

Daniel S. Johnson

- Catechist to Siberia & Baltic Churches

Garbė Dievui aukštybėse

ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται

Χριστὸς ἠνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν!

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EFREMKINO: The camp between the rivers

I had been there before. I was familiar with the geography having visited Khakassia in January 2000, when I made my first trip to Siberia. At that time, I had been sent under the authority of the Concordia Theological Seminary -- Russian Project. However as I arrived on August 22, 2013, I was doing so under a completely new title. I was no longer a parish pastor from Iowa, visiting as a guest from America. The LCMS and Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SLMS) had recently adopted a fellowship concord. I was now an official representative of the LCMS. My title had become, LCMS Office of International Missions (OIM) Catechist to Siberia. My wife, Amy, I have moved to Germany, from which I will frequently travel to Siberia, the Baltics and Central Asia as a Catechist and Pastoral Care Specialist. My 23 years of experience as a pastor will now be used to catechize pastors in these regions.



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:
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As I stepped out of the 1994 Toyota Van at the Efremkino compound, I was immediately greeted by a face I did not recognize. He knew I was coming and he wanted to be the first to greet me. As he reached out his hand, Slava said in clear English, with a Russian accent, "Do you remember me? You taught at the Biblical School I attended in 2000." Thirteen years older and sporting a goatee, the previously unrecognizable man in his early thirties quickly became familiar. "Yes!" I said, "I remember you!" Slava was now a deacon in the Ingrian Lutheran Church. He had come to Efremkino to attend the seminars. [note: In Siberia there are two Lutheran church bodies with whom the LCMS is in fellowship -- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) and the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). The ELCIR, which has her roots among the Finnish people living in Russia, claims a few congregations in Siberia. However, the majority of her congregations are

located in European Russia. The Bishop of the ELCFI serves St. Mary's Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg.]

The camp known as the "Camp between the Rivers," near the small village of Efremkino in the south central region of Khakassia is couched between the two rivers known as the White Lus and the Black Lus. Every summer Pastor Pavel Zayakin holds a summer camp for youth and a theological seminar. The camp begins every morning with Matins and ends every day **continued on the next page**

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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.



...From sedition and from rebellion; from lightening and tempest; from all calamity by fire and water; and from everlasting death: Good Lord, deliver us.



with Evening Prayer. During the summer seminars, theological lectures are held during the day on selected topics. Both laity and their pastors attend the lectures, which supplement the catechesis they regularly receive from their pastor and from personal study. At Efremkino this year, lectures were given on the topics of liturgics, the state of Lutheranism in the world, and the theology of St. Mark's gospel narrative. Dr. Collver writes in his blog, "Mercy, Witness, Life Together": **The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church's "Camp Between the Rivers" is structured after a *Poligon*, literally in English, a polygon. It has the practical sense of a training field for soldiers or athletes. The camp is set up to train the hearts, minds, and bodies of young people to be Christians in this world, hence hiking, works of service, worship, study and camping.**

After the completion of the seminars, Pastor Zayakin took several camp participants on a hike along the river, explaining the history of Christianity in the region from the 7th to the 10th century. Along the way we would pause to view various items of interest such as ancient cave drawings and copper and iron mines dating back over 1,300 years or simply to take in the beautiful landscape. One of the caves contains an ancient runic inscription on the rock wall, which reads: *"I greet you Altu Shan, my state and my Han (prince). I am Agdam Enal. My people are Tersye. I have come down from the mountains and have found out."* This message was discovered in 1883 by archeologists, but was not deciphered until the early 20th century. The language is in a Turkish-based dialect. The word "Tersye" used in the inscription is believed to be an ancient word to describe a "Christian." Therefore, this ancient messenger is announcing his people to be Christian.

It is believed that the early missionaries to Khakassia (south central Siberia) were Nestorians who were driven out of the Persian Empire, toward the east onto the Great Step of Siberia. [Nestorianism is a heresy condemned at the councils of Ephesus (ad 431) and Chalcedon (ad 451).] The history of Christianity in Khakassia continues until the Mongolians entered the region (around the 11th century) driving the Khakassian Christians into Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The next day, after the seminars, we headed to the city of Shirah, about 100 kilometers away. Pastor Zayakin served Holy Communion to two young ladies who are members of the Tuim parish. We then traveled on to Tuim. Pastor Vitali Gavrolov is the pastor of The Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Tuim. Pastor Gavrilov [see photo to left] was preparing to serve the Communion Liturgy to two elderly members of his congregation who are shut-in. We were invited to attend the liturgy. When we arrived, the women, 84 and 85 years old respectively, were dressed in their "Sunday best" for the occasion. Having been deported to Siberia when they were young children, they had retained their Lutheran identity. They both spoke to us in Russian, and spoke to one another in their native Latvian.

The church in Tuim has an interesting history. In the late 1990s, there was an attempt from the local authorities to close the church. When they first arrived in Tuim, a few years earlier, Pastor Zayakin and his wife, Nina, were accused of being American spies and many parishioners were harassed. A lawsuit was brought against the congregation to declare it an illegal assembly. This lawsuit proceeded all the way to the Supreme Court of Russia, which ruled in the congregation's favor.

After visiting Tuim I traveled on to Abakan, Novokuznetsk, Novosibirsk and Tomsk to visit the parishioners, lecture and confer with the pastors. I will return to Novosibirsk in November to visit the parishes, and lecture at the annual seminary symposia. [For more information see: www.siberianlutheranmissions.com] ✠DSJ

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