# **FRIENDS OF LATVIA**

#### Volume 2; Issue 2

#### June 2010

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

2011 Friends of Latvia Conference

#### HOSTED BY

Canton First United Methodist Church

#### MAY 6-7, 2011

BRING YOUR CHILDREN TO THE CONFERENCE AND CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY IN ATLANTA!

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#### Friends of Latvia 2009-2011 Officers

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

# Paldies FUMC Lancaster, Ohio



# 2010 Latvia - Lithuania Mission Initiative Held at First UMC in Lancaster, Ohio

On Friday, Saturday & Sunday, April 23-25, Lancaster First United Methodist Church in Lancaster, Ohio hosted the annual Latvia-Lithuania Missions Initiative Conference. Over 40 individuals made the trip to Ohio for what is to be the last Latvia-Lituania gathering for several years. Patrick Friday announced on Saturday afternoon that the two groups will meet separately beginning in 2011.

We give thanks to God for Tim Binkley and those who assisted him.

#### Canton First UMC to Host 2011 FOL Conference

Canton First United Methodist Church is honored to host the 2011 Friends of Latvia Conference on May 6th and 7th. The church is located off of Interstate 575 on the north side of Atlanta. Hartsfield Jackson International Airport is about 50 miles south of us. We look forward to seeing you next year!



## Notes from the Chair



I am very happy to welcome you to the Spring issue of the Friends of Latvia Newsletter. Many of you were able to attend the April 23-24, Friends of Latvia/Lithuania Initiative and experience God's grace moving among us. We owe a great debt to our friends at the First United Methodist Church of Lancaster, Ohio for hosting the event. Their facility and hospitality was a wonderful part of our gathering.

There is some news that you need to be aware of about the Initiative in 2011. We will meet only as the Friends of Latvia. It is possible that we will reunite with our friends in Lithuania and Estonia at some future time to work on common challenges.

Things we learned at the Initiative:

• Many denominations in Latvia are organizing for a Franklin Graham Crusade in November; the event will be held in Riga.

• Two Methodist congregations in Latvia need supporting churches: Cesis, and the Russian Congregation in Riga.

• Skype internet phone service can be used to inexpensively interact with friends in Latvia.

• The Hope Center is in need of stable financial support. Churches could consider becoming a connecting congregation with the Hope Center. • Wesley Camp near Leipaja needs VIM teams to construct tent platforms and for renovation. Contact Joe Acker for more information (jdacker@centurytel.net).

• A campaign is underway to collect repay a no-interest loan made available to purchase a church for the Methodist in Cesis. Randy Tolleson is organizing this effort and needs our support. There has never been a better time to use United States currency to support the church in Latvia. Rev. Gita Mednis informed us that deflation is occurring in Latvia at the present and the value of everything is decreasing. This is a wonderful time to purchase real estate in Latvia for the Methodist Church. A message from Rev. Gita Mednis about purchasing the building for the Cecis congregation and some information about the Hope Center can been found at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=plObdvyjilc

Contact Randy Tolleson for more information: rstolleson@att.net.

• A women's retreat to bring together United Methodist Women to address the emotional and spiritual needs of women in Lithuania and Latvia will be held September 24–26, 2010 at the new retreat center in Palenga, Lithuania. The retreat seeks to establish an awareness of mental health issues and to create skills to help women in their communities. The retreat will cost about \$200 per person and donations will be gratefully accepted. Contact Rev. Gita Mednis for more information (gitamednis@aol.com.)

May God continue to bless us and our churches as we seek to support the growth of the United Methodist Church in Latvia.

Jim Hayes, Chair

"The central core of our United Methodist theology of mission is this: understand that we are engaged with God in mission... We are in mission because that is the very nature of God, and we are in collaboration with God in this world." John Edward Nuessle, God's Mission: Incarnation, Not Intervention.

(New World Outlook)



## Co-Chair Chat

## Randy Tolleson

## Finding Our Faith

#### Matthew 12: 31-32

Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

Forgiveness is a foundational component of our faith journey. Why would Jesus link our faith in the Spirit so tightly to the forgiveness available to us?

While our faith walk is deeply personal, the importance of relationships in this walk is difficult to overstate. Relationships with each other and with our fellow Christians in Latvia offer endless opportunities to grow in our faith: often by identifying gaps in our faith that need attention. As surely as a river flows beyond where we stand, this river of living water . . . our Savior and Spirit . . . flows onward toward God's grace-filled purpose. How might He bless us to step in faith into this river? What sane person would decide that we should commit a campaign for tens of thousands of dollars to purchase a church building for our friends in Cesis with no clear path to those funds? What profit can come from such an endeavor? Doubts like these reveal our faith gaps requiring attention since God, the Creator of Cesis, our Earth, and our Universe, can surely make available what is needed for this



work. How could we possibly be guided to a successful completion of this project?

Watch each other as we demonstrate both the strengths and weaknesses of our faith and take the opportunity to grow. The connection to our brothers and sisters halfway around the world provides instant proof that we have a ways to grow. Our trust in Christ and that guiding Spirit represents our faith response. See you soon at a worship service in Cesis.

## Danny Lindsey

## Pastors Salaries

Friends, we continue working as the Pastoral Salary Committee to provide funding for sustained payment of salaries to Latvian pastors that will attract and retain high caliber talent. Sustaining these pastor salaries at the current levels requires us to raise \$30,000 over the next several months.



This is where I need your help! Will you lead a campaign in your

church, Sunday School class, or community to help us raise these funds? How about a goal of \$1 per church member in your local congregation?

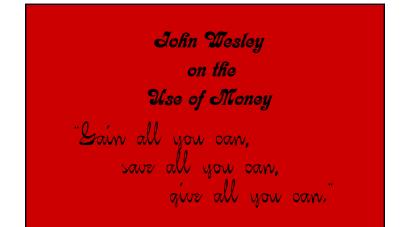
Please contact me with your plan (dwlindse@southernco.com) to help raise these funds by the end of June. I'll be contacting each of you individually by e-mail if I haven't heard from you by that date. We'll establish the deadline to raise these funds after I have gotten your ideas and feedback.

Also, I want to share the Action Items our Committee is working on this year.

- 1. Pray asking for God's will to be revealed to us
- 2. Listen to God
- 3. Confirm the current level of ongoing pledges

4. Compile pictures, testimonials, videos and presentations that can be used by the FOL to introduce others to our mission5. Communicate to all FOL our funding progress quarterly.

It is a privilege to join each of you in this critical mission. Danny



#### Beyond the Call

## Jim Nance

How do we establish priority in our lives? How do we understand and implement what God has impressed on our hearts? How are we living out what He expects of us? Let's make a short list using the United Methodist Church profession: Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, Witness.

**Prayer** – for whom do we pray? Only those closest to us? Those brought to mind by acquaintance or familial relationship? For whom does God desire us to pray? Beyond family and those we know first hand, are we praying for ones we likely will never meet? Is there someone with whom you will cross paths soon that God desires you to have a heart to lift up to Him? Maybe our prayer in that area could be that God would teach us and reveal to us for whom to pray?

**Presence** – Does that mean that through us, Christ is to be present everywhere we are, not just in worship and program participation, but in our walk everywhere we go? Where can Christ not go if we would be willing to take Him?

**Gifts** – What kind of "Gifter" has God enabled and blessed you to be? After our family needs are met, how do we "invest" our remaining resources? There are so many needs in this world, near and far away. How do we choose where to give our financial resources? If that is a recurring question for you, seeking God's face for that answer might be an appropriate topic to bring before the Lord in your prayer time noted above. Only you can make the priority choices that follow through on the Lord's call for your life.

**Service** – Again, here we are making life choices. And this one is difficult because it takes time and personal investment.

"Do all the good you can: By all the means you can: In all the places you can: At all the times you can: To all the people you can: As long as ever you can." -- John Wesley Whether it is teaching a class, serving on a committee or stocking the food pantry; time and personal investment are a requisite. What do we not do in order to facilitate doing something in this area? Again, time with God can reveal His first and best for us.

Witness – Similar to presence, where in the world are we not to be a witness for our



Lord? Many times we tremble at the thought of "witnessing." But doing the things listed above is really the nuts and bolts of our witness. Before we realize it, we have "witnessed" to those around us without being conscious of it.

Let me encourage you to intentionally and prayerfully consider taking a few small steps in each of these areas in the next seven days. Set yourself a target. Make one change in each area this week sharing your heart with another in your fellowship circle.

If you are receiving this newsletter, you have let someone know that you have a heart for the United Methodist Church in Latvia. Consider if God would use you to raise the Banner of Christ in that small country by committing to consistently praying for the people of Latvia or maybe more specifically, one of the churches there. Or by committing yourself to be present in upcoming meetings and initiative gatherings raised by the Texas Friends of Latvia (TXFOL). By giving to one time causes such as the Cesis church building initiative or an ongoing monthly supporting gift to a partnering church that desperately needs your financial support. How about the Hope Center that prepares pregnant young girls by teaching life and childcare skills. Maybe you can serve as a facilitator in one of the FOL gatherings or coordinate an effort for a project within your own church.

All these add up to witness which is the charge that Christ gave to all of us.

Bless you as you seek His face,

Jim Nance Treasurer, TXFOL

#### Reaching the Better Through the Bitter

## Dr. Bill Quick



OUR recent gathering in Lancaster, Ohio's First United Methodist Church may, in one way, be a watershed gathering for the Friends of Latvia as well as Lithuania. Although the initial decision for a joint gathering was not made by either Latvian or Lithuanian groups, I believe Bishop Hans Vaxby, at the time, believed the joint gathering would bring the two re-stored churches together after 50 years of Communist occupation.

As the vision became a working reality, we encountered communication problems which unraveled the dream. No need to rehearse those problems because we have moved ahead and both Latvia and Lithuania will have separate meetings in different places next year. It is hoped the Bishop will visit both groups.

Personally, although there are some who feel otherwise, I find it 'bitter-sweet' to realize we have broken these annual ties. There was a time when GBGM provided the sole financial support to pay for the travel of the D.S. and 2 representatives from each country and helped cover expenses of the local church. In time,

GBGM received diminished support and budgets were cut and personnel cut. Partner churches were turned to for help and you have responded. Thank you.

We are losing John Campbell as the district superintendent of Lithuania and will miss him. John and Gita were beginning to work together in ways that will lay the groundwork for the coming together of Methodism in these two Baltic nations.

My dream has been to find a way whereby there could be a closer working relationship among the three Baltic nations: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. What a witness we could have by the three working together in a determined joint effort to grow Methodist witness and Christian mission in a strategic region of Europe.

It has been a privilege to be a part of the groundwork in the rebirth of Methodism in Latvia. Let the record be clear: It was Metropolitan United Methodist Church in Detroit which became the first WME Connecting Congregation in Latvia, pairing with Liepaja. Metropolitan voted in September 1991 to connect with Liepaja and has supported the Church since. We were followed by William C. Martin Church in Bedford, Texas in becoming a GBGM partner church to First UMC in Riga. What a privilege it has been to see both of these churches: Metropolitan and Martin continue over these two decades in support of these two significant congregations. Although a church initially makes a three-year covenant to partner or connect, it is rewarding to continue support and watch the growth of some of our churches.

Volunteers in Mission teams have helped make a difference.

Both Baltic countries are facing hard times. Adversity is something we mutually share. I share with you, from Worthy Devotions,

#### **GROWING THROUGH ADVERSITY**

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

"I suppose one of the hardest questions to answer is: "Why do I have to deal with so much adversity?!"

Quite honestly, one of the best answers I've ever come across was written by C.S. Lewis in his book, <u>Mere Christianity</u>. Lewis likened God's use of adversity to walking a dog. If the dog gets its leash wrapped around a pole and tries to continue running forward, he will only tighten the leash more. Both the dog and the owner are after the same end: forward motion. But the owner must resist the dog by pulling him opposite of the direction that he wants to go. The master, sharing the same intention, but understanding better than the dog where he really wants to go, takes an action precisely opposite to that of the dog's will. It is in this way that God uses adversity!

We really don't like being pulled and corrected by the Lord – but when we understand there's a greater purpose involved, then we can pass through adversity with hope, expectation and steadfastness knowing these events are for our greater good!

Let's learn from the trials and tribulations we go through because God has a purpose in them. We may not enjoy it, but when all's said and done, enduring trials faithfully will produce perseverance, character, and hope. And hope will not disappoint us for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:4-5) We truly can trust in the God who loves us with an everlasting love because He knows the direction we need to go, AND He knows exactly how to get us there! "

– Dr. William K. Quick, GBGM Partner Church Ministries Former Member of World Methodist Evangelism Committee

#### News & Notes from Lancaster

Friends of Latvia/Lithuania lnitiative pictures taken by faithful photographer, Mary Quick, are available at

http://albums.phanfare.com/isolated/KjNuGneZ/1/4654886

Ullas Tankler has provided an excellent PhotoStory to download and watch on your computer.

http://multimedia.gbgm-umc.org/pindownload/login. do?pin=BZN8J

(Download the file "PhotoStory-Lat-Lit'10")

Thank you, Mary and Ullas!



Friends of Latvia send congratulations and best wishes to Tim and Sharon Binkley, on the birth of their first grandchild.

Noah was born on May 1. He weighed 7.75 pounds and was 21 inches long. Noah Christopher is the son of Jason and Savannah Binkley.



Bill and Mary Quick were honored on Saturday, April 24, by the Friends of Latvia and the Friends of Lithuania for "bringing us together in partnership."

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

## Friends of Latvia

#### 2010 Mission Trips

### Friends of Latvia

## Who's going to Latvia?

If you are leading a team to Latvia, please send an e-mail with the dates of your trip, where you are going, and your trip objectives.

Jim Hayes will lead a team to the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, June 11 - 21. They are doing a work project at the church, sponsoring Vacation Bible School, and an adult Bible study. For more information contact Jim at jrhayes46@bellsouth.net.

Joe Acker will lead a small team to Wesley Camp, June 21-July 5.

September/October - Faithful Men Fairview, Tennessee

#### When You Return Home

When you return from Latvia, please provide us with a report of the trip including several pictures with names of participants. Send your follow-up report to: djnance@sbcglobal.net.

Thank you, Holt Cason, for the timely follow-up from your trip to Liepa in May!

Hebrews 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Stewartstown,F UM CHURCH MUSIC MINISTR Presents he Company of Praise 2 Youth Choir

The Friends of Latvia and Lithuania were delightfully entertained on Saturday by Blacklight Puppets as well as Stewartstown United Methodist Church "Company of Praise."

What a blessing to see the leaders of tomorrow growing in grace and truth today. Thank you for sharing your gifts with us.

## 2010 Mission Trips

### Holt Cason

#### LIEPA, LATVIA VIM TEAM May 6-20, 2010 by Holt Cason

Through the dedication and commitment of numerous volunteers from the United States and five years of working on a former deserted and condemned Communist office building, the Latvian and Russian congregations of Liepa have sanctuary to worship our Lord and Savior.



View of room in 2007



View of room in 2010

The task this year for our VIM Team was to complete sheetrock work, sand the mudded areas to provide a smooth surface for wall paper. Unlike the typical renovation of rooms in the USA, the Latvians cover the walls with paintable wallpaper and then apply paint. The paper provides a textured look for any room, but there is a lot of additional work required with this method of renovation.



Sanding sheetrock walls



Smoothing mudded seams

After the wallpaper and painting, our team installed a suspended ceiling.



Beginning of ceiling





#### Liepa, Latvia VIM Team

Holt Cason

Once the walls and ceiling were completed, we installed a snap and lock 20 year floor system. The flooring went fairly smoothly due to the installation of the subfloor in 2009.



Sub floor installation in 2009



Completed floor in 2010



On the final evening that our team was in Latvia, members of both the Latvian and Russian congregations, representatives of the United Methodist Central Office in Riga, and District Superintendent Gita Mednis joined in a brief service inside the new sanctuary prior to a celebration on the front lawn of the church.

During the two Sundays that our VIM Team was in Liepa, we attended both the Latvian and Russian speaking congregational services. The attendance has more than doubled in both congregations over previous years and there is a noticeable presence of younger people and children. It is our belief that if the children and youth are involved, the adults will follow. "Let the children lead them."

From what we witnessed with the Liepa church this year, we believe that the church is making a difference in the community and lives of its people. We thank God that we have had the opportunity to help Did you know a list exists for all international VIM projects for teams wanting to help?

Did you know that any of us can add projects in Latvia needing a team and that none are listed for Latvia?

For a listing of projects and instructions on how to add those you see in Latvia, go to:

new.gbgm-umc.org/about/us/mv/volunteeropportunities/international/

#### Friends of Latvia to make disciples of Jesus Christ

# **Gift Transmittal** Cesis Church Building Project

Romans 8:27-28 And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. NIV

**The Need:** The Friends of Latvia (FOL) has undertaken to respond to an emergency situation with the United Methodist congregation in the city of Cesis, Latvia. This congregation had been meeting for several years in a small Lutheran church on a rental basis. The host church changed leadership and the new leader wanted exclusive use of their building. For the past several months the congregation has been meeting in a small upstairs apartment which belongs to the lay leader of the congregation. Now, due to the severe economic situation in Latvia, the apartment is subject to foreclosure.

This link shows Rev. Mednis describing the situation at the beginning of an online video. (from 0:00 – 2:23)

**The Opportunity:** The Rev. Gita Mednis, District Superintendent of Latvia, presented this situation to the FOL April 2010 meeting in Lancaster, Ohio. She learned while visiting in the US that there is a building in the heart of Cesis which is in danger of foreclosure and which the owner wishes to sell. This building has several advantages in addition to its attractive price. It will be accessible to the elderly of the congregation which is not true of the present arrangement. This building was of post-soviet, high-quality construction in 1991 and is in excellent repair. The ground floor can serve immediately as a sanctuary, the basement refitted for youth activities, and the second floor is suitable as a parsonage. An offer has been made and accepted to purchase for a price totaling approximately \$64,000 USD, which includes purchase of items needed to further develop the ministry in Cesis. This is about half the price of this property from two years ago.

This link shows photos of the proposed new Cesis Church Building.

**To Help:** Contribute financially to help with the purchase of this church. Send copies of this Gift Transmittal to anyone who might be called to help. This fund-raiser is underway in May and June of 2010.

Use the following instructions to 1) route your gift correctly, 2) ensure that your church will be properly identified as the source of the gift by the UMC, and 3) obtain your tax receipt.

Friends of Latvia to make disciples of Jesus Christ		ransmittal v and enclose with your gift.
To: Scott Sellman, Treasurer North Alabama Conference UMC	CHECK YOUR PREFE	RRED METHOD TO GIVE:
898 Arkadelphia Rd. Birmingham AL 35204	□ 3-Year Pledge amount	s will be sent)
Make checks payable to:	Your church name and address	Your name and address (receipt mailed to your address)
North AL Conference of UMC (IMPORTANT) FOR: CESIS LATVIA INITIATIVE	·	

#### E-mail from Latvia

## Friends of Latvia

Update on Milda Vainovska E-mail from Kristine received May 18

We are bringing grandmother home from the hospital tomorrow. She is still weak and needs help with everything. She is not able to manage herself or do even simple things. She is able to feed herself but of course the food must be prepared! :)

They are planing to leave the gall-bladder stone and she is not going to have the second surgery because of her heart condition.

Now she will be on a special diet. She will not be able to eat everything she wants.

However, she is feeling much better and she looks very good too! She cannot wait to return home! We will appreciate your prayers so that grandmother can recover well!

#### Inga Rate sent this note...

"We have received money for travel Gita and Kristine. On 6. April \$ 3450.00 USD and on 27. April \$ 285.00 USD (\$440 cash was also collected and given to G&K)

Thanks for supporting Latvia UMC Peace :)  $\label{eq:latvia}$ 

Many, O LORD my God,

are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you;

were I to speak and tell of them,

they would be too many to declare Psalm 40:5

#### from Juris Mednis received Friday, May 21

Our acknowledged rainmakers and all supporting idealists!

Gita just called...

Its done ! Done ! Cesis congregation now finally has a home !

More administrative paperwork will need to be taken care of, etc. etc. But, the congregation just might be able to already hold its services there this Sunday. To its new home I can envision people carrying chairs from all over, etc., etc. Exciting ..."

And so dear rainmakers, save and keep some more water in those buckets!

Cheers and very lovingly, Juris

#### from Gita (a few hours later after Juris' e-mail)

Dear Friends,

This afternoon, I handed over the keys to the new Cesis church building to a very emotional, teary lay leader. Sunday we will be celebrating Pentacost Sunday --- the day that many heard the good news of the Gospel in their own tongue. You have given us our own upper room where the Holy Spirit can descend on us and fill us with strength, guidance, love and His wisdom, so we can spread His light to our community. God is awesome, mighty, loving, faithful and true and so are you.

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU Gita



# The Last Page

## Dana Nance



It's been an exciting month for the Friends of Latvia! I count it a privilege and an incredible blessing to share with so many of you in the work that God is doing in Latvia. My life is truly richer because I said yes to God's call to serve as your newsletter editor and secretary.

Thank you to

- \* each one who gave financial resources for Gita and Kristine to travel to the states without having to be concerned about how God would provide.
- \* Jim Nance for scheduling flight arrangements for Gita and Kristine to visit in Texas before traveling to Ohio.
- \* Smithfield, Martin and Meadowbrook UMC for your warm welcome to our Latvia guests. And a special thanks to Jack & Dana McCarty, Richard & Julie Payne, and Tim & Roxanne Dougherty for entertaining our guests at different times throughout the week.

Because we are all so very blessed, my challenge to each of you is to ask, "What can I deny myself today in order to participate in the Cesis Building Project and/or the Pastor's Salary Fund?" I don't think it's possible to out give God!

#### Friends of Latvia Photo Album

Send a picture with your name, church, city/state, & connection in Latvia.

This is Steve Elliott. He is the Director of Youth Ministries at Latham UMC in Huntsville, AL. He's connected to Wesley Camp in Latvia.

Thanks, Steve, for sending your picture and information for the 2011 Friends of Latvia Photo Album.

To be included send your digital photo to djnance@sbcglobal.net ASAP!



Steve Elliott Director of Youth Ministries Latham UMC Huntsville, AL Wesley Camp



#### I Timothy 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

#### Ways to give.....

http://new.gbgm-umc.org/advance/

Camp Wesley Project Number: 15160N

Hope Center Project Number: 3020447

Latvia Mission Initiative Project Number: 00235A

**Pastors' Salary Fund** Advance project: 14706A

> "the world is our parish." -- John Wesley

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." -- John Wesley