

# 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 1

May 2015

## Friends of Latvia 2015 Gathering

Friends of Latvia held their annual meeting April 16-18, 2015 in Grapevine, Texas. This year, we had the extreme blessing of having most of our Latvia Pastors and some of their spouses and friends along for the journey. In addition, the pastors were able to spend some time on a spiritual retreat from April 19-22. We want to extend a special "thanks" to all those who attended, contributed and made this the most amazing Friends of Latvia gathering! ♦



Friends of Latvia Meeting – April 2015

### In This Issue

- ♦ Greetings from Gita
- ♦ Notes from the New Chair and Vice-Chair
- ♦ Upcoming Trips
- ♦ FOL 2016
- ♦ Wesley Camp Scholarships
- ♦ And much more!!

[friendsoflatvia.weebly.com](http://friendsoflatvia.weebly.com) | [www.metodisti.lv](http://www.metodisti.lv)

# Greeting From Gita Mednis

**Senior Pastor 1st Riga / District Superintendent**

Dearest Friends of LAMB,

Thank you, thank you, those that attended the Friends of Latvia and all of you who made it possible for most of our pastors and some spouses to experience the heart and unity of Methodists, Texas extravagant hospitality and everyone's friendship, openness and caring. We all were blessed with new acquaintances and friendships. new experiences of worshipping together and laughing together. We had the joy of worshipping together and listening to your stories and sharing ours. God is truly good!!!

This coming year will be a challenging time for us Methodists in Latvia, as we transition into new leadership and everyone assumes more responsibility for their church. God has been with us and will continue to light our path. We ask your prayers for discernment, courage, patience and strength for this journey. How wonderful and significant it is to know that we are not alone, that we have you walking alongside us!

God's "hand" was very evident in many of the things that happened during the week we spent in Texas. The friendships that developed were pre-ordained by God for mutual blessing.

I always marvel at how God uses people to fulfill His purpose. There is no doubt in my mind that all of you, who have been touched, transformed or moved by the mission to the Latvian Methodist Church, have been selected by God to be a blessing and to be blessed.

How exciting that the time has finally come for the Friends of Latvia to gather in Latvia!! I hope that you all are planning to be part of this historical event. This plan has long been discussed and it has finally matured – probably June, 2016. Please start to make plans for all of us to gather, pray, celebrate and be touched by our Lord.

Looking back on my years in service to the Lord in Latvia, the greatest and unexpected surprise and the richest blessing has been all of you, my dear extended family. You have taught me the richness and authenticity of agape love, love that transcends family, borders, language and distance.

May God continue to richly bless you, your families, your ministries and your life!

Gita ♦



## Officers

Here are your new officers for 2015-2017:

### Mark Croft, Chair

[markcroft@hotmail.com](mailto:markcroft@hotmail.com)

First UMC  
Grapevine, TX

### Randy Tolleson, Vice-Chair

[rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)

Smithfield UMC  
North Richland Hills, TX

### Jim Hayes, Treasurer/Projects

[jrhayes46@bellsouth.net](mailto:jrhayes46@bellsouth.net)

Norris UMC  
Norris, TN

### Melissia Mason, Secretary

[secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@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 Zamberga, Dana Nance





# Notes From the New Chair

As I write this I am still basking in the warm, spirit-filled afterglow of the FOL annual meeting in Texas. What an amazing week it was! It was a joy and a blessing to have Gita and nearly all the Latvian pastors and some of their spouses in attendance, with some being in the U.S. for the first time. From the wonderful presentations, worship, and testimonies during the FOL meeting, to the numerous activities participated in by the FOL and pastor spouses, as well as the spiritual retreat at the Stillwater Lodge, there was a powerful sense of God's presence through it all. I know the host families, my wife Julie and I included, were blessed beyond measure by our Latvian brothers and sisters in Christ. I know I felt a tinge of sadness upon their departure. It was a blessed time for all FOL members to renew and strengthen existing personal relationships as well as develop new ones. I would also like to extend many thanks to our host church, FUMC Grapevine, for their incredible hospitality during the FOL meeting and the days following. If you went hungry during the meeting, you only have yourself to blame!

I am humbled and honored to be elected to serve as Chairman for the next two years. I will do all I can to be worthy of the trust you have placed in me. I met quite a few of you during the meeting and look forward to meeting as many of you as I can over the next two years. As a quick introduction, my wife Julie and I have been members of FUMC Grapevine for over 23 years and we have been to Latvia once (fall 2013). We fell in love with the country and the people and were inspired and moved by the passion and work of the Latvian pastors. I am excited at what amazing things God will do working through his people in the coming months and years. I look forward to seeing the relationship and communication between the FOL connectional churches in the U.S. grow and deepen. I also look forward to working to deepen and further strengthen communication with the Latvian clergy as we work in partnership with them to meet the mission of the global United Methodist church.

Finally, there is a committee of individuals beginning the work to assess the possibility of having the 2016 FOL meeting in Latvia (see details page 5)! I encourage each of you to pray about this possibility and if you have any expertise or ideas on how to make this happen, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Jim Hayes or Melissa Mason. I would also love to hear from you anytime with any ideas or suggestions you might have. My email is [markcroft@hotmail.com](mailto:markcroft@hotmail.com) and cell number is 817-308-7822. I look forward to hearing from you. ♦



**Mark Croft, Chair**  
[markcroft@hotmail.com](mailto:markcroft@hotmail.com)  
FUMC Grapevine, TX



## Upcoming Trips

Here are some of the upcoming trips to Latvia. If you are interested in going on one of these trips, please contact the person listed.

### **July 9-21, 2015**

#### **Mission to Cesis**

Smithfield UMC  
North Richland Hills, Texas  
Contact: Randy Tolleson  
([rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net))

### **August 6-15, 2015**

#### **Hope Center Work Trip**

First UMC Tullahoma, Tullahoma, TN  
Contact: Holt Cason (934-455-3139, [lyno67@hotmail.com](mailto:lyno67@hotmail.com))

### **August 19-24, 2015**

#### **Wesley Camp Board Meeting Latvia Annual Conference in Riga**

FUMC Grapevine, Grapevine, TX  
Contact: Richard Payne (817-235-8000, [paynerr@live.com](mailto:paynerr@live.com))

*If you have additions or corrections for any of this information, please contact FOL Secretary Melissa Mason at ([secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com)).*



# Notes From the Former Chair / New Vice-Chair

## What a Team!

As my FOL term as Chair comes to an end it's important to stop and reflect. Because Gary and Sue Fowler – early 1990's friends of Latvia – attended this year's meeting I was blessed to talk to them about profound changes in the LAMB / Latvia they noticed upon returning after the few years they were away. A lot has changed in the condition of the facilities, the leadership of the clergy, Wesley Camp, the Hope Center and the number of good people committed to a relationship with our friends in the Baltics. While a lot of joint prayer and work is needed, my deepest thank you goes out for the selfless dedication you demonstrate serving as the hands and feet of Christ. I look forward to the continued friendships that were significantly strengthened at the 2015 FOL meeting. I will continue to serve as Vice-Chair beside your new Chair, Mark Croft so I'm not done yet.



A special thanks goes out to the amazing team at FUMC Grapevine for this year's all-for-God's-glorry meeting and the spirit-filled professionalism that was present at every turn. Melissia Mason, Bev Campisi, Rev. John Mollet, and Julie Payne made it a well-tuned love machine. Jim Nance and the transportation team left no one behind and the countless other volunteers who jumped in were wonderful. Keep up the focus and know that you are shining the light of Christ through your faithful work. ♦

A handwritten signature in black ink.

**Randy Tolleson, Vice-Chair**

[rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)

Smithfield UMC

North Richland Hills, TX



## 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](http://www.ustream.tv/channel/umc-friends-of-latvia)

### File Sharing (Friends of Latvia Google Drive):

[tinyurl.com/FOLdrive](http://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](http://friendsoflatvia.weebly.com)

Facebook: [facebook.com/friendsoflatvia](https://facebook.com/friendsoflatvia)

Mark Croft, FOL Chair - [markcroft@hotmail.com](mailto:markcroft@hotmail.com), 817-308-7822

Melissia Mason, FOL Secretary - [secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com), 817-798-3443

# Thank You, Everyone

It is hard to believe that it really happened – providing a spiritual life retreat for our pastors from Latvia – but it did! And it wouldn't have without the help and support of our Friends of Latvia. I do not know the name of every church or individual who helped pray it into being and then gave your time and money to support your prayers. I just feel each one of you in my heart. Please know that Jesse and I are more grateful than there are words to express. It was a holy time – from beginning to end. But then, our brothers and sisters from Latvia are holy and amazing in so many ways. It would appear that the Texas pastors who came to partner with them at the retreat and then committed to remain partners through technology were divinely chosen by our God. But then, that's the kind of thing our God is always doing.



Please accept our heartfelt appreciation for your participation in this time of holy blessings.

We pray God's blessings on you all,  
Annette Sowell ♦

## FOL 2016 in Latvia!

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 proposed dates are anytime from June 6 to June 22. (In Latvia, there is a huge holiday on June 23. It is the midsummer eve - Jāņa celebration. This is held in the countryside and most everyone is celebrating somewhere.)

As part of the gathering, the pastors thought it might be great to incorporate a retreat. Coming together, worshipping, praising, Bible study as well as discussing and sharing issues that are relevant to all of us as Christians.

Each pastor will consult with their congregation and offer possible ministry/work opportunities. They will have these ready by their next meeting in June.

If you have specific dates that would work best for you, have questions or would like to be a part of the planning, please contact Jim Hayes at [jrhayes46@bellsouth.net](mailto:jrhayes46@bellsouth.net).

# LAMB's "Graduation" from GBGM Initiative

By Gita Mednis, DS Latvian United Methodist Church

You have probably heard that Latvian UMC no longer has the official status of New Initiative at the General Board of Global Ministries. Exactly what does that mean and what will be the repercussions for LAMB?

As a New Initiative, each year, LAMB received a stipend to be used in fostering the work of the church in order to help it to establish itself and become self-sustaining. This year, Russia, Lithuania and Latvia were "graduated" from this designation.

LAMB is very grateful for the help and support that it has received from GBGM. LAMB has used this yearly stipend to fund the programming of the church, children and youth work, camping, leadership and lay training,

The amount of the stipend has been decreasing for the last 7 years. The last budget year, the stipend was \$7,000, which was designated to cover all of the above costs. LAMB has been working hard to reduce costs and expenditures to a bare minimum as well as shifted some of the financial responsibility to the individual congregations.

GBGM invites the global church to help these emerging churches through donations to the Advance Special. As you know, the Latvian individual congregations are striving hard to cover as many of their own expenses as possible as well as their 11% apportionment to LAMB and the apportionment to the Bishop's office and Central Conference.

We have raised the price of camp, asked the congregations to help pastors, lecturers and lay with travel expenses and are looking for ways to fund some children's and youth work.

The consequences of this GBGM move will fully impact us in 2016. ♦

*Your gifts to the Latvia Mission Initiative are vital in helping replace the support that was received from GBGM. See Advance giving info at right.*

## Pastor Income Awareness Depends on YOU!

Most everyone attending the FOL gathering 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](http://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](http://www.umcmision.org/advance)

### Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447

Goal: \$39,500.00

2015 YTD: \$5,423.33

### Latvia Mission Initiative \*

Project Number: 00235A

Goal: \$100,000.00

2015 YTD: \$12,494.30

### Pastors' Income Fund

Advance project: 14706A

Goal: \$50,000.00

2015 YTD: \$5,375.00

### Wesley Camp

Project Number: 15160N

Goal: \$23,000.00

2015 YTD: \$1,500.00

[Track Your Gifts](#)

**\* 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](mailto: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](mailto:metodistu.birojs@gmail.com)) for wiring instructions.



# Hope Center Update

By Gita Mednis

This has been a very intensive year for Director Gita Binane and the Hope Center. The Center is overfull and a waiting list has developed. Each decision to turn away a desperate young woman or girl is very painful for all of us. The needs are all so urgent and the stories often tragic. The Center has never had so many calls for help.

A new need has arisen that the Center is trying to address along with our fundamental work. International agencies have reached out to the Center for help in relocating stranded young pregnant women to their homeland. We have helped 3 such cases. Two from the Netherlands and one from Great Britain. Gita has met the young women at the airport, taken them to the Hope Center and worked to identify what social services and aid these young women are entitled. They have lived at the Center and been given a chance to get their lives back on track.

These past weeks have been quite challenging for Director Gita. Out of a great love and desire to give each girl every advantage in order to equip her for an independent life, she has been driving hundreds of kilometers a day to take some



*Continued on page 8...*

## Wesley Camp Scholarships



The **Wesley Camp** celebrates 10 years of ministry this summer at Annual Conference. We need 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](http://www.umcmmission.org/advance)

**Project Number: 15160N**

## Hope Center continued...

of the new mothers to testing facilities for their national exams. Each major subject has a specific day that the tests are given to all 9th graders. The student must pass all of them in order to finish 9th grade and have the opportunity to continue their education. Ninth grade education is compulsory. Gita drives from Riga to Liepa, over 100 kilometers, to pick up the student and her baby, drive to the exam location, again hundred kilometers and sit all day in the hallway holding the baby so that the young mother can come breast feed her infant during the breaks. Gita has also been driving some of the babies and mothers to the hospital in Riga for testing. One of the babies is not gaining weight and seems not to feel any pain. The Center has been paying for all of the necessary testing to ensure that all that can possibly be done is done for this baby. Today Gita is in children's court along with one of the young mothers to ensure that she understands the proceedings and is given a voice and advocate in the proceedings. These court visits are the norm after a baby is born and subsequently.

This ministry is truly a labor of love and caring. Your donations make it possible for us to be the caring mother. We try to do all for the mothers to encourage and make possible their continuing education so that they can have a future. We do all we can to ensure that each baby gets the best possible care. You are not donating to an institution or agency, you are donating to these young under privileged mothers and the precious babies that they have brought into the world.

Right now we are struggling. There are renovations that need to be made. The mold issue in the Hope Center is beginning to affect the babies and mothers. The problem has been identified as faulty roof construction that needs to be remedied.

A fire exit must be installed on the second floor. Much of the furniture needs to be replaced after 8 years of constant usage. All urgent concerns that seem to have reached a crisis point at the same time. A joy, getting the official certification as

a non-profit social welfare organization, has also brought with it extra ongoing expenditures.

We are running out of money. The rate of illness and doctors' bills have been higher than usual. The young mothers have had needs for school and personal issues and we have had to use some of our budget for repairs that could not be delayed.

So, in many ways it has been a year of joys, frustrations, challenges and sense of accomplishment. It is a time to experience the fruits of some of our efforts, the long hours spent counseling and empowering, teaching, caring and parenting. ♦





# Connect

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



## Cesis

Pastor: Kristīne Rozefelde | [kristine.rozefelde@gmail.com](mailto:kristine.rozefelde@gmail.com)  
LAMB Cēsu draudze  
Vaļņu iela 12a, Cēsis, LV - 4100

## Jelgava

Pastor: Jānis Baumanis | [janis@galileja.lv](mailto:janis@galileja.lv)  
LAMB Jelgavas draudze  
Zemgales pr. 3, Jelgava, LV-3001

## Kuldīga

Pastor: Vivita Kalniņa | [kalninavivita@gmail.com](mailto:kalninavivita@gmail.com)  
LAMB Kuldīgas draudze  
Policijas iela 8, Kuldīga, LV - 3301

## Liepa

Latvian Pastor: Ilzīte Ozola | [iloze@inbox.lv](mailto:iloze@inbox.lv)  
Russian Pastor: Vera Titoviča | [vera.titovica@inbox.lv](mailto: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](mailto:esneiders@inbox.lv)  
Gunta Grīna-Sologuba | [ggrinasologuba@gmail.com](mailto:ggrinasologuba@gmail.com)  
LAMB Liepājas draudze  
Brīvības iela 25, Liepāja, LV - 3400

## Matras

Pastor: Edgars Šneiders | [esneiders@inbox.lv](mailto:esneiders@inbox.lv)  
LAMB Mātrās draudze  
Mātrās, Medzes pag, Grobiņas novads, LV - 3461

## Paplaka

Pastor: Inese Budņika | [b\\_inese@hotmail.com](mailto:b_inese@hotmail.com)  
LAMB Paplakas draudze  
"Atvasaras", Paplaka, Virgas pag, Priekules novads, LV - 3433

## Rīga 1st

Pastor: Gita Mednis | [gitamednis@gmail.com](mailto:gitamednis@gmail.com)  
Astra Dannenfelte | [danne@inbox.lv](mailto:danne@inbox.lv)  
LAMB Rīgas 1. draudze  
Akas iela 13, Rīga, LV 1011

## Rīga 2nd

Pastor: Andris Vainovskis | [Vainovskis.andris@gmail.com](mailto:Vainovskis.andris@gmail.com)  
LAMB Rīgas 2. draudze  
Slokas iela 6, Rīga, LV-1048

## Sarkani

Pastor: Ilzīte Ozola | [iloze@inbox.lv](mailto:iloze@inbox.lv)  
LAMB Sarkaņu draudze  
Sarkaņi 7 - 3, Sarkaņi, Liepas pag, Priekuļu novads, LV-4128

## Tāši

Pastor: Gunta Grīna-Sologuba | [ggrinasologuba@gmail.com](mailto:ggrinasologuba@gmail.com)  
LAMB Tāšu draudze  
Tāši, Medzes pag, Grobiņas novads, LV-3460

## Youth & Children Ministry Coordinator of UMC in Latvia

Sniedze Više | [sniedzux@inbox.lv](mailto:sniedzux@inbox.lv)

## Lay Leader of UMC in Latvia

Agita Kļaviņa | [klagi@tvnet.lv](mailto:klagi@tvnet.lv)

## Office Manager of UMC in Latvia

Rihards Germans | [metodistu.birojs@gmail.com](mailto:metodistu.birojs@gmail.com)

## Latvia District Superintendent

Gita Mednis | [gitamednis@gmail.com](mailto:gitamednis@gmail.com)

## The Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference

Bishop of the Nordic and Baltic Area: Christian Alsted  
[bishop@umc-ne.org](mailto: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](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com).

