

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 7 | Issue 2

October 2015



LAMB Annual Conference

Several members of Friends of Latvia were in Latvia in late August for the annual conference meetings, which were hosted by Matras and Tasi congregations. Mary Garber (Pittsburgh, PA), Rev. Jesse Sowell, Mark and Julie Croft, and Melissa Mason (all of Grapevine, TX), and Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and Rev. Lee Padgett of the North Alabama Conference were all in attendance. The worship times were touching, and the hard work of the Latvian church was evident in each of the reports we heard. [Click here to read the Conference Report](#) (pdf).

Astra Dannenfelte, the Associate Pastor at Riga First, was commissioned as a probationary member of the Conference (one more step on the way to becoming an Elder). Zinta Dzintara, member and song leader at Riga First, was welcomed as a candidate for ordained ministry and is serving as a part-time local pastor in Kuldiga. Ilze Vesterlunda was appointed as Lay Pastor to Liepa Latvian congregation, as Ilzite Ozola takes a leave of absence. Vera Titoviča will add Sarkani to her pastoral responsibilities. It was affirmed that this coming year will be Gita Mednis's last as District Superintendent (replacement is still yet to be decided).

In addition to the business meetings, we also got to enjoy Latvian cooking and culture... including a few history lessons about the area. We worshiped in Matras, visited Tasi's manor house and goat farm, and enjoyed time at Wesley Camp for picnics and folk dances. ♦

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Greeting From Gita Mednis

Senior Pastor 1st Riga / District Superintendent

Dearest Friends in Christ,

We are very excited, looking forward to next July, when we will all be together in Riga. I am sure that God will richly bless all of us with His Grace, His presence and love. We are praying for God's discernment as to how best go forward with the plans.

Just think – Methodists from US, Ireland, England, Denmark and Latvia gathering to worship and praise our Lord!

I hope that you have all marked your calendars and are talking with your friends and congregations. It would be a great time and place to become more acquainted with Latvia and the Methodist Church here.

Our Annual District Conference was the 3rd week of August. It was held in the Liepaja area and in attendance were some of our brothers and sisters from the US. We loved the fellowship with them, who by now are old friends as well as the new relationship with Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and her husband Lee.

They all were a blessing and joy to all of us.

New appointments have been made. Ilzite Ozola, who for years had been the pastor of Liepa Latvian speaking congregation as well as the Sarkani congregation, asked for a leave to devote more time to her four foster children.

Returning to Latvia from living in Sweden the past 10 years, Ilze Vesterlund has been appointed to serve the Liepa Latvian congregation. Pastor Vera Titovica has been appointed to both the Liepa Russian speaking and Sarkani congregations. Vivita Kalnina has returned from her child care leave and was appointed pastor at Kuldiga as well as Sunday School co-ordinator. We welcomed a new member to our clergy family, Zinta Dzintara who will be working with Vivita in Kuldiga. Astra Dannenfelte became a provisional member of our Conference. I invite you all to take some time to read the reports which detail the work of the individual congregations and the diaconal work of the District (linked on p. 1).

The annual Apple Festival was just celebrated with some of our Danish Methodist brothers and sisters. It was not a great year for apples, but a wonderful year for fellowship.

Many of our members are getting ready for the North European School of Congregational Dev. In Tallinn. It will be a time of learning and fellowship.

I hope that all of you had a good summer and you have returned energized and ready to continue to serve our Lord in your communities and congregations.

Many, many blessings,
Gita ♦



Officers 2015-2017:

Mark Croft, Chair
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First UMC
Grapevine, TX

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

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

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

†

Standing Committees

Wesley Camp
Richard Payne, Joe Acker, Vivita & Edgars Kalnina

Hope Center
Jim Nance, Holt Cason, Dana McCarty, Kristine Rozefelde, Gita Mednis

Pastor's Income
Randy Tolleson, Mark & Julie Croft, Wayne Richards, Edgars

Relationship
This is a new committee tasked with creating strategies for developing relationships between churches
Lisa Nelsony, Jim Hayes, Daina Zambergas, Dana Nance

Notes From the Chair

Greetings, my friends! I can't believe this summer is gone! Fall is upon us and I hope all is well with you and your congregations. As Melissa mentioned in her Post Conference Update, seven members of Friends of Latvia just returned from the LAMB Annual Conference hosted by the Tasi and Matras congregations. It was so good to see all of our friends and renew and strengthen our relationships with them. Our worship times were very special and the conference presentations were timely, informative and interactive. The passion, commitment and resolve of the DS, pastors, and support staff was very evident as was the presence of the Holy Spirit. We were heartened and filled with joy as Astra and Zinta progressed in their journey in faith and leadership in the Latvian Methodist Church. We were bathed by the warm love and hospitality of our Latvian hosts throughout our stay and enjoyed our share of wonderful food and fellowship. Rumor has it there was video taken by our FOL Secretary of a certain FOL Chairman and others "attempting" to do Latvian folk dancing at Camp Wesley. I have not seen the video yet, but I am sure there is not enough money out there to keep it from public view! What is a guy to do!



We met with DS Mednis and other members of her staff after the conference to discuss the 2016 FOL Meeting to be held IN LATVIA at Riga First on July 1-3. We had a good meeting and made some preliminary decisions on the physical location of the meeting, which will be in the sanctuary of Riga First. We felt this was a good location as it could function both as a meeting and worship venue with minimal interruption. The First Riga building also has adequate space for breakout sessions, lunch and meal seating, and restroom facilities. This would also eliminate most of the expense for a separate conference facility.

We will continue to move forward in the coming months with planning for conference content, missional and outreach activities for the days leading up to the conference, and fellowship activities while in Latvia. If you would like to volunteer to help in any of these areas or have questions, please contact me at markcroft@hotmail.com or Mary Garber at mgarber1989@aol.com. We need to obtain an initial estimate of those attending as soon as possible so we can begin to look at booking hotel rooms and assess costs. So if you could share this with us as soon as you can, that would be great. Finally, be thinking about potential mission and outreach projects your group might be considering and share those with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark".

Mark Croft, Chair
markcroft@hotmail.com
FUMC Grapevine, TX



My wife and I recently went to see the movie *War Room*. If you haven't seen it yet, I strongly encourage you to do so. It is a film by Christian film maker Alex Kendrick centering on the life of a successful real estate agent, her successful salesman husband and young daughter.

War Room focuses on the mentoring relationship that develops between an elderly client who is selling her house and the real estate agent. The agent shares with the woman the story of her lagging faith, disintegrating marriage and family life, and how she sees no way to fix it. The agent tells the woman she is tired of all the fighting, struggle, and heartache and is about to give up.

The elderly woman shares with the agent that maybe she is not "fighting" the right way and that maybe she needs new tools and a "battle plan."

The woman then takes the agent up to her "war room." It is a small room with walls filled with scripture verses, prayer requests and a place for her to pray. The woman indicates that this is the place where her battles are waged and suggested maybe the agent build a war room and begin a battle to save her marriage and family.

What transpires is a story of prayer, forgiveness, and God's grace that slowly begins to restore and transform the agent's marriage and family life. The climactic scene shows the elderly woman in her "war room" giving thanks to God for bringing the agent into her life. She then launches in to a soliloquy of prayer as the camera cuts to shots of people across the country praying, people dealing with different problems and issues of their life and her asking God to "raise them up, raise them up Lord." Her voice builds to a thundering crescendo as the movie ends.

As I walked out of the theatre, my thoughts turned to Latvia and our special relationship/partnership. This movie reminded me vividly of the transformational power of prayer, God's unending grace and forgiveness, and how we can continually raise each other up through prayer. So to all of you... consider yourself "raised up"!

HOPE CENTER 2015

By Holt Cason

Our Volunteers in Mission (VIM) from First United Methodist Church, Tullahoma, TN went to Liepa, Latvia to work at the Hope Center. The team consisted of Craig Diller (a first time VIM member), Rebekah Diller, Kenny Helms, Jim McClure, Doug Thomas, Dudley Tipps, and Holt Cason. The original plan was to arrive August 7, but American Airlines failed to cooperate and we arrived on August 8 and were greeted by Gita and Juris Mednis and Rihards Germans.

After touring the Salaspils Concentration Camp, and the Jewish memorial at Rumbula in Riga on Saturday, we arrived at the Salvation Army house in Skangali where we roomed during our trip. Sunday was a leisure day after attending a combined service of Latvian and Russian speaking congregations in Liepa.

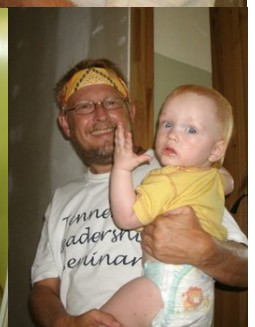
Early Monday morning, our team arrived at the Hope Center and began removing old wall paper from one of the bedrooms, the main hall and the kitchen area of the building. After the wallpaper was removed, we spackled holes and cracks in the sheetrock and then sanded the walls to achieve a smooth surface for painting.

On Wednesday, we were finally in a position to begin applying a base coat of sealant to the walls, and after that dried, we began painting. The colors were chosen to be bright to help psychologically with the long, drab winter months.

In addition to the ripping, tearing, spackling, sanding, and painting, we installed a new light fixture, a new light control device and new crown molding in the hallway and bedroom.

While the work was meaningful and will give the girls and their babies at the Hope Center a cleaner, brighter and more colorful environment, spending time with the residents was the most enjoyable part of the trip.

On the last day of our VIM trip, we visited the Hill of Crosses at Siauliai, Lithuania to remember those of previous teams that have passed on to be with our Lord. ♦



Smithfield Mission Trip

By Rev. Lisa Neslony

Seventeen members of Smithfield United Methodist Church and a friend from Huntsville travelled July 9-21 to Cēsis, Latvia. While there, they helped repair a leakage problem in the church basement that was causing the building to sink.

Members of the team also spent two days in Liepa, where they led a VBS-style program for the children from the Russian and Latvian congregations and treated the moms at the Hope Center to a Girls Day Out complete with bowling, two great meals and quality time getting to know one another. Two Smithfield women teamed up with two Latvians to care for the children of Hope Center while the moms were away. And one of the Smithfield women distributed cosmetic kits for the moms to enjoy.

In addition to all this, the team participated in a nursing home visit, an outdoor Bible study with Latvia church members and their neighbors, two awesome worship services, a hand-bell concert at the Lutheran Church, and a chilly, rainy picnic that ended with a challenge by the Latvians to leap into a frigid pond. One of the Smithfield team members actually answered their call by stripping down and heading for the water!

It was a great trip and there were many tears when it was time to leave. What a blessing to have such great friends a half a world away! ♦



FOL 2016 in Latvia!

June 27—July 3, 2016

During this year's Friends of Latvia gathering, it was decided that we would explore the possibility of holding the 2016 gathering in Latvia! We hope that this would allow our friends from churches in England, Ireland and other parts of Europe to participate. A task force was formed (Jim Hayes, Gita Mednis, Mary Garber, Dana McCarty) to explore the options and put a plan together.

The Latvian pastors have since gathered and discussed next year's gathering in Latvia. All agreed that Riga would be the most convenient and logical site. The dates are June 27-July 3, 2016. The first few days will consist of project work in local churches and the opportunity to participate in Wesley Days. The business meetings of Friends of Latvia will take place at Riga First on July 1-3. Mary Garber has volunteered to be the coordinator on the US side. We need to get an estimate of those attending as soon as possible, so please poll your church members to get an idea how many will be attending. Also, begin talking with your partner church (if you have one) about what projects may need to be accomplished during the work days. We are still taking volunteers to assist with planning outreach and fellowship activities. If you have questions or would like to help, please contact Mary Garber at mgarber1989@aol.com or Mark Croft at markcroft@hotmail.com (note this is a corrected email address – if you have emailed Mark and not gotten a response, please verify the address).

Mary Garber mgarber1989@aol.com

Mark Croft markcroft@hotmail.com



RESOURCES AND LINKS

If you were unable to be present at Friends of Latvia, or would like to revisit some of the information that was presented, you are invited to take advantage of the following resources...

Live Stream and Archive:

www.ustream.tv/channel/umc-friends-of-latvia

File Sharing (Friends of Latvia Google Drive):

tinyurl.com/FOLdrive

Any of the handouts we distribute or refer to are available on the Google Drive. Can't find something? Let us know!

Website: friendsoflatvia.weebly.com

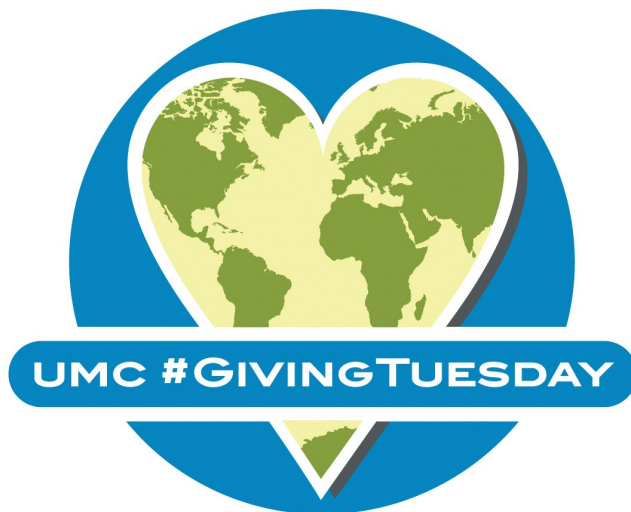
Facebook: facebook.com/friendsoflatvia

Mark Croft, FOL Chair - markcroft@hotmail.com, 817-308-7822

Melissia Mason, FOL Secretary - secretary.fol@gmail.com, 817-798-3443

Current Funding Needs

- Salary for the new additional nanny for Hope Center - €500 will cover one month of salary
- Funding for renovations to the wooden building beside Riga First (to be used by Hope Center and other outreach ministries) - €19,000 is the cost for the initial restoration of items related to historical preservation.
- Consistent, regular gifts to Wesley Camp to provide for the expenses that are no longer covered by GBGM funding.
- Pastor's Salary Fund gifts are much appreciated and needed.



Save the date! Giving Tuesday is
December 1, 2015

In past years, GBGM has matched a portion of funds given. As soon as firm plans are announced for this year, we will let you know!

Pastor Income Awareness Depends on YOU!

Most everyone attending the FOL gathering this Spring agreed that their link to Latvia began as a conversation with a person like you who conveyed a passion and a love that was too real to ignore. That's important to realize as we serve in our ambassador roles to get the word out about the good work there. In case it wasn't made clear at the meeting, as of 2015 the pastor salaries are paid primarily by gifts to the Pastor Salary Advance from individuals, Sunday School classes and anyone concerned about improving the lives – physical and spiritual – of our friends in Latvia. Review the resources posted online in our Latvia Google Drive - you can access them directly at www.tinyurl.com/latvia-pastor-income. Print some of the trifold brochures, say a prayer, and schedule time with groups at your church to show and discuss the video. It's a Spirit-guided cause and it takes that personal conversation to make it happen. ♦

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 2015 Year-to-Date giving (according to the Advance tracking feature on the GBGM website). To give online through the Advance, go to... www.umcmision.org/advance

Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447
Goal: \$39,500.00
2015 YTD: \$11,628.33

Latvia In Mission Together *

Project Number: 00235A
Goal: \$100,000.00
2015 YTD: \$24,936.30

Pastors' Income Fund

Advance project: 14706A
Goal: \$50,000.00
2015 YTD: \$6,910.00

Wesley Camp

Project Number: 15160N
Goal: \$23,000.00
2015 YTD: \$2,875.00

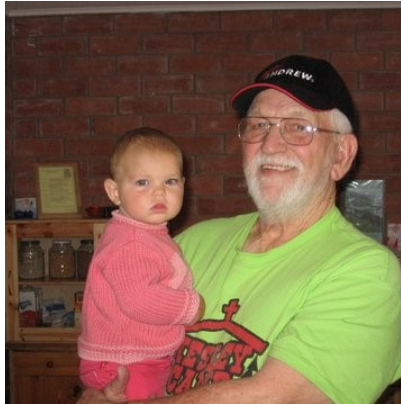
[Track Your Gifts](#)

* **Special Note:** You may or not be aware, but when you give a gift to the "Latvia In Mission Together" 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.

Remembering Richard Lee (Bud) Vann

Oct. 14, 1933-July 23, 2015

Budd Vann was a member of the first American team to come to Wesley Camp in 2005. The North Alabama Conference, under the leadership of its Bishop, Robert Fanning and its Missions director Patrick Friday, had used its annual conference offering to finance the purchase of the 20 acre dairy farm which became known as Wesley Camp. The team was made up of 35 leaders and missionaries from the North Alabama Conference and the Red Bird Missionary Conference. Following the Dedication service on a cold and windy day the team attacked the 10 year neglected farm and made a very sizable start into the task of creating a summer camp and retreat center.



Upon leaving Latvia after that first trip Bud remarked, "We'll be back." Indeed we were! In 2006, only weeks after losing his beloved wife Gail to cancer, Bud again joined a team headed for Wesley Camp. Over the next 8 years Bud made 8 more trips to Latvia and Wesley Camp and the Hope Center. He was a tireless worker and expressed a great love for Latvia, Wesley Camp and the wonderful people who are the Methodist Church in Latvia. He first attended the Friends of Latvia

meeting when it met in Fargo North Dakota and was a faithful member of this organization the rest of his life.

Budd was an active member of the several Methodist churches to which he belonged and with his wife was actively involved in VIM work. They made many trips to South America on mission trips. Bud also served on the Board of Trustees of the North Alabama Conference and was very instrumental in building the new Conference Center on the Campus of Birmingham Southern College.

Bud expressed two regrets as his health began to fail. He had planned to attend the FOL conference in Grapevine, TX earlier this year but was in the hospital at the time of the conference. Then after his diagnosis of terminal cancer he expressed that his greatest disappointment was in not being able to go to Latvia one more time.

Bud's memorial service was held at the Mountain Chapel UMC in Birmingham, AL on August 29. At his request his children suggested that memorials be designated to Wesley Camp and the Hope Center in Latvia. ♦

Wesley Camp Scholarships



Wesley Camp needs us to be more vigilant about fundraising to continue to support this ministry.

If churches could together raise enough scholarship funds for 200 campers at \$100 each...

...that would be enough to pay for both the camper expenses and for the expense of keeping the camp open. Give your scholarship donations through

www.umcmision.org/advance

Project Number: 15160N

Connect

Don't forget to be in communication with our friends in Latvia...
to nurture and grow your relationships!

Cēsis

Pastor: Kristīne Rozefelde | kristine.rozefelde@gmail.com

LAMB Cēsu draudze

Vaļņu iela 12a, Cēsis, LV - 4100

Jelgava

Pastor: Jānis Baumanis | janis@galileja.lv

LAMB Jelgavas draudze

Zemgales pr. 3, Jelgava, LV-3001

Kuldīga

Pastor: Vivita Kalniņa | kalninavivita@gmail.com

Lay Pastor: Zinta Dzintara | zinta_dz@inbox.lv

LAMB Kuldīgas draudze

Policijas iela 8, Kuldīga, LV - 3301

Liepa

Latvian Pastor: Ilze Vesterlund | imarija@inbox.lv

Russian Pastor: Vera Titoviča | vera.titovica@inbox.lv

LAMB Liepas draudze

"Madaras", p.k. 38, Liepa, Liepas pag, Priekuļu novads, LV - 4128

Liepāja

Pastors: Edgars Šneiders | esneiders@inbox.lv

Gunta Grīna-Sologuba | ggrinasologuba@gmail.com

LAMB Liepājas draudze

Brīvības iela 25, Liepāja, LV - 3400

Matras

Pastor: Edgars Šneiders | esneiders@inbox.lv

LAMB Mātrās draudze

Mātrās, Medzes pag, Grobiņas novads, LV - 3461

Paplaka

Pastor: Inese Budņika | b_inese@hotmail.com

LAMB Paplakas draudze

"Atvasaras", Paplaka, Virgas pag, Priekules novads, LV - 3433



Rīga 1st

Pastor: Gita Mednis | gitamednis@gmail.com

Astra Dannenfelte | danne@inbox.lv

LAMB Rīgas 1. draudze

Akas iela 13, Rīga, LV 1011

Rīga 2nd

Pastor: Andris Vainovskis | Vainovskis.andris@gmail.com

LAMB Rīgas 2. draudze

Slokas iela 6, Rīga, LV-1048

Sarkani

Pastor: Vera Titoviča | vera.titovica@inbox.lv

LAMB Sarkaņu draudze

Sarkaņi 7 - 3, Sarkaņi, Liepas pag, Priekuļu novads, LV-4128

Tāši

Pastor: Gunta Grīna-Sologuba | ggrinasologuba@gmail.com

LAMB Tāšu draudze

Tāši, Medzes pag, Grobiņas novads, LV-3460

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Gita Mednis | gitamednis@gmail.com

The Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference

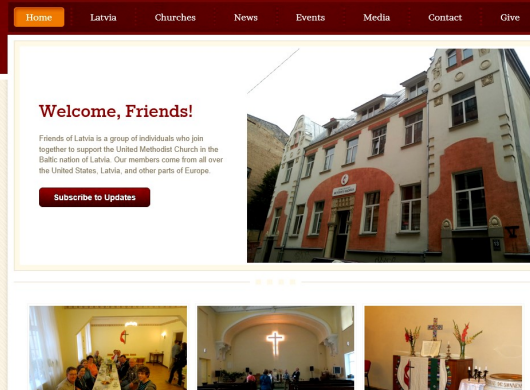
Bishop of the Nordic and Baltic Area: Christian Alsted

bishop@umc-ne.org

Connect Online

The Friends of Latvia website 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, Melissia Mason, at secretary.fol@gmail.com.

Friends of Latvia



friendsoflatvia.weebly.com