

Friends of Latvia

News!

Friends of Latvia in Covenant Relationship since 1991

To advance to every resident of Latvia the joyful witness of Jesus Christ as the risen Savior...

Volume 6 | Issue 2

October 2014

Greeting From Gita Mednis

Senior Pastor Rīga 1 / District Superintendent

Greetings to all of our friends on the other side of the Atlantic!

Hope all of you are well and slowly settling into all of the ministries and opportunities to serve that the advent of fall brings us every year.

For **Latvian Methodists**, it has been quite a busy and wonderful summer. Our friends from **Kuldīga** partnership churches visited, and as always, immediately began to work! **Grapevine UMC** members were of invaluable help with children's **Sunday School** camp. Grapevine members also came to attend **Camp Wesley's Board meeting**, our **Annual District Conference** and to see the ministries at **Liepa, Hope Center** and the after school program. The **faithful team from Tullahoma** returned, to help with the renovation of some of the rooms at the **Hope Center**. **Bud Vann** from Georgia also joined them along with. **Volunteer in Mission, Michael Barr**, who worked at **Camp, Hope Center and Riga's 1st basement**. Many, many thanks to all of you for volunteering your time, energy and finances to serve **our Lord in Latvia!**

God's time is always the right time! The wrestling club that occupied the basement floor of **Rīga 1** found different space and moved out in July. The basement is the same size as the first floor of the building. **Rihards**, with the help of many volunteers, has been tearing off the tiles and old wood paneling to expose the walls in order for them to dry out. It is very damp downstairs, but the possibilities are incredible for expanding our ministries!

This December, we are planning to commemorate the **10th anniversary** of the **Hope Center**. The celebration will be in our **Liepa** church. The young mothers have asked to be baptized and for their children to be baptized! One young mother is already baptized but wants to renew her baptism vows. There are 7 mothers and 9 children at present. What a joyful celebration, not just to look back at what has been, but also with the baptisms, to look forward to a hope and love filled future.

Continued p. 2...

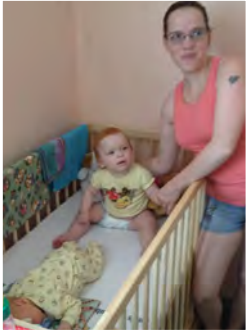


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- ◆ Sharing Latvia
- ◆ Wesley Camp Update
- ◆ And much more!!

Friends of Latvia Meeting – April 2014

friendsoflatvia.weebly.com | www.metodisti.lv



So many of you have supported the **Hope Center**, thank you, thank you! It occurred to me to ask you if any of you might want to send a cross necklace for the mothers or the babies. All of the support that has come to keep the **Hope Center** operational has come from you, so a symbol of the unity and love that you have shown could all symbolically be in the cross that will be put on each mother and child at their baptisms.

Next summer, we will celebrate the **10th Anniversary of Camp Wesley!** Please think about joining us for the celebration that will take place during **Wesley Days**, late June-beginning of July. A team from **England** will be visiting camp next summer and hopefully some of you!

Our **Apple Festival** was a huge success. This year we had an incredible bounty of apples. Many congregations were represented including a group of young **Methodists** from the **Danish** church. God blessed us with a sunny, beautiful day. There were children all over the place, running, laughing, climbing trees, and gathering apples. This year we had a great addition, an old-fashioned juice press. The apple juice was incredibly good! The rich variety of apples gave the freshly squeezed juice a uniquely good flavor. It was difficult to restrain from drinking too much. Fortunately, only a few children ended up with stomach aches from too much juice.



One of the most lasting memories of the day for me, was the trip back from the bus to our respective homes. My car holds 4 but we were 6 that needed rides. It was late and we were determined. So, the only way we could all fit was to have our oldest member, a tiny lady of 94 sit on the lap of one of our teens! What hilarity. She was such a good sport and cracked so many jokes at the absurdity of a 94 yr. old sitting on the lap of an 17 yr. old! We laughed the whole way. When asked if she was ok, she replied “ couldn’t be better, I have the softest and warmest seat in the car!” Glad we did not meet any police for they were in the front seat. God is good, He not only feeds our mind and lives but also brings us closer together through laughter!



It will soon be **Christmas!** Time really does fly. In planning our diaconal outreach, the question has arisen about the possibility of obtaining and the continued need for vitamins for the elderly and children during the winter months. If any church or **Sunday School** class is planning to donate to this ministry, we would appreciate your letting us know so that we are prepared and can share if this ministry will be realized again this year.

We want to especially thank our brothers and sisters for the very big gifts of an apartment in **Kuldīga**, a new stove for the **Sarkanji** congregation and a new heating unit for **Riga 1** and help with the basement project.

As to the future, all of our pastors are looking forward to meeting all of you at the **Friends of Latvia** meeting in April at **FUMC Grapevine, Texas**. It is truly a special opportunity for you and your church to connect with all the pastors serving in Latvia. For some of the pastors, it will be their first time visiting the US. All will have the opportunity to visit **Methodist** churches and gain a little insight into the American branch of our worldwide Church. We are all looking forward to that opportunity as well as participating in a spiritual formation retreat. What an incredible gift to us and hopefully also you!

May our incredible Lord, bless each and every one of you! May you grow in faith, joy, hope and love. May this gift of fellowship that unites us as God’s family continue to grow and nourish all of our faith walks!

Your partner in faith,
Gita Mednis, DS

Notes From the Chair

In Romans 12:2, Paul instructs *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* ESV

The Rev. Mel Munchinsky provided good guidance at our April gathering on how we might test our thinking as we plan our service to help others. These are important tests as we hope for Spirit-guided discernment leading to decisions that will very likely not conform to this world. If our work proceeds without resistance from the world then we might consider that a needed transformation has yet to occur.

Our spiritual and personal connections with brothers and sisters in Latvia offer a glimpse of nonconformity. Because we are from a faraway land with strange customs and rituals, we arrive as non-conformists. That we have the Good News of a risen Savior and the hope that our Latvian brethren will spread that Good News makes this non-conformity all the more intense and, hopefully, contagious. As Sandy Staples from Texas said while at the UMC Cesis, *“The true bravery is in the Latvians on this street corner evangelizing with us. They are among secular friends they will see again. We’ll leave and return home. I wonder if I’m brave enough to stand on a street corner in my home town and evangelize like they are doing here with us?”*

Once again, we go to Latvia to teach and to serve and, as a result, we are taught and are served. The resulting renewal of our minds is in the good and in the perfection of the faith we find in our Latvian friends. What does it mean when the world objects to our renewed minds upon our return?



Randy Tolleson, Chair
rstolleson@att.net
Smithfield UMC
North Richland Hills, TX



EU and Latvian Humanitarian Organization Contact Needed

The Pastor Income Team has broadened it’s scope to consider our pastors not only as solely UMC clergy, but also as potential employees of official humanitarian organizations. If you or any of your contacts are familiar with the laws and requirements around these organizations in Latvia and in the EU please notify Randy Tolleson at rstolleson@att.net. Information is scarce and a knowledgeable contact is needed.

Officers 2014-2015

Randy Tolleson, Chair
rstolleson@att.net
Smithfield UMC
North Richland Hills, TX

Wayne Richards, Vice-Chair
WCR4040@gmail.com
Medford UMC | Medford, NJ

Jim Hayes, Treasurer/Projects
jrhayes46@bellsouth.net
Norris UMC | Norris, TN

Melissia Mason, Secretary
secretary.fof@gmail.com
FUMC Grapevine, FUMC
Colleyville | Euless, TX

†

Standing Committees

In order to continue our work year-round, the following standing committees have been created. If you are interested in the work of a particular committee, please contact the person indicated:

Communications
Melissia Mason
secretary.fof@gmail.com

Hope Center
Holt Cason
lyho67@hotmail.com

Pastor’s Salary Fund
Randy Tolleson
rstolleson@att.net

Resources
Wayne Richards
WCR4040@gmail.com

Wesley Camp
Richard Payne
paynerr@live.com

Friends of Latvia Gathering & Pastors' Retreat

Gathering April 16-18 / Retreat April 19-22, 2015

By Annette Sowell

A Dream... A Vision... A Plan

The Dream began in the heart and spirit of Gita Mednis.

The Vision began in the heart and spirit of Professor Jesse Sowell.

The Plan begins, now, to take shape in the hearts and spirits of the entire Friends of Latvia community, across miles and oceans.

Gita dreamt that her pastors would have ministry partners/mentors to ease the journey they have each undertaken. We have all known the value of those more experienced than we who share their experience, strength, and hope with us; those who have listened to our dreams, visions, and plans, then celebrated or suffered with us – whatever was needed at any given time.

Jesse had created and implemented such programs frequently over his 38 year teaching career. He had seen how such pairing enhances the making of disciples and contributes to more celebrating than suffering. He envisioned such a program of pairing between pastors in the U.S. with pastors in Latvia. In sharing his vision with his pastor/wife, the vision began to take shape and form. It became this proposal:

We will bring our Latvian pastors and their US partners to Stillwater Lodge in Glen Rose, Texas for a 3-day Academy for Spiritual Formation. They will have opportunity to experience educational sessions, worship times, and sharing times with each other and the full group. They will learn and practice rich moments of encountering God through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines. They will get to know each other. Then, with the aid of modern technology, they will keep in touch with one another across the miles and the oceans.



The proposal has been adopted by the Texas Regional Friends of Latvia in the hope that the greater FOL community will catch the dream and envision their participation, too.

What can YOU do?

SUPPORT THE LATVIAN PASTORS' TRIP TO THE 2015 FOL MEETING AND RETREAT WITH YOUR PRAYERS AND YOUR FINANCES.

We will be sending a note to individual contacts at US connecting congregations requesting that those churches consider sponsoring the expenses of their Latvian pastor. However, we know that there will be some congregations who cannot cover the entire expense, and there are some pastors who do not have a connecting congregation. Therefore, we ask that each of you consider giving toward this great effort! Every little bit helps. Together, we can make a great impact in transforming the hearts, minds and lives of our Latvian friends.

Our goal is to cover all expenses for any pastor who wishes to attend - airfare, retreat expenses, accommodations, entertainment, translators, etc. We hope all of the Latvian pastors will attend, and we do have firm commitments from most of them. **We estimate that the total cost for each pastor will be \$2,200 (depending on airfare).** Airfare will vary depending on when flights are booked, whether pastors visit their connection congregations, etc.

FUMC Grapevine has agreed to receive and process the donations for the retreat. To give:

Mail checks to: FUMC Grapevine | ATTN: Latvia Pastors Retreat | 422 Church Street | Grapevine, TX 76051

Give online at www.firstmethodistgrapevine.org/give - put your donation amount in one of the "Special Gift" lines with "Latvia Pastors Retreat" in the memo.

If you have questions about how to give, contact Melissa Mason at FUMC Grapevine (817-481-2559 x109).

Friends of Latvia Gathering 2015

April 16-18, 2015 in Grapevine, Texas

Texas Friends of Latvia are excited to welcome you to the 2015 Friends of Latvia gathering! It has been many years since we have hosted this event, and we are pleased to have you as our guests. The 2015 Friends of Latvia gathering will take place Thursday, April 16, starting at 2:00 PM through noon on Saturday, April 18, at FUMC Grapevine. The schedule will be much as it was at last year's gathering in Tennessee.

This year, we have the added blessing of welcoming the pastors from Latvia! They will have the opportunity for some renewing time away, plus be able to deliver their congregational reports in person. We hope you will mark your calendar and begin making plans now to join us.



FUMC Grapevine



We are taking your registrations now! The registration fee will remain the same as last year (\$40). For those who wish to stay through Saturday evening, we will also have a BBQ dinner with the Latvian pastors. There are many churches who will welcome you to join them for worship on Sunday morning. You will find more information about travel arrangements on the registration form (see next page). You may register by printing, completing and mailing the registration form, or you may register and get details online at www.firstmethodistgrapevine.org/fol2015.

If you have questions, please contact:

For questions related to the FOL business meetings and schedule, contact:

Randy Tolleson, FOL Chair - rstolleson@att.net

For questions related to travel and accommodations, contact:

Bev Campisi, FOL Gathering Coordinator - beverlyc@fumcg.org, 817-481-2559 x140

For questions related to payments or registration, contact:

Melissia Mason, FOL Secretary - secretary.fol@gmail.com or melissiam@fumcg.org, 817-481-2559 x109



Riga Renovations

During their trip to Latvia this summer, FUMC Grapevine visited Riga First and toured the basement area that was formerly used as a gym. As Gita mentioned in her letter, renovations have begun to convert this to usable space. Look for renovation info in Michael Barr's article later in the newsletter.

In the past, the gym has helped cover the utility costs for heating the building, which houses Riga First Church and the District Offices. Because they no longer have a basement tenant, Riga First has made a covenant partnership with FUMC Grapevine to help alleviate utility costs until the space becomes usable and the church is able to cover the costs on their own.



Friends of Latvia National Gathering

April 16, 2:00 PM thru April 18, 12:00 PM
At First United Methodist Church – Grapevine, Texas

Name(s) _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email _____

Annual Conference _____ District _____

Local Church _____

Latvian Church or Ministry With Whom You Partner _____

I/we plan to arrive _____ and depart _____.

I would like to stay in a host home if possible. I'll need transportation to/from the conference.

I/we would like to attend the BBQ dinner on Saturday night.

There will be _____ of us attending (please include \$10 per person with your registration fee).

Registration

The registration fee of \$40 per person includes three meals, refreshments and conference materials. All participants are responsible for their own lodging and airfare. You may register and get more details about the conference schedule online at www.firstmethodistgrapevine.org/fol2015 OR return your registration form with fees and a copy of this form to: FUMC Grapevine, Attn: Friends of Latvia, 422 Church Street, Grapevine, TX 76051. Please make CHECKS PAYABLE to FUMC Grapevine with *FOL Registration* in the memo. *For proper planning please register by March 15, 2015.*

Lodging

The Comfort Inn of Grapevine is holding rooms for the conference at a rate of \$89 per night (1 king or 2 queens). Call 817-329-9300 to make your reservation and tell them you are attending the Friends of Latvia Conference at First Methodist Grapevine. Reservations must be made by MARCH 15, 2015, to take advantage of this rate.

Host homes may be available upon request.

Transportation

DFW International Airport is within the Grapevine city limits and is just a few minutes from the hotel and the church. **Love Field** is located in Dallas and is about a 25 minute drive to the church. The Comfort Inn has a free shuttle available to get you to and from DFW Airport and the church. *Alternate transportation to/from the airport, the hotel and the church will be provided upon request.*

For questions contact: BEV CAMPISI or MELISSIA MASON
817-481-2559 x140 817-481-2559 X109
beverlyc@fumcg.org melissiam@fumcg.org

First United Methodist Church | 422 Church Street | Grapevine, TX 76051

www.firstmethodistgrapevine.org/fol2015

Wesley Camp

Board of Directors Report

The Board of Directors of Wesley Camp met for their annual meeting at Riga 1st UMC on August 21, 2014. The Board considered the following important items and decisions:

- Approved minutes and financial report
- Discussed expanding the Board to include additional members.
- Discussed a decline in funding and donations to Advance Fund #15160N
- Reviewed and approved camp directors report (Inese Budnika)
- Reviewed master plans and prioritized list of needed repairs and projects.
- Discussed Website www.wesleycamp.org and facebook

Special thanks to Romans Budnika for his efforts in keeping things running during camp. Romans will be unable to be at 2015 camp due to work.
We are looking for volunteers to assist with maintenance during camp.

We will be celebrating 10 years of Wesley Camp in 2015. God has definitely used Wesley Camp to change the hearts and bring the Holy Spirit to so many children, youth and adults. The camp has been a place to plant the seed of the Holy Spirit and watch it grow and bear fruit through the children who attend. The Board continues to look for ways to expand and increase the ability of the Camp to host more people. Thank You to all that have helped with your Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness.

The Board of Directors, at the time of the meeting is as follows:

- Bishop Christian Alsted
 - Steffen Tvilling – Denmark
 - Lars Braestrup – Denmark (Withdrawing from Board)
- Latvia D.S. Gita Mednis
 - Gunta Grina-Sologuba – Latvia UMC Pastor
 - Inese Budnika – Latvia UMC Pastor
- Lithuania D.S. William (Bill) Lovelace
 - Laerijana Budzinauskaite – Lithuania Youth Director
 - Rolando Piecia – Lithuania UMC Pastor
- Friends of Latvia – Richard Payne
- Friends of Lithuania – Mary Garber



Keep connected with
Wesley Camp on our
website at
www.wesleycamp.org

and on Facebook at
[www.facebook.com/
campwesley](http://www.facebook.com/campwesley)

Questions? Contact Richard
Payne at paynerr@live.com or
Inese Budnika at
b_inese@hotmail.com.

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10th
Anniversary
2015

Next summer is the 10th
Anniversary of Wesley Camp!
We'll be celebrating at Wesley
Days in July. Watch for more
details and exact dates coming
soon... and make plans to join
in on the celebration!

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WHEN METHODISTS ARE UNITED

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

On UMC #GivingTuesday last year, gifts from United Methodists totaled \$6.5 million. That means 16,300 gifts given through The Advance reached mission and ministries around the world. **What's next?**



www.umcmmission.org/give

Giving Tuesday

December 2, 2014

We have Black Friday and Cyber Monday... and the charity world has claimed the Tuesday after Thanksgiving as "Giving Tuesday." The United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries has announced that on December 2, 2014, it will match up to \$1 million in gifts made online to any project through The Advance as part of UMC Giving Tuesday.

Remember that last year the matching funds were depleted in mere minutes! If you would like to try to get your donation included in the matching funds, please plan to give right **at midnight Eastern time on Tuesday, December 2.**

At right, you will see the latest year-to-date giving for each of the Advance areas related to Latvia. We are late in the year and most of these funds are far below their goals. Consider how you might raise awareness of these needs within your congregation.

For resources related to Giving Tuesday that you can use in your church, visit www.umcmmission.org/Giving-Tuesday.

Giving to the Advance

Your gifts make a huge difference! Below are the Advance numbers related to giving to Latvia, along with last year's total given and 2014 Year-to-Date giving (according to the Advance tracking feature on the GBGM website). To give online through the Advance, go to... www.umcmmission.org/advance

Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447
2013: \$24,410.43
2014 YTD: **\$10,323.15**
Annual Goal: \$39,500.00

Latvia Mission Initiative *

Project Number: 00235A
2013: \$50,375.58
2014 YTD: **\$14,596.00**
Annual Goal: \$100,000.00

Pastors' Salary Fund

Advance project: 14706A
2013: \$11,942.00
2014 YTD: **\$2,950.00**
Annual Goal: \$50,000.00

Wesley Camp

Project Number: 15160N
2013: \$9,574.00
2014 YTD: **\$1,498.00**
Annual Goal: \$23,000.00

*** Special Note:** You may or not be aware, but when you give a gift to the "Latvia Mission Initiative" via the Advance website, the memo you include does not get transmitted to the Latvia District office along with your gift (this is glitch in the system that they are hopefully working on). So... if you give a donation through the Advance website that you would like to be designated for something specific, please send an extra e-mail to Gita (gitamednis@gmail.com) to let her know how you would like your gift to be designated. You may also wish to wire your funds directly to the Latvia District Office. Please contact Gita or Rihards (metodistu.birojs@gmail.com) for wiring instructions.

UMVIM Training

United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) is set to hold a training session at the end of October in Tallinn, Estonia. About 30 people will be gathering for this event, including Rev. Mel Munchinsky, our In Mission Together Coordinator. Rihards Germans will be representing the Latvia churches. If there is anything which might help UMVIM teams going to Latvia which can be used after this event, Mel will be passing that on to us and we will share it in a future e-mail.

Q&A With Gita

Q: How has the recent war on Christians affected the country of Latvia?

A: There have been no protests or violence against Christians in Latvia. The persecution seems to be more in Asia and Middle East. Methodists and free churches are being persecuted in the Crimea. They are seen as siding with the Ukrainian government and therefore the enemy.

June Mission Trip Report

Riga, Kuldiga and Leipaja Latvia

by Jim Hayes, for the Kuldiga Partners

June 12-22, 2014

We have been involved in the "In Mission Together" Program since 2006 when we formed a covenant relationship with the members of the Kuldiga UMC in Latvia. The recent trip I was on represents the sixth time we have either visited Kuldiga or helped bring their members to visit us. Members of the Kuldiga partnership are Norris, Sinking Springs, Wears Valley and Maryville First UMC.

On June 22 we returned from Latvia with a team of four persons. Three of the team are members of the Maryville First UMC. While in Latvia we:

Attended the christening of Vivita's baby Charlotte. Vivita has been the minister at Kuldiga and is now on maternity leave.

Visit with our friends at Kuldiga UMC. Several of the ministers near Kuldiga have been filling in while the minister is on maternity leave. We found that this situation is not good for the church and learned that they need a full-time minister who lives in Kuldiga.

Jim Hayes preached last Sunday at the Kuldiga church and led a Bible study about the Holy Spirit. The other team members worked with youth at the church on prayer beads.

Last Monday we looked at eight apartments that could be purchased for the Kuldiga minister. Members of the church leadership and our team settled on a renovated apartment that will cost 14,500 Euros. We have about \$15,000 in the Ervins Fund and will need to raise about \$5,000 to help Kuldiga purchase the apartment. Our partner churches began working on this effort in July.

Members of the Kuldiga church rented a van and drove us to several historical and cultural sites in the area.

We had a picnic at the farm of a church member before leaving Kuldiga.

The team drove to Leipija and Wesley Camp where we stayed for five nights in the Holston House. While there we removed furniture, cleaned and painted the floor of an auditorium, cut grass, burned brush piles, and cleaned the showers. All of this was to prepare the Camp for the summer camping season.

Vivita and her husband provided us dinner in her home in Leipija and led us on a tour of Leipija. We visited a Soviet era military prison, a beautiful Russian Orthodox Church, and shopped.

On Sunday, 6/21/14 we meet with Gita Mednis, the Latvia DS about our trip and discussed the purchase of the Kuldiga apartment. We found that she would be retiring this year at the mandatory retirement age of 72.

While in Latvia, we gave the Kuldiga church \$2,000 from the four partner churches to help them replace their heating system. We gave Inese Budnika, the director of Wesley Camp \$1,950 from Norris UMC that we had raised to make improvements at the Camp.



My Latvia Story

By Dana Nance
Meadowbrook UMC
djnance@sbcglobal.net

Exodus 4:10-13 Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The LORD said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."

I couldn't help but think about my third trip to Latvia this summer, as I studied this passage in Bible Study Fellowship this week. I traveled with my husband, Jim, and the group from First United Methodist Church Grapevine.

While we were in Latvia, Elaine Winburne followed our trip via Bev Campisi's daily posts to the church blog. (Elaine was asked to go to Latvia in 1999. She said, "Sure! Where is Latvia?!") Elaine asked if I would speak to the United Methodist Women at Colleyville UMC in September. I immediately responded, "Bev is who you need, as she is quite articulate and this is her first trip to Latvia." (See Bev's thoughts on the next page.) But, as the time drew closer for the meeting God impressed upon me that because I have a history with Latvia that I need to share how a little girl who grew up in Nebraska would end up traveling to Latvia.

So, in September, I told the UMW that God tilled the soil of my heart from 1997-2007. He planted seeds in the tilled soil when Bishop Hans Vaxby sang "Can't Help Falling in Love" in the Martin UMC church sanctuary on January 9, 2000, the 25th anniversary of my surrender to Christ. And even though I took pictures at the 2001 Friends of Latvia Gathering, I wasn't ready to get involved. I was busy with Women's Retreats, BSF, Companions in Christ and raising four children.

In 2006, Jim and Dr. Ron Lee took an "exploratory trip" to Latvia to determine how we could help. The conclusion was to pack your bags and trust God to show what needs to be done when you arrive!

God planted more seeds in the softened soil of my heart when the Latvia Youth Choir came in 2007. The following year I traveled to Latvia with Jim. We, along with Roxanne and Ansley Dougherty worked on the sanctuary floor at Riga 1st with Rihards and Janis. A year later I agreed to be the Friends of Latvia Secretary and published the first newsletter.

The second time I went to Latvia in 2011, Jim and I helped transform the Bambi Room with a whole bunch of Latvians. God continued to prove Himself faithful. All we had to do was show up with the resources we had and He would lead the way and show us what to do.

This year, although I loved the job, God impressed upon me that it was time to let go of the Secretary position and allow someone else the blessing of serving. Recommending Melissia Mason was a no-brainer! She has taken the communication aspect to the next level.

This summer as we traveled in Latvia, I felt like an ambassador as we visited several places we had seen in previous years, but also places new to us. It was enjoyable traveling with FUMC Grapevine. They made us feel like family.

To what is God calling you? How will you respond to His call? Will you consider attending or helping with the planning of the 2015 Friends of Latvia Gathering that will be held in Grapevine?



Jim, Juris, Gita, Ron 2006



The Bambi Room before (above) and after (below)



Jim and I reunited with Ramona at Wesley Camp during our 2014 trip. We had worked together on the Bambi Room in 2011.

Experiencing & Sharing Latvia

By Bev Campisi

FUMC Grapevine and Meadowbrook UMC Share with FUMC Colleyville

July 24 began what I knew would be a pivotal experience for me. We met at FUMC Grapevine for a memorable prayer send off, flew to Riga with our group of ten adults and youth. We began our trip as one group, knowing we were to separate on two missions once we arrived in Latvia. The Payne family and two additional youth would be going to Wesley Camp to help at Children's Camp while our Senior Pastor, John Mollet, Jim and Dana Nance from Meadowbrook UMC and I would stay in Riga, visit the outreach programs and area churches, then continue on to Liepaja and Wesley Camp.



Riding with Gita as our guide and being able to ask the Nances for more history from their prior trips and their experiences, meeting people John had just met on our church's first trip in September 2014, and being able to form my own relationships with people I had been told about continued to be God-eye-and-ear-opening and I am continuing to see and hear!

Dana and I were taking and posting photos to our Facebook pages and her friend Elaine Winburne from FUMC Colleyville, seeing them with renewed interest from her prior trip, invited her to speak at their United Methodist Women (UMW) program in September. Dana accepted and invited me to share as well.

We were warmly received by a room full of interested UMW members who listened with interest as we shared our stories. Dana's recap of her God-led trips and involvement in Friends of Latvia and my recap of programs visited and people engaged with sparked interest. This was actually a second presentation I had made. The FUMC Grapevine UMW had extended an early invitation upon our return and our youth and Julie Payne and I spoke at their August luncheon. It was another wonderful opportunity to show and tell and expand the opportunity for more to be involved.

My feeling is that awareness and information sharing will help our friends in Latvia and is a responsibility we have when we make these trips. When you go, share your photos of your work and needs on social media or with your church to be posted to your congregation and shared with Friends of Latvia. Create interest in your circles of influence, for resources often lie hidden until awareness is shared.

We returned from Latvia August 2, and I sat in our worship service the next day, seeing couples and individuals who "should go to Latvia!" Then I told them so and why. When each of our groups take a trip, we should return and invite others to consider going on a future trip, even if they were to join a group from another church. And we should invite ourselves to go and speak to other groups and churches, even if we haven't been invited, to tell the story to all who will listen!



Hope Center Mission Trip Recap

by Holt Cason

Liepa, Latvia

August 15-29, 2014

Our VIM Team consisting of Clay Bearden, Kenny Helms, Jim McClure, Doug Thomas and Holt Cason from Tullahoma, TN; Paul Wennermark from Fairfield Glades, TN; Bud Vann from Birmingham, AL were joined by Dr. John Morrison and Mike Barr from New Orleans to work on the Hope Center to eliminate mold and to refurbish parts of the facility in Liepa, Latvia.

At times you make a mess before making something better and this was the case on our recent trip. Days one and two were spent primarily stripping old, badly worn, mildewed wallpaper and carpet from 3 rooms and a small bathroom. Additionally, we removed a partial wall and door to give the existing hallway an easier flow thru for traffic.



Children's summer camp at Liepa UMC.

Following the “destructive work” the Team washed walls to remove excessive glue, wallpaper tatters and gunk from the walls prior to coating them with a fungicide material to help prevent mold growth. The bathroom presented an exceptional challenge with tight quarters but also with a buildup of layers of wallpaper, moldy tiles, etc. A special fungicide material made especially for bath facilities was used on these walls.

To help prevent the reoccurrence of mold in the future, the team cut out approximately 6 inches of sheetrock around the interior perimeter of each window. We then sealed each window with expansive foam, weatherproof stripping and added insulation to the vacated areas. New sheetrock pieces were added using sheetrock stripping mud to help prevent wind and moisture from entering the rooms. Then the work began as we patched and sanded, sanded and patched indentations on the walls.

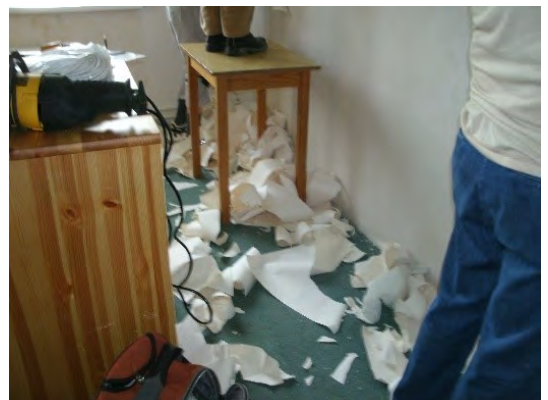
While some sanded, others built a new wall where only a curtain had given any privacy to its occupants previously. An outside contractor was paid to install ventilation systems in each of the four rooms we worked on as well as a system in the bathroom on the opposite side of the building.

After all the sanding and patching were completed, we painted the walls including the interior of the window sills with a very light beige tone color; reinstalled a door on one room, and added a new light fixture in the hallway.

Needless to say there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done at the Hope Center but at least we have made a start to improving the interior of the building. The unused funds will be kept in a separate account for future use to complete the work list presented at the FOL meeting at Marysville this past April.

Improvements to Hope Center:

- Remove wall paper and clean walls
- Paint walls and ceiling
- Construct wall to create a hallway
- Modify window surrounds for better insulation
- Create openings for two doors
- Add new light fixture in new hallway
- Fix floor squeaks
- Paid to have 5 ventilation units installed



A New Friend of Latvia

Michael Barr Shares His Missionary Experience

I wasn't a friend of Latvia before this summer 2014 but I am proud to say I am one now. I served as a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries for about three months - a month and a half at Wesley Camp in Liepaja where I was the handyman, several days out of two weeks in Liepa with Holt Cason and their team at the Hope Center, and a final two weeks at Riga 1st helping with the demolition in order to renovate the basement. I also attended the annual conference with Richard Payne and was quite pleased, enriched and edified by the focus and collaboration among the lay leaders of the Latvian congregation. I then returned back to camp to ready it for winter and celebrate the harvest at Apple Festival, held each year. The grounds receive a thorough raking, even the flower beds, and the trees in the orchard are picked and processed into apple juice and jam.

Pastor Gita Mednis remarked that "connectional ministry" meant something different to her in Latvia and it is very true. Unlike in the states (I live in New Orleans and moved there from Boston) the churches in Latvia have to rely on each other, work with each other, share pastors, share ideas, host each other's youth, and be "united" in ways we often do not expect. Perhaps as with the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles, they have to problem solve together and work to change the mindset of the local people, given its Soviet history. Any question of whether the brutality of the Soviet regime matched the Roman Empire is quickly settled with a visit to the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.

I am in Palestine now where I recently learned that the actual Greek word for Jesus our Lord's occupation means 'builder,' which, given the deserts around Jerusalem means stone mason. Well, in Riga, there was a lot of rock pounding and brick laying to do. The basement was rental property for a gym club and the walls needed to be taken down to the brick underneath the plaster and concrete parge coat. In some places they need built back up and waterproofed and in other areas sealed. It is quite a lot of space (the entire footprint of the upstairs) with a separate entrance, shower facilities, an old sauna, and several rooms but as you can see from the pictures below requires some resources and sweat equity to turn around. This room here will be perfect for youth group.



On to Wesley Camp: I enjoyed the people, the food, the location amid tall grasses and apple orchards set in lush farm country near the sea, immensely. I grew up going to camp in the state of Ohio, Christian Service Brigade, and went almost every year for a week from the age of eight into adulthood when I returned as a counselor. The position of "handyman and male role model" at Wesley Camp also fit my skill set. My question, of course, was how would that be possible not knowing the language? As God's faithfulness is said to be "new every morning," so each day seemed to bring a new answer. This meant not being frustrated if I couldn't understand or participate in conversations, just to wait, expectantly, to be open personally, and initiate conversation and work projects. It is also a good life lesson!

In my role, I really looked to Romans, camp director Pastor Inese's husband, who was home from sea, for what to do and often when. His pithy humor kept everyone on staff light-hearted and focused, and his leadership with the maintenance showed a clear sense of priority. When I was needed to help with a game for the youth, I asked and he said, "Camp first, jobs second - no camp, no jobs!" Another time when I was repairing a bed that wasn't in use, he said, "Ah, work when camps are done, make the children happy now." I benefited spiritually too from Romans' sharp insights and appreciation of the larger purpose the camp serves. It seems unlikely he will be at camp next year which is a loss in itself and an extra burden on Inese, with three kids, two of whom are young. We need to keep this in prayer. I will pray I can return but just the presence of an extra adult is helpful. Here is a picture of me with Lucas and Marta.



The work I did for the camp I would divide into three categories: improvements to infrastructure, yearly maintenance, and helps to the camp programming.

- 1. Improvements to the camp:** We removed a roof on the back of Holstein house and it has since been replaced; I weather-proofed the three tent platforms to keep from warping; hopefully, a cabin or two can be built in the near future; I rebuilt a couple wood bed frames; we built temporary handicap access ramps for Holstein house; helped Richard a little to build the bench / picnic table; filled the foundation of an outbuilding with a couple tons of sand to create a giant sand-box, great for the kids and the parents! I constructed four screens to fit the dining hall windows; and finally, I designed and built shelving to hold the craft materials inside Holstein house and clear-coated them.
- 2. The majority of my tasks would fall under the category of yearly maintenance:** organizing the tool sheds and barn more than once, cutting grass, sawing wood, mowing fields, clearing winter tarps off the platforms and then putting them back on, neatly packing up tents, plastic tarps, and sleeping bags, building camp fires, etc.
- 3. Activities for the different camps:** I led a wood-craft activity for both children's camps, two afternoons each week, and with the help of eager boys and sometimes girls, we created 2 birdhouses that now hang on two trees, a box for the camp postage, a hanging frame for the camp schedule, and a sign that says "Wesley Camp" on it. This had not been done before and the kids really enjoyed having wood to cut and pound nails into and the experiment of invention. About four of the guys told me they want to come back next year! I also gathered reeds for the second week of children's camp, built a pyramid structure, and with Romix created a camel of wood and plastic buckets for the theme, Egypt in Latvia!

Overall, I found the camp clean, well-managed from behind the scenes, and well-maintained by the staff youth whom Inese instructed along with Ilze Erode, the staff youth spiritual mentor. For two of the weeks, an excellent young and gifted Pentecostal fellow led worship. During the last week, a few of the cooking staff led singing and I had the opportunity to help too. I was also impressed with the emphasis on teamwork in the games. It was a perfect illustration of the verse in Ecclesiastes that says, "...the race is not to the swift, nor the battle always to the strong!"

Pastors Gunta and Vivita, and lay leader Sniedze, primarily, did an amazing job to inspire the younger leaders and, for one, to pull off a Flash Mob in Liepaja Center. For the teenagers, they turned the entire dining hall upside down with a culminating event, an interactive role-play called a "Global Village." The room was divided into several sections and we walked through each and had the opportunity to talk and minister to, if we could, persons playing a homeless man, a business man, a prostitute, a young street girl with her brother, a drunkard, and a female victim of spousal abuse. Upstairs were prayer stations for reflection and art that gave time and space to process. I saw youth moved to tears by the profound and challenging material; such reflections on how as Christians we engage the culture is not normal fare for a summer camp so I wanted to give it special mention.

Apple Festival had about 70 people attend. A work day in many ways, the camp was a beehive of productive activity as we brought water filtration



tanks, carpets, the sign etc. in for the winter. We also learned that the fellow who brought the apple press, brother of one of the young pastors in Riga, and newly returned from overseas, is a skilled carpenter and home builder. He is interested in the ministry and I'm hopeful that he will be able to work with the camp in the future.

Since we, as Americans, cannot readily understand the camp worship songs, I thought it would be nice to close this report with some lyrics. Even without the melody, this gives an idea of the substance and wonder of a beautiful Latvian worship song.

No mala veidots es

Tavu roku izmicits

Tavas zelastibas aplaistits

Tavas uguns izkarsets, naku es, naku es pie Tevis Jezu.

Tu esi mans prieks, kad man ta vairs nav

Tu esi mans speks kad es esmu vajs

Tu esi mans draugs kad es esmu viens

Tu esi mans Dievs.

From clay I am made

Your hands have fashioned me

Your mercy showers over me

Your fire refines me, I come, I am coming to you Jesus.

You are my joy when I am without

You are my strength when I am weak

You are my friend when I am alone

You are my God.

Liels paldies (big thanks) for the continued support of Wesley Camp!

Michael Barr
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New Orleans, LA



Connect

During the last Friends of Latvia gathering, we had a conversation about what is most important in church partnerships. As the Latvian pastors shared their thoughts, over and over again we heard, "Prayer. Relationships. Connection." Don't forget to be in communication with our friends in Latvia... to nurture and grow your relationships.

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Connecting Online

Don't forget to visit our website often! As we receive updates, we post them on the "News" blog. We try to also send these updates in your e-mail, but if you miss something, you can always get it on the website. The website also contains contact information for each of the churches in Latvia, the latest news, upcoming mission trip dates and events and links to Advance giving. If you have information you'd like to share on the website, please email it to FOL Secretary, Melissa Mason, at secretary.fol@gmail.com.

