@lcmsintl.org](mailto:Daniel.Johnson@lcmsintl.org)





## Prayer Requests, Praises, and Thanks

Many Siberian pastors serve multiple congregation parishes. Pray for safe travel as these dedicated clergy travel to provide care for their parishioners.

Pray for the Lutheran catechumens, as they learn the Christian vocation.

Pray for those Lutherans “in exile” who have not been given opportunity to receive preaching from the mouth, and the Holy Sacraments from the hand, of a Lutheran pastor. Pray they can again sing like Zechariah: *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David...”*

***We poor sinners implore You... To rule and govern Your holy Christian Church; ...We implore You to hear us, good Lord.***

-- The Litany

see liturgy as *adiaphora* (as a matter of opinion, preference or indifference). Holy Liturgy is seen as a faithful delivery of pastoral care, both publicly and privately, to those baptized in Christ. The heart and soul of pastoral care is the proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection for the sinner’s life and salvation through the delivery of His Word and Holy Sacraments.



**Bp. Lytkin, Dr. Rueger and Rev. Johnson visit Edinenie.**

“Faithful pastoral care makes its focus, the delivery of this salvation. Faithful pastoral care is expressed in both recognition of Holy Space and the ‘Holy Things’ of God. This is revealed by recognizing Jesus, as He locates Himself, in Holy Baptism, the Office of Holy Absolution and in the distribution of the Supper, of the holy precious Body and Blood of the crucified Savior. Faithful pastoral care is a confession of Jesus, delivered as He has promised to reveal Himself. When Jesus said, ‘*Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age,*’ He speaks of the ongoing liturgy of the baptismal life. It means that He locates Himself, for the sinner – for you! He locates Himself in the Holy Office of the Pastor as the holy liturgy delivers the Holy Things. This is what it means to be liturgical. This is why confessing Lutherans are recognized -- regardless of language or cultural setting. The socio-economic cultural setting is not a factor. This is because the Church has its own culture. The liturgy



**The world’s largest head of Lenin, in Ulan-Ude.**

reveals this united culture of faith and confession. “No longer, am I so overwhelmed by the poverty in the homes and congregations I visit. (I have been regularly visiting Siberia for over 14 years.) I accept it and respect it. What overwhelms me each visit, is the incredible faith and witness the Siberian people express through their faithful liturgical practice of Word and Sacrament. “The SELC pastor, as well as the faithful Lutheran pastor, elsewhere, exercises his office in such a manner, because the historic liturgy expresses the common confession of the Church. Whether one may worship in a LCMS congregation in Marshalltown or Hubbard, Iowa, in a SELC congregation in Oberursel, Germany, a LELC congregation in Palanga, Lithuania, or a SELC congregation in Novosibirsk or Chita, Russia, in the heart of Siberia, the spoken language may be different, but the confession and practice is the same. Christ and Him crucified, is preached, sins are confessed and absolved, the *Our Father* and *Creed* is prayed, the *Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Agnus Dei* is proclaimed, and sinners are rescued and saved into eternal life with the eternal Savior.” ✕ DSJ



**At the train station in Petropavlovka**



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