

FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 1; Issue 3

December 2009

FRIENDS OF LATVIA IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP SINCE 1991

WE AGREE TO ADVANCE TO EVERY RESIDENT OF LATVIA, THE JOYFUL WITNESS OF JESUS CHRIST AS THE RISEN SAVIOR.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

APRIL 23-24, 2010

LATVIA-LITHUANIA
MISSION INITIATIVE
CONSULTATION
FIRST UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH
LANCASTER OH
AND
WORSHIP
SUNDAY, APRIL 25

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Friends of Latvia 2009-2011 Officers

Chair: Jim Hayes
Co-Chair: Randy Tolleson
Secretary: Dana & Jim Nance
Treasurer: Julie Payne

It's All About Relationships by Joe Acker



Joe Acker walks Laura Shveicere down the aisle to meet her beloved, Robert Painter, in the Matra's church on August 15, 2009.

In June 2005 when I was a part of the first VIM team from America to work at Wesley Camp, Latvia, for me, was just a place from news headlines. Patrick Friday took 35 Alabamians on what turned out to be, at least for some of us, a life changing experience. Throughout the orientation sessions Patrick kept emphasizing that the trip was not about the work to be done but rather about relationships to be established. Having recently experienced back surgery I thought, "that's a good job for me."

When we arrived at camp the possibilities were obvious for the work to be done. By the time we left the orchard had been transformed, the director's house (now Holston House) and the main barn (now the Alabama building) had been cleaned out and preparations for construction begun and many meaningful relationships had been formed.

By the time we arrived at camp Romans and Inese had assembled a crew of teens and young adults to stay at camp and work with us. *(continued on page 6)*

Friends of Latvia Receive Seat on Wesley Camp Board

During its annual conference in August The United Methodist Church in Latvia (LAMB) approved by-laws which were proposed by the prior board of directors of Wesley Camp. The prior board approved the by-laws during its annual meeting which was held concurrently with the annual conference. Patrick Friday had been chair of the prior board since the inception of Wesley Camp. These new by-laws, when fully implemented will provide a permanent mechanism for the selection of board members as well as the other duties and responsibilities of the board.

The by-laws provide that one seat on the board will be held by the Chair of the Wesley Camp committee of the Friends of Latvia (FOL). The current chair of the FOL Wesley Camp committee is Joe Acker. He is already active on the board having been selected by the executive committee as the acting chair of the board. The executive committee consists of the Bishop of the Northern Europe Conference, *(continued on page 3)*

“And the angel said unto her, fear not, Mary; for thou has found favor with God.” (Luke 1:30) What a wonderful knowledge this must have been to Mary. To be recognized and honored by God. Have you every experienced the favor of God? The angel Gabriel transmitted God’s message to Mary. How has God given you the message that you have received his favor? An angel may have visited some of you, but this has not been my experience. When relating to others about the thirst for God that I have seen in the people of Latvia and how three small Methodist Churches are striving to support the ministry of the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, I never fail to become emotional and filled with the favor of God. In some small way I know how Mary must have felt. Sharing the message about the wonderful ministry occurring in Latvia is our opportunity to find favor with God.

May I encourage each one of you to share the story of the Methodist church in Latvia. If each one of us would invite one additional church, district or conference to join us in supporting the Methodist church in Latvia, just imagine how their ministry could be spread. Please pray about this request.

A few days ago I saw a documentary called “The Singing Revolution,” about how Estonia led the movement to separate from the Soviet Union. The documentary also mentions the part Latvia and Lithuania played in this mostly non-violent revolution. I recommend it to help understand some of the struggles and hardships experienced by the peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This documentary is available through Netflix.



Finally, during this season of celebration, take time to send a message of love to our friends in Latvia to encourage them in their ministry.

Paldies, Jim Hayes

Co-Chair Comments

A wise person once told me that Americans are odd ducks. We’re odd in the same way as the Germans and the Brits in that, compared to the rest of the world, we’re all about planning, organizing, getting tasks done; we’re methodical. The rest of the world is about relationships. They get together for the sake of being together and occasionally accomplish something. Our relationships tend to be built with whomever is helping us get things done while people in the rest of the world build their relationships first and may eventually get around to doing something later. Our task orientation is so deeply engrained that we have trouble imagining a relationship built from anything but a mutual task to accomplish.

Our differing perspectives aren’t a problem as members of the Body of Christ, in fact they are essential. From 1st Corinthians 12:12 (NIV) we learn that “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” So it is when we plan our tasks and tight agendas for our work in Latvia; I imagine a faint smile on God’s face as we create the next version of our

Randy Tolleson

plans and then another version still. It’s OK that we’re all about accomplishing the task as long as we let the Spirit move our relationships while we work. On mission trips there’s a place for caulkers and a place for talkers because both are crucial members of the Body.



Those of you who have been to Latvia know how visibly the Spirit will move as we accomplish these tasks. You’ll also recall that the most powerful moments there are when we lift our eyes from the task at hand and look into the beautiful eyes of our brothers and sisters in Christ who want to know us better. Allow God the smile as we make our agendas but keep the times loose. The next itinerary or agenda I make for a Latvia trip will have 60% to 75% unstructured time: Spirit time. We’re disciples in training and we’re working hard to get to Mark 6:8-10; it’s just hard for us to have so much faith.

Randy Tolleson

QUESTION:

What is UMVIM Team Leader Training?

ANSWER:

UMVIM (United Methodist Volunteers in Mission) offers a course in Team Leader Training that can be very helpful to leaders of teams going to Latvia. Training areas include:

How to organize and manage a mission team
Do's and Don't of leading a mission team
Available Resources
Team Dynamics
Cross-Cultural Adaptation
Packing Tips and Tricks.

For more information about UMVIM Team Leader Training you can visit umvim.org, on the Internet or your conference Volunteers In Mission Coordinator.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2010 TRIP TO LATVIA

If you are leading a team to Latvia in 2010, please send us an email with the dates of your trip, where you are going, and your trip objectives. We would like to provide a list of teams going to Latvia in the Spring Friends of Latvia Newsletter.

Also, upon returning from Latvia, please provide us with a report of the trip. The Friends of Latvia Officers thank you for your help.

Send trip dates and follow-up reports to:
djnance@sbcglobal.net

(Wesley Camp Board continued from page 1)
the DS of Latvia and the DS of Lithuania and the elected officers of the board when the board is fully formed. The above named officials also have the authority to appoint two members to the board.

The new by-laws also provide that one board seat be held by the chair of the Wesley Camp committee of the Friends of Lithuania. Unfortunately there is no formal Friends of Lithuania organization. It was decided that this designation would stay in the by-laws as a means of encouraging those who are involved in VIM work or have an interest in the work in Lithuania to form such an organization.

NEW WORLD OUTLOOK

UNITED METHODIST MISSION MAGAZINE

New World Outlook is a magazine devoted to coverage of United Methodist mission activities around the world.

The New World Outlook promised church members:

- Updates on UMCOR/s disaster relief and ongoing development ministries.
- Coverage of Advance projects.
- Stories from United Methodist missionaries and volunteers.
- In depth coverage of mission issues, such as poverty, refugees, world health, and mission in times of war and famine.
- Tips on how to get a local church involved in global ministries.
- Mission studies-resources and supplements for conference Schools of Christian Mission.

Visit their web site to gather more information and to subscribe on-line; go to gbgm-umc.org/nwo/nwo-news. To subscribe by phone call 877-881-2385. An online version of the New World Outlook is available.

2010 Mission Trips

Who's going to Latvia in 2010? Send your Mission Trip dates/plans to djnance@sbcglobal.net for publication in the next newsletter.

May/June - North Texas Friends of Latvia - Contact Randy Tolleson at rstolleson@att.net.

Jim Hayes will lead a team to the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, June 20 - 30. We will do a work project at the church, sponsor a Vacation Bible School, and an adult Bible study. For more information contact Jim at jrhayes46@bellsouth.net.

September/October - Faithful Men
Fairview, Tennessee

Latvia Youth Choir on Youtube

Will someone please send Randy T. the names for the Latvian songs in the youtube videos? rstolleson@att.net
www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnMNFH9Zks
www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmgDhmfSJEo
www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N1ayVmmXHW
www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCKqM3iLJEQ

The Faithful Men of Fairview Choir is planning our 6th tour for September 2010. We plan to go the last week of September and the first week of October. We do not have any information about plane fares now. We hope to sing in public squares and concert halls if we can get permission. We want to do an outreach to unchurched men and women. We also have talked about starting an outreach just for men. All of this is tentative.

We stay at the OK Hotel on Slokas Iela two blocks from the Second Methodist Church. It is not fancy but comfortable. They usually give us a good group rate since we tend to fill up their place.

We first went to Latvia in the fall of 2000. Our choir had been around for about 7 years and we decided that since our church was so involved in mission trips, we, as a group of men, might have something to offer. We assumed that we would be going to Central America or Africa where most of our mission trips had gone before. Gary Fowler, somehow, heard about our decision and presented us with Latvia as an option. He gave a great talk and after much prayer we agreed. We began fund raising and managed to make \$16000 on our first auction. Wesley, our director, attended a music seminar and met a choir director who had just returned from Latvia. This man gave Wesley the names of the people to contact for our trip. We found the one woman in East Tennessee who could translate some of our music into Latvian. She was a student from Latvia who had decided to come to Maryville College to practice her English and learn more about the US. She was here just when we needed someone to translate our words. She also was kind enough to teach us how to pronounce these words. It appeared that this was meant to be.

We were not prepared for the reception that we received. The Latvians planned for us to tour their country. Without ever hearing us, they scheduled us to sing in one of the famous cathedrals, be on their radio, and go to other places besides Riga. It took me some years to realize that when we were asked to sing our National Anthem as a warm up our first day there, that this was our audition. Luckily, we passed.



We have been going every other year since. We have made close relationships with a number of people there. We have been fortunate to be able to support two women to come here to get their degrees. One fell in love and married. The other graduated and is now working back in Latvia as a lay leader. Our choir sounds different there. My wife, Pam, who started this choir was able to come on one of the trips. She was amazed at the difference in our sound when we sing and worship in Latvia. She was impressed which is not that easy to do since she is a professional musician.

We are different as a choir. We are closer to each other, we have become a true brotherhood because of these trips. Our faith has grown as we learn about the courage of the Latvians in their 50 year persecution under the Soviets. It has been life changing.

Anyone is welcome to join us. You do not have to sing. We need workers to help renovate some of the buildings. We need people to greet the congregations and audiences. We need people to hand out brochures and programs. We need people who like to meet new people. We also need patient people since, as a group, we do not always behave.

Contact our church, 865-983-2080 and talk to Wesley. You can also e-mail me at gildriec@gmail.com and I will keep you informed of the particulars as they come.

Chuck Gildrie,
President Faithful Men of Fairview.
Friends of Latvia



Dear Friends,

Greetings from Rīga and from all of your friends and spiritual brothers and sisters in Latvia!

Another year is drawing to a close and it is a wonderful time to stop, reflect and remember all of the blessings of the year.

2009 began with a great deal of anxiety, the predictions of what was to come were truly frightening. Often, I find, that it is more the fear of the unknown rather than the certainty of the situation, that causes anxiety, stress and often a sense of powerlessness.

Many negative things have happened, our medical care system is in total disarray. Many schools and hospitals have been closed. No one seems to have a plan for the future and the government is chaotically cutting, cutting, cutting to meet the demands of the international lenders. Our individual tax burden is increasing, pensions and wages have been cut and our unemployment rate is the highest in the European Union. Many feel that Latvia and its government has let them down, betrayed them. Many, many of our citizens are emigrating to find jobs abroad. Many in our congregations are now unemployed and some have joined the lines of the emigrants.

However, not all things are negative, many positive things have also occurred. Our church is a beacon of light, tranquility and hope. We, as a church, because of your help, are reaching out to our elderly. We are giving them vitamins to supplement their meager and often unhealthy diet in the winter. We are also giving vitamins to children from our poorest communities. We are distributing food to those in need as well as used clothing. As a church, we are heavily involved with ecumenical events. We are involved in the planning committee for the Franklin Graham Festival as well as country-wide all night and all weekend prayer vigils. We are praying more for each other, non-believers and for spiritual re-birth in our land.

This summer we had the possibility to have more summer camps than ever before. Thank you to all those who supported camping with your gifts and some with your presence. Church camp is probably one of the most effective ways to share the joy of Christ with young people. We have been blessed with a group of wonderful young adults who plan and lead the camps. It is a great privilege to watch them mature and assume more responsibilities.

We have a new Bishop, Christian Alsted. Bishop Alsted is a strong leader and visionary. We are very grateful to God for this wonderful leader.



Our Annual District Conference was held in Kuldīga this year and the local congregation did a superb job of preparation. Our next Conference will be in Liepā. The Liepā Sanctuary is not yet finished, but we trust that with God's, our church and your help, it will be.

A sad bit of news. Our missionaries, Courtney and Dan Randall have been in prayer over their assignment and God has told them that it is time to move on. They will be leaving us the middle of December. It was a great joy for us to have them and we greatly appreciate all of their efforts on behalf of our church.

We have had some excellent seminars which have helped us grow in the Spirit and understanding of the Church. Maryville District held a Pastors School in Latvia. This was a wonderful occasion to get to know one another and discuss God's Living Word – how it pertains to our lives today

But, the greatest joy has been a closer relationship with all of you. For this we praise our Lord Jesus. You continue to feed us spiritually and materially. You model agape love and what it means to be a connectional church.

May God pour out His blessings on each and every one of you. May this Christmas Season fill your hearts with wonder, His peace, His light, His wisdom and His love.

Together, we will greet the New Year with renewed hope in Him. In Him there is no recession, just opportunities to grow stronger in spirit and truth.

May the eternal truth of our Lord, lead us with a renewed commitment to spread His light and love and share His good news to our spiritually starved world.

Blessings, peace, thanks and joy to you, your families and congregations,

Gita and your friends in Latvia

(Relationships, continued from page 1)

Daily some older adults came from Liepaja to work alongside us. We stayed in many of their homes and worshiped and played with them for ten great days. I hope to never forget the sight of the teenagers who walked to the road with us to say good-bye as we boarded the bus on the last day, the kids were weeping and there were many wet eyes on the bus. Relationships were established. Among those teens was a young lady by the name of Laura.

In 2006, I led a team from Fayette, AL to Wesley Camp. We had a great time and this time Laura was our cook and a leader of the camp. I learned that her full name was Laura Shveicere and we exchanged e-mails. My wife and I had been to Wesley Camp a few weeks before to make arrangements for the team visit and we had visited with Laura then. In each of 2007 and 2008, I along with members of my family and some friends spent a month in Latvia at Wesley Camp and the Hope Center. Each time we spent time with Laura. During these years there was also a lively e-mail exchange between myself and Laura.

In early 2009, Laura broke the news to me that she had also been in a lively e-mail exchange with another American. His name is Robert Painter. They met while Laura was on the choir tour in 2007, when the choir sang in his hometown, Williamsburg, Va. There had been vis-

its back and forth and now in August there would be a wedding. Laura is in her last year at Liepaja University and Robert is a graduate of William and Mary in Williamsburg and employed at an IT firm in Williamsburg. "Could Mr. Joe possible attend the wedding at Matras church on August 15th?" Having been appointed to the Wesley Camp board at the last FOL meeting, I knew that the board would be meeting in Kuldega on August 20, so I said, "yes, I will be there."

Over the years I had learned a lot about Laura. I knew that her Father had been killed in an auto accident when she was nine. Her mother had always been the mainstay in her life as well as a very active member of the Madras church. But the next e-mail blew me away. "Would Mr. Joe consider escorting me down the aisle at my wedding?" Of course, I said yes. Many honors have come my way in life but few equal this. The wedding was beautiful and a joyful event beyond my expectations. Also beyond my expectations was the request by the minister, Edgars, that I pronounce the final blessing on the couple as they knelt at the altar.

To me it points out that the very essence of VIM is not the task or work to be done. It is all about relationships.

-- Joe D. Acker



Joe Acker with Laura and Robert Painter.



Mr. and Mrs. Robert Painter on their wedding day.



Inese, Agate and Marta Budniks



Romans and Inese Budniks



Baby Marta



The Newest Latvian Methodist

Marta's Birth as told by Joe Acker

(Joe had dinner with Romans and Inese earlier in the evening.)

I noticed during dinner Inese winced a couple of times so I asked her if she was in labor. She said that she thought the baby would come on Saturday. When I left to go back to Kuldiga they were headed to the apartment. I had work to do, so when I got back to the hotel in Kuldiga I borrowed a computer and was sitting on the stairs working at about 11:30 when the phone rang. It was Romans telling me that the baby was here! They went to the hospital about a hour after they got home and the baby was born 30 minutes after they got to the hospital.

We had made it up that they would not call anyone else in Kuldiga and that the next morning I would announce to the conference that I wanted to introduce the newest Latvian Methodist to them. I told them she weighed 3 kilos 20 grams and was 55 cm long. I then said that her name was Marta Budnika and that I was told that she was beautiful like her grandmother. When I said this I was looking right at Inese's mother and you could see that suddenly they understood what I was saying. Then everybody was clapping and laughing.



A Note from Dan & Courtney Randall

5 December 09

Dear Friends of Latvia,

We hope this letter finds you well. You may have heard that we will be leaving Latvia in the middle of December. We wanted to write

to you and tell you why.

We believe God is inviting us to move on from Latvia. Currently, we do not know to where and for what, yet we believe God is asking us to move. We want to respond to God's calling as faithful as we can, and therefore we are moving. In Scripture we see that sometimes God calls people and gives them a specific destination or task (like Moses or Gideon). At other times God asks people to step out in faith and trust God to guide even though they do not know the route, destination, or task at hand (like Abram and, at times, Elijah). While we do not know where God is leading, we believe we are making a faithful decision.

While there is hope and joy in journeying out in faith, there is also sadness in saying goodbye and leaving. We will miss the people of Latvia. We thank God that we have had the opportunity to get to know and live with brothers and sisters in Christ. We also thank God that we have the hope that we will meet again, whether it is "here, there, or in the air."

We will remain with GBGM. We will have the opportunity to spend Christmas with Courtney's family in the US, and then in January we will have further conversations with GBGM regarding future steps.

We are thankful to you for all of the support you have given us over the past 2 ½ years. We thank God for your prayers and encouragement. Thank you.

We will not forget Latvia, and we will not forget you.

May God bless you and keep you and give you peace.

PEACE

Dan, Courtney, and Ceara

Newsletter Articles Needed

When did you first hear about Latvia? **Tell us your story.** How did you, your church, district, or conference become involved with Friends of Latvia?

Thank you to all who took the time to send articles for the fall newsletter.

Share your pictures on Facebook!

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Latvia/76939152110>



Dana Nance
newsletter editor

A Step of Faith

Meadowbrook UMC in Fort Worth, TX took a step of faith on November 17 when they agreed to Covenant with a UM Missionary and become a Global Mission Partner.

Continue to spread the word. Contact another church in your District or Conference. Ask them to take a step of faith and partner with your church in 2010.

JUDE 24-25

TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING,
AND TO PRESENT YOU BEFORE HIS GLORIOUS PRESENCE
WITHOUT FAULT AND WITH GREAT JOY — TO THE ONLY

GOD OUR SAVIOR BE GLORY, MAJESTY, POWER
AND AUTHORITY, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD,
BEFORE ALL AGES, NOW AND FOREVERMORE!

AMEN.

Ways to give.....

new.gbgm-umc.org/work/initiatives/latvia/

Planting Seeds of Hope for our Friends in Latvia

Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447

Latvia Mission Initiative

Project Number: 00235A

Pastors' Salary Fund

Advance project: 14706A

Youth Mission and Camping Support

Project Number: 14046A

"the world is our parish."

-- John Wesley