

Greetings From Gita Mednis

Out-Going District Superintendent



Dearest Friends,

Greetings from our beautiful wintery white Riga! It is a joy to have this opportunity to write to you once more.

The Friends of Latvia Gathering is still quite fresh in our minds and brings instant smiles to our faces and hearts! It was such a joy to see so many of our Friends and to have the opportunity to have so many representatives from our congregations from all over Latvia, fellowship with you and make new friends and together worship our Glorious Lord.

The summer was quite busy! We thank our Lord and all of the wonderful volunteers from near and far who worked to make all of our camps a meeting place of believers and seekers on Holy Ground OF CAMP WESLEY. Several teens and young adults shared that they had finally fully accepted Christ as their Savior. We also want to thank all of you who donated funds to make it possible for those who could not afford to attend camp receive scholarships.

We also want to thank Pastor Inese and "Romiks" Budniks for their selfless and tireless effort as Camp Directors and Property Managers. Without them, Camp Wesley would not be the place it is today! We also are happy to announce that they have trained someone new to take their place.

I am happy to report that finally all of the buildings that were once the property of GBGM in Latvia have successfully been registered in our Land Registry Office as now the property of LAMB. I must admit that this process was much more complicated than I had anticipated or imagined. God was caring as always and gave me two exceptional people who understand the required documents and steps and helped me along the way. Without Gita Binane and Irina Casa, who worked tirelessly on this process as volunteers, it would have been much more difficult and expensive to finish the process. The Liepaja Church building was the hardest to register and the process which was begun in February was finally successful just 2 weeks ago!

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Greetings From Edgars Šneiders

District Superintendent / Pastor Liepaja

Greetings to our friends and supporters from UMC in Latvia pastors and congregations!

On November 4, a pastors' meeting was held in Jelgava where we shared briefly what is happening and the prayer needs of our congregations.

Jelgava UMC has received a couple of new rooms, however it also comes with bigger costs for rent and utilities. Recently, some new younger people have started attending, some of them come from Riga. Lately there had been a problem with lack of Sunday school, but now there is a hope of a new beginning. The congregation is thankful for answered prayers. One lady was healed from an ongoing sickness where the doctors had not been able to help. They continue to be in prayers for a musical director.

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Notes From the Chair

Greetings friends!

I hope you all have had a wonderful, spirit-filled summer and fall! As I write this, the calendar has flipped to November...where has this year gone! It seems like many of us were just in Latvia participating in mission activities and the 2016 FOL meeting. The feeling of holiness and spirituality from that wonderful week remains with me and I hope with you as well!

I know I promised a listing of the priorities we were going to focus on from the FOL meeting in Latvia. I apologize for its tardiness. You can find the listing on page 5. I hope as an organization, and through our connectional congregations, we can move these priorities forward for the remainder of 2016 and 2017. Please share any feedback or stories from your congregations on what you are doing in Latvia along these lines. We would love to hear about them and put them in the newsletter. Also, the plans for the 2017 FOL meeting are underway. See the article on page 6.

We had a wonderful month of celebration in October here at FUMC Grapevine. We celebrated 150 years of serving our glorious God and our community. We enjoyed an amazing worship service and luncheon and an organ concert that showcased our new organ pipes that were recently installed. We received many wonderful thoughts and well wishes, including a very special one via video from 1st Riga which touched our hearts! I truly believe God chose our congregation to go to Latvia and he knew the blessings we would receive once we got there. We are forever changed because of our experiences and relationship with the people of Latvia. I look forward to what the next 150 years holds for our church and continuing our partnership with our friends in Latvia!

Finally, with the holiday season approaching, our thoughts turn to the birth of our Savior and being a blessing to others. With that in mind, GBGM's Giving Tuesday is early this year, taking place on November 29. GBGM has decided not to match gifts this year, but this is still a great way to give through The Advance and support the on-going projects in Latvia we care about (Hope Center, Pastor's Salary, Camp Wesley) as well as other programs like the After School Program in Liepa and Sarkani. We would also like to hear about projects that both our connectional churches and our Latvian churches are doing leading up to make the holidays to spread joy and compassion to those in need!

I wish you and yours a wonderful, joyous, and spirit-led Christmas season!

Blessings,



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



Officers 2015-2017:

Mark Croft, Chair
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Grapevine, TX

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North Richland Hills, TX

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

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

†

Standing Committees

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

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

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

Relationship
Lisa Neslony, Jim Hayes, Daina Zamberga, Dana Nance

A Note Regarding Officers

At our 2017 Friends of Latvia gathering, we will have election of officers. Please be in prayer about how you would like to serve. **All positions** will be open for nominations. We know for sure that Melissia will be stepping down from the Secretary position. If you would like to serve or would like to nominate someone, please contact Mark Croft (markcroft@hotmail.com).

Greetings From Gita Mednis continued...

LAMB held its Annual District Conference the third week of August. It was wonderful to get the opportunity to again see friends, Julie and Richard Payne, Jeannie Reimer from GBGM, the DSs and their wives from Estonia and Lithuania. The Conference Delegates devoted Saturday evening to celebrating my retirement from serving them as their DS the last 9 years. Juris, my husband, also was feted and thanked for his "sacrifice". It was a lovely evening of songs and love!

It is wonderful to have pastor Edgars Šneiders as our new DS. He is a wonderful, caring person and pastor. LAMB is more than ready to have new and younger blood leading it. I am very confident and excited about the future of our Church. It will be different and marvelous!! We have wonderful pastors who I know will support and work with DS Edgars to forge new steps and direction. May God's wisdom and love guide each step!

It has been an incredible gift to be a part of LAMB and a part of all of your lives! When I answered God's call to return to my homeland, I was in awe of being called by God Himself! I looked forward to the privilege of serving Him. My focus was on what I could do for..... but I see these last 16 years of service have been more about what God has done for me!

The love, the fellowship, the joy, the fulfillment and the great opportunity to see and experience God's almighty power, love and care for each of us are gifts I could never have imagined existed. Having experienced these through you, I have grown to understand better just how wonderful it is to be a part of a connectional church, to be part of the family of Christ not just in words but heart! I have learned the power of agape love. I have learned that proximity or frequency of being together is not that important when what binds is love of God and Christ's spirit. I was a person of logic, now I am a person bathed in God's love, which I see radiating from each of you. WOW! I remember wondering if there would be room in my heart for another child in my heart when I became pregnant with our second child. Could I love another as deeply as I loved our son? Of course I could, there was room not only for other children but for countless more people, not blood related but heart related. The more we love, the more we can love!

My colleagues in ministry all over Europe, Ireland, Great Britain, Latvia and US that I have had the privilege of meeting and being together in ministry, our Bishops present and past, wonderful friends, co-workers and ecumenical partners, I pray that I will continue to have opportunities to meet you again face to face but if not, know that I consider each of you a special part of me because I am a composite of all that I have experienced and learned through you and come to love and call family. THANK YOU!

Also, thank you to all of you who have supported the ministries in Latvia by prayer, donations or mission trips whom I have never had the privilege of meeting, thank you for we are joined in Christ's mission.

Friends, it has been an incredible privilege and honor to serve our Risen Lord together! May God continue to bless you in all your thoughts, words and deeds.

Before I finish this, my last official greeting to you, I would like to share some of the more pressing needs of our church in case God wants to use you as His instrument in this ministry and puts it on your hearts.

Hope Center

The Hope Center's donations have fallen sharply. This vital ministry can not exist long without help from you. The ministry has helped many, many young mothers and their babies for over 12 years and is still as needed today as in the past. The Hope Center is at maximum capacity. God has given us this opportunity to serve His "least of them". We are often the only hope for these mothers who need a caring heart and safe sanctuary. This ministry helps young women learn how to be responsible mothers and gives them the opportunity to fight to keep their babies, instead of having to give up parental rights. Social Services public budget continues to be very meager and therefore they are only capable to continue their support at the same levels as over the past 10 years. They contribute approximately 1/3 of the total cost to help each mother. Some mothers get no aid whatsoever and their expenses must be totally covered by the Center. ADVANCE SPECIAL NUMBER : #3020447

Winter Vitamin Program

Vitamins are bought wholesale and distributed to needy elderly and children. This program, supported by your donations has been very helpful and appreciated by the elderly and parents of young children. The vitamins are an essential supplement to the meager winter diets of those living in the Rural areas. Please contact the Friends of Latvia secretary for how to best donate.

It is written that God will provide. We are the hands, feet and heart of Christ. It is us that He uses as His instruments of Grace. May each of us have eyes and ears, hearts and minds open to the whispers of God, to recognize His blessings and be filled with His love as we live and serve together as His Family.

With love, Gita ♦

A Note from Randy Tolleson Regarding Winter Vitamins

The Winter Vitamin Program is an exceptional holiday fundraiser for 2016. Because the vitamins are most seriously needed as the winter grows long, the 2016 holiday season is the perfect time to offer these \$25 gifts enabling the UMCs in Latvia to provide vitamins for someone in need. Follow the link below to download awareness materials, contributor log, Christmas card donation placards, etc.

bit.ly/latvia-vitamins

Greetings From Edgars Šneiders continued...

Cēsis UMC has a blessed confirmation class, but they receive a lot of attacks from Satan, therefore they need prayers about God's protection. A heating furnace fan has broken. It has to be fixed to provide heating.

There are several remodeling projects going on at Riga First UMC. Two rooms on the second floor are being redecorated, one of them the District Office, and also one room in the basement is being remodeled. Thanks to receiving funds for a social outreach project, the work in the basement has to be finished in 2 months time. Lately several of the members had become sick and gone to hospital. Now, they have started getting back to health and the worship attendance has increased. Some of the members have understood the value of prayers, therefore now they have scheduled Sunday morning prayer time an hour before the worship. We pray also about the wooden building next to the church and which is owned by the UMC in Latvia, it is in a critical condition.

Kuldīga UMC recently visited Liepa Latvian UMC, a total of 14 members, including pastor Zinta Dzintara. The heating system had malfunctioned in the summer time, but after prayers and God's intervention, now it works again. A shower has been installed, also – a washing machine, therefore people with no other options can come to church to get washed and do laundry. Kitchen is still under construction. Sunday school has started a month ago. One of the youth is willing to teach children to sing. One new member has been accepted recently. We pray about an Afterschool program director.

Tāši UMC recently visited Paplaka UMC. Together with Mātras UMC they organized a fellowship bus trip for adults and children to Usma town. They need prayers about Aivija who is soon to finish 12th grade. It is possible that she would like to study in the Christ's discipleship school, but that would require funding.

Liepāja UMC recently accepted a new member. A wedding was held. Several youth are attending confirmation class. We pray that God would help them become strong in their faith, and also about the other youth who attend the youth meeting on Tuesdays. The heating season has started. This will be the last year that heating furnaces are used, next year it is planned that the congregation will be connected to the centralized city heating system. We pray that the rebuild is successful and we have enough funds. We continue to pray about a new PA system, which is a current need. God has answered our prayers about the Sunday school, the curriculum will restart on November 6. The Afterschool program has also resumed its work. They need helping hands to expand the ministry.

Mātras UMC has a new pastor serving since September – Jānis Grunte. A new piano player has been found who plays every Sunday at worship. There are several options to improve the electricity and heating issues. They are in prayers about a youth leader so that the youth work would develop.

Liepa Russian UMC has ongoing active Afterschool program. In the first month there were 27 children attending. Now the daily attendance is between 10 and 15. We are in prayers about finances so that this blessed ministry would continue. They are also in prayers about several teens who have alienated from church.

In Sarkaņi UMC we pray about a Sunday school leader and children, and also about a man called Nikolai, who has huge health problems.

At Riga Second UMC big repair work is planned soon. 8 windows are about to be replaced, the roof has to be insulated. Soon the showers will be finished, that would hopefully help with a new ministry to the neighboring people. The congregation is in prayers to understand which would be the better way to reach people of Pārdaugava with the Good News.

UMC in Latvia is still praying about the wooden building next to Riga First UMC, due to unclear situation about its future. Designing a current and high quality home page is also a current and great need.

We are grateful to our friends around the world for your prayers and support!
Edgars Šneiders - UMC in Latvia (LAMB) District Superintendent ♦

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

Giving Tuesday is November 29!

This year, Global Ministries does not have matching funds for Giving Tuesday, but we still encourage you to use this day to promote awareness and giving to Latvia through the Advance!

Priorities/Opportunities

Visioning Session – July 2016 FOL Meeting

Opportunities

- Have a Latvian version/translation for the FOL newsletter.
- Stories about Latvians living out their faith (put in newsletter).
- Increased communication between Latvian pastors and connectional churches (distance challenge).
- Prayer/pen pals for kids and adults of Latvian and connectional church.
- Sharing of children's Sunday school materials with Latvian churches.
- Continue to spread word about FOL and Latvia in the U.S. and internationally – through increased communication efforts at our connectional churches, UMC annual conferences, and other functions.
- Possible creation of FOL t-shirts for sale as a fundraiser.
- Increase efforts of connectional churches to learn Latvian language and hymns in Latvian.
- Enhance awareness and reach of Metode ministry as a vehicle to help Latvian churches advance their mission outreach.

Priorities

We identified Hope Center, Camp Wesley, and Pastors Income as main areas of focus for increased awareness/communication and financial commitment. The following areas were identified as ways to begin achieving these priorities:

- Increasing awareness of the Latvian giving opportunities through The Advance and GBGM's website.
- Communicate the benefits of monthly giving opportunities for budget purposes.
- Increase communication/awareness at UMC annual conferences of our connectional churches – tell our story.
- Related to the above bullet – possible development of shareable video clip of these 3 areas to share via social media and other media vehicles.
- Talk with our UMC District Superintendents about FOL – tell our story.
- Increase awareness of FOL website – include any enhancements that will help tell our story and how people can get involved.

Upcoming Trips to Latvia

VIM Trip from Tennessee

July 2017

Contact Holt Cason

(lyho67@hotmail.com)

FUMC Grapevine, TX Trip

June 23-July 3, 2017

Contact Richard Payne

(paynerr@live.com)

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.umcmmission.org/advance

Project Number: 15160N

Friends of Latvia 2017

March 20-21, 2017 | Camp Sumatanga, Alabama

Our last FOL meeting in Latvia was wonderful; you could feel God's spirit moving among us. At the end of the meeting Mark asked if anyone would be willing to host the next meeting and I felt God nudge me to say "YES, we will host in Alabama." The date is now set for March 20-21, 2017. We will be meeting at Camp Sumatanga, the North Alabama UMC Camp. They have a very nice retreat center with hotel style rooms, so we will be comfortable. This is the camp that Wesley Camp was modeled after.

Immediately following the FOL meeting will be an Emmaus Walk. In working with the International Emmaus Walk office, we will be trying to bring all of the pastors over for the FOL meeting and some of the women will be staying for the Emmaus Walk beginning on March 23. One of the requirements to bring an Emmaus Walk to a country is that we have 20 people that have attended a walk. Stephan Brooks, International Director of Emmaus, has suggested and agreed to help make this walk one that our pastors can be pilgrims on. Therefore the decision was made to have the FOL in the same week.

We will be looking for sponsors, and funding to help the pastors come to the FOL meeting and attend the Emmaus Walk. More information about registrations and meetings will be coming soon. Please be in prayer for our friends in Latvia.

In His Service,
Wannell Scott
Minister of Discipleship
FUMC Florence



www.sumatanga.org

Greetings from Jeanie Reimer

In Mission Together

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to those that I do not know and to say Hello to those of you that I do know. My name is Jeanie Kurka Reimer and I am a consultant for Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. I have met some of you at past Friends of Latvia Gatherings and also met some of you at the Latvia Annual Conference this past summer.

For the past several years, I have been an In Mission Together (IMT) Partnership Coordinator for Lithuania. Recently, I have been asked to take on the role of Partnership Coordinator for Latvia which I am thrilled to do. My main role and purpose is to help to support partnerships using the concepts of In Mission Together and the framework of the 50/50 Covenant.



In mid-August, I traveled to Latvia to attend the Latvian Annual Conference and in early November to meet with the pastors, lay people and the new District Superintendent. We had a wonderful conversation/meeting last week talking about the tenets of In Mission Together and the concept of the 50/50 Covenant which I know is a conversation that many of you have begun to have. For those of you not as familiar with these two concepts, let me provide some information.

In Mission Together (IMT) is an initiative of Global Ministries which is a global partnership network available to equip conferences, districts, and churches for transformational partnerships in mission in your local community, the United States, and around the world. A traditional approach to mission is often needs-based and short-term relief whereas the IMT vision of partnership embraces asset-based and long-term development and relationships. The 50/50 Covenant is a sacred covenant for both partners to participate equally, 50/50, as the body of Christ, by utilizing each partner's skills and resources. A 50/50 framework is at the core of IMT as it works to prevent dependency and foster self-sufficiency. These principles address systemic issues rather than treating symptoms. IMT is GLOCAL (meaning these concepts are applicable for both global and local mission work) and equips you with core values that are cross-culturally appropriate for a variety of contexts whether in the United States or around the world.

I look forward to continuing this discussion with our friends in Latvia as well as the partners here in the United States. Hopefully, we will be able to meet soon and have some face-to-face discussion on these topics. In the meantime, please let me now if you have any questions.

Blessings to you in your ongoing work with Latvia,

Jeanie Kurka Reimer

In Mission Together Lithuania and Latvia Partnership Coordinator
Global Ministries / The United Methodist Church
Phone: 920-851-5485 | Email: imtlithuania@gmail or jeaniereimer@aol.com

NOTES FROM THE DISCUSSION WITH THE LATVIAN PASTORS

On November 8, 2016, I had the opportunity to meet with the Edgars Sneiders (the new District Superintendent), eight Latvian pastors, and three lay people from the Latvia Methodist Church. In our conversation, the pastors asked me to relay these wishes and thoughts:

Liepa Russian has no connecting or partner church. They are praying and waiting for this to come to fruition. If you know of any churches, districts, conferences, etc. that might be interested in being an ongoing partner with Liepa Russian, please let me know. I will be happy to talk to them more about the concepts of In Mission Together and 50/50.

For those partnerships that have not had regular contact with their partner church, I would be happy to assist you in getting in contact with the pastor from your partner church. The pastors and church members have a strong desire to build relationships with their partners and there are ways to do that from across the ocean. I would be happy to assist.

The pastors expressed an interest in putting together a video telling the story of Methodism in Latvia. They are able to take video footage but need help in putting all the videos together. If you know of someone who has this gift and is willing to help with a project, please let me know.

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: Zinta Dzintara | zinta_dz@inbox.lv

LAMB Kuldīgas draudze

Polijas iela 8, Kuldīga, LV - 3301

Liepa

Latvian Pastor: Ilzīte Ozola | iloze@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

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LAMB Liepājas draudze

Brīvības iela 25, Liepāja, LV - 3400

Matras

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LAMB Mātras draudze

Mātras, Medzes pag, Grobiņas novads, LV - 3461

Paplaka

Pastor: Inese Budņika | b_inese@hotmail.com

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Rīga 1st

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LAMB Rīgas 1. draudze

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Rīga 2nd

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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

Tāsi

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

LAMB Tāšu draudze

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Latvia District Superintendent

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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.



friendsoflatvia.weebly.com