

Daniel S. Johnson

- Catechist to Siberia & Baltic Churches

Garbė Dievui aukštybėse

ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται

Χριστός

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The Mission – east Siberia (part 2)

In late March, Rev. Dr. Matthew Rueger (St. John – Hubbard, IA) and I accompanied Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin on his episcopal visits to the Eastern Siberian congregations of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). I reprinted an edited version of the article I wrote for the SELC “Faith & Hope newsletter #229,” in my April 2014 newsletter. I now reprint an edited version of the interview of

Rev. Dr. Matthew Rueger, from the SELC “Faith & Hope newsletter #230.” To be added to the SELC e-newsletter mailing list, send a request to: vsevolodytkin@gmail.com.



M. Rueger (r) standing with D. Johnson at the entrance to Edinenie, a village in eastern Siberia where there is a congregation of the SELC

Peace to you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Who is risen! In our last Newsletter #229 we shared with you with the story written by Rev. Daniel Johnson who (together with Rev. Matthew Rueger) accompanied our Bishop Vsevolod during his last travel to Eastern Siberia. And now may we bring to your attention the interview that Rev. Matthew Rueger graciously gave to Rev. Pavel Khramov (Novosibirsk).

What was the most unexpected thing for you in Russia? What did agree perfectly with your expectations?

The most unexpected thing about Russia was what I saw in the villages visited with Bishop Vsevolod. The level of poverty was surprising to me. I also found it [as] a surprise that at the outskirts of even the larger cities, people are living without indoor plumbing. The fact that money seems to be spent on cell phone towers and communication but not on basic things like indoor running water and sewer systems was something I found strange. The degree of animism and Buddhist influences with the many roadside shrines was a bit surprising too. I was also surprised by the continuing homage paid to Lenin with the statues of him in every place I went. As to what agreed with my expectations... Perhaps the food was about what I

expected. I enjoy different foods and liked what I ate in Russia. The Russian Orthodox presence throughout my travels was also as expected. The types of places where we stayed and the means by which we traveled were all as I was expecting them to be.

Teaching at our seminary on sexual moral issues, [do] you feel that [the] students understand... that these problems are “real-life” problems in Siberia? What... make you to think this way?

I do think the matter of sexual immorality and pagan influences on sexual attitudes is a real problem in Russia, as it is in America. This is something every pastor will have to face very quickly in his ministry -- so, yes! I believe it is a practical matter. As to the discussion from the seminarians... The students didn't ask many questions, probably, because without experience, they don't know what to expect. I did enjoy the questions asked by the pastor who visited for a couple days and from you and the other instructor present.

Was Russian liturgy too different for you or you could follow it and really worship, though even without knowing Russian?

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No, I did not think the Russian liturgy was a great difference from our American LCMS liturgy. I could [recognize] the various parts of the **continued on next**

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





Prayer Requests, Praises, and Thanks

Pray for those Lutherans “in exile” who have not received preaching from the mouth, and the Holy Sacraments from the hand, of a Lutheran pastor.

We poor sinners implore You... To preserve all pastors and ministers of Your Church in the true knowledge and understanding of Your wholesome Word and to sustain them in holy living...
-- The Litany

and had helped him be faithful through difficult times. There was obviously a great deal of respect between them. After the Divine Service in Chita a few of the members spoke with us and said how they believe Lutheranism will spread and grow because they have the truth that so many are looking for. They spoke, as people were not ashamed to confess Christ to the world around them.

In addition, you mentioned that people spoke through... acts of kindness. It would be nice, if you could give an example of such acts.

[Pastor Daniel Johnson and I] ...were treated with great kindness by everyone we met. A man in the village near the Mongolian boarder offered to drive us to Ulan-Ude in his car, which unfortunately broke down along the way. Every home we visited people were generous in sharing their food with us. Again in Chita, the members of the congregation treated one another kindly and seemed to be very close to one another. Of course it is also true that there were times when we were told to be careful not to let our Americanism show. Some of the places we visited had the potential to be dangerous and I did feel... [a certain amount of] uneasiness about being an American at times. This is no fault of the Lutheran people whom we met. I think with the Russian/US tensions these days, it was simply a matter of public feelings.

Finally, what food did you like the most and the least in Siberia?

I really enjoyed the borscht [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borscht>] and the “herring in a fur coat.” The soups were all very good. I can say that there wasn't really anything I didn't like. I suppose my least favorite food was the slices of pork fat served to us in some of the homes we visited. ✪DSJ

liturgy and knew what was happening. I was able to pray the various parts of the liturgy quietly in English as the congregation spoke Russian.

Visiting small towns and villages, what did you find most striking?

The poverty and lack of a sewer system or indoor plumbing was most striking. The [log-home] construction is similar to what was common in the US in the late 1800s. I was a bit surprise that nearly all of the villages seemed to be at this same level of development. Also the level of road maintenance was surprising. The roads were in very rough shape. I was thankful no one had any health problems when we were away from the larger cities too because medical care seemed to be in low supply as well.

You said, “I was moved by the passion of Lutheran men and women to let those around them know about Jesus and to encourage others in faith and bring them to Christ's Church.” Could you give a couple examples, where you could see this passion?

The man who impressed me the most was Aleksey Kondratiev, in Chita. After his conversion he has helped bring his wife, mother-in-law, mother, and grandparents into the Lutheran Church. In turn the lady, named Katherina, had been a huge influence in his life



Standing on a WW2 memorial, “The Great Patriotic War,” in Chita



The east-Siberian “Autobahn”



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