

FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 1; Issue 2

September 2009

FRIENDS OF LATVIA IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP SINCE 1991

WE AGREE TO ADVANCE TO EVERY CITIZEN 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

Alabama/Louisiana Delegation



John Morrison, Jan Hudson, Esther Lawley and Cyndy Wright with the Alabama/Louisiana Delegation, visit Camp Wesley in June and July. The Dakota Team and some of the Latvian youth decorated the old pump house with these flags. A Dakota youth painted the globe and cross and the flags were a combined effort.

The trip to Latvia was the first for some of us from Alabama and Louisiana and the second for others of us. Seeing our friends, Gita and Kristine, waiting for us at the airport, made us feel instantly at home.

After settling in and resting, we went to the Hope Center in Liepa, the following day. It was inspiring to see the smiling faces and listen to the positive directions that these women and their children in the Hope Center are going after having such a difficult start. The work that the United Methodist Church and Gita Mednis are doing with the Hope Center is outstanding and an inspiration. They are not only providing a safe place to stay, but are also teaching these mothers life changing skills to help them provide for themselves and their children when they are able to go out on their own.

One of our mission groups' members brought a large suit
(continued on page 6)

What a privilege it was to serve with a small team from Fayette First UMC in Fayette, AL returning to Camp Wesley in Latvia from June 26-July 6. Our team included former FFUMC members who now reside in Baton Rouge, LA and a church member from White Springs UMC in Alabama. The team was small but richly blessed as we renewed some old friendships in Latvia and made new friends. We worked with fellow Christians from Latvia, Lithuania, Tennessee, North & South Dakota.

It was a joy to share in devotional times, to work during Wesley Days, visit the Hope Center, and worship at Riga 1st UMC. Cleaning out a barn, clearing rocks and packing dirt, sewing curtains, hauling wood, cooking breakfast and supper, washing dishes, and an assortment of chores was truly a fellowship experience as we worked and celebrated together.

God's people are connected in a unique and blessed manner. Our team came away feeling we received so much more than we were able to give, for the Latvian and Lithuanian communities truly extend the hands and heart of Christ.

Grace and peace,
Esther Lawley
Fayette First UMC

Greetings to the Friends of Latvia: All of us are members of the Friends of Latvia because we have been called here. The highest priority of our organization is to increase pastor's salaries in the Latvian Methodist Church. Danny Lindsey and his committee are identifying and submitting applications for funds to establish a pastor's salary buffer fund. Can you help us by identifying sources for this funding? It is beyond our ability as humans to identify all the sources of funding for this and other needs in Latvia. It is our responsibility to continue asking and making others aware of our need. God will provide, if we only ask for His help.

In our last newsletter I encouraged you to help me increase the number of supporting congregations for the United Methodist Churches in Latvia and I encouraged you to speak to other Methodist churches and invite them to join you in supporting a ministry in Latvia. A recent experience will provide an example of how God can use us in His ministry in Latvia. Last January one of the three United Methodist Churches in our partnership to support the Kuldiga United Methodist Church ended their support after three years. The remaining two small churches have been praying and talking with other small churches to find a replacement partner. In July I was permitted to speak to a prospective church about joining our partnership to support the Kuldiga church. At the end

of the meeting the church administrative council and mission chair informed me that they would consider the action and let me know. In early August the mission chair called to inform me the committee had voted to request the administrative council join our partnership in January 2010. I was also informed that the mission chair wanted to send me a personal check for the entire year's support. She reported that she had recently received an inheritance and she felt this was worthy use of her money. About a week later I received a check for \$1,800 to support the Kuldiga United Methodist Church. Only God could have motivated this action. I was only an instrument in this process because I asked for the support.



God can work through each of us to support the United Methodist Church in Latvia. May I challenge you to open your mind and heart to the possibilities all around us.

Paldies,
Jim Hayes

Pastors Salaries

by Danny Lindsey

The Pastoral Salary Committee has reviewed the current wages paid to our pastors in Latvia and concluded they are not adequate. In fact, we believe the current salaries are so low as to be a disincentive for people to become pastors. After studying the poverty level and wages of other workers in Latvia, we concluded that the Latvian Senior Pastors should be paid 500 lats per month and the Local Pastors should be paid 400 lats per month. These salaries require an additional \$4,000 per month above what is currently being received and paid. We need your help!

First, we need your prayers for a solution to this problem. Second, we need money set aside up front for the Latvian churches to commit to these new wages. Our committee feels that \$48,000 or 12 months salary is necessary to insure the salaries can be paid by the church going forward. We need these funds today so that the pastor salaries can be increased! Please consider a personal gift to achieve this goal. The GBGM

Gift Transmittal is the most effective way to make these contributions. In addition, we believe there are grant funds available, both within the Methodist Church and outside our Church, to help meet this need. Please let me know if you have expertise with writing grant requests or have other members in your local churches with that expertise.

Third, we need new ongoing monthly commitments going forward for the \$4,000 monthly increase. Again, the GBGM Gift Transmittal is the best way to make these contributions. Global Ministries Advance 14706A

Please call or e-mail with any questions or request for additional information.

Thanks for your prayers and support.
Danny Lindsey
Chair, Pastoral Salary Committee
E-mail dwlindse@southernco.com
Phone 770-704-7123

Connecting Congregations, a ministry of World Methodist Evangelism, World Methodist Council, began after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The first connection was made in May, 1992 in Czechoslovakia, now Czech Republic. Dr. H. Eddie Fox, Director, World Methodist Evangelism, in cooperation with Superintendent Josef Cervenak and Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, developed a simple plan to immediately help with pastor's salaries. The continuing purpose for the Connecting Congregation ministry is to help establish new Christian Faith communities, to pray and communicate regularly with the Connection, to share prayers, hope and faith through stories, correspondence, and possible visits.

The first connection in Latvia was made in 1992 with Fairview UMC, Maryville, TN connecting with Second Church, Riga. Since that time we now have eight Connecting Congregations in Latvia:

- Second Church Riga - Fairview UMC Maryville, TN
- Liepaja - Metropolitan UMC, Detroit, MI
- Liepa Russian - State Street UMC, Bowling Green, KY
- Liepa Latvian - First UMC, Tullahoma, TN
- Matras - Joy Sunday School Class, Hermitage UMC Hermitage, TN
- Paplaka - First UMC, Canton, GA
- Jegalva - Middlebrook Pike UMC, Knoxville, TN
- Sarkani - First UMC, Heber Springs, AR

World Evangelism asks for a financial commitment of three to five years. Connection funds are remitted through World Evangelism to the superintendent/and or bishop to provide basic support for salary, housing, worship and some programming.

More information can be obtained through:
World Methodist Evangelism
P.O. Box 8388
Hermitage, TN 37076
Telephone: 615-885-5020

or by contacting:
James O. Thurmond, Coordinator,
Connecting Congregations
490 Grider Pond Road
Bowling Green, KY 42104
270-746-0458
jamesothurmond@insightbb.com

(Correction for Spring 2009 Newsletter: Connecting Congregations is a ministry of World Methodist Evangelism, World Methodist Council. We have no connection with the Board of Discipleship (Evangelism) of the UMC, other than the fact that the United Methodist Church is a member of the World Methodist Council. We represent the whole affiliated body of Wesleyan believers around the world. -- Jim Thurmond is Associate Director World Evangelism and Coordinator for Connecting Congregations.)

The Latvia Mission Team at Middlebrook Pike United Methodist Church in Knoxville, TN produced 5 videos that provide an overview of the country as well as the UMC missionaries' efforts to re-establish the Latvian Methodist church. The videos also summarize several outreach efforts to the Latvian youth including Camp Wesley and the Hope Center.

Watch the videos on the website at www.middlebrookpike.com/news-missions.html

DVD AVAILABLE: Copies of HELPING HANDS FOR LATVIA, by the Holston Conference, 2005. Contact Jim Hayes for a copy. jrhayes46@bellsouth.net



Alabama/Louisiana group waiting for mealtime at Camp Wesley

Two months before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the brave people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in defiance of Soviet occupation formed a human chain of 2,000,000 people who stood hand in hand from Tallinn, Estonia to Riga, Latvia to Vilnius, Lithuania.

And, of course, their defiance of the Russian occupiers resulted in bloodshed. August 24, 2009 marked the 20th anniversary of their defiance.

In September **1991** I received a telephone call that our beloved Methodism had the opportunity to establish new congregations in a half dozen or more countries in the former Soviet Union. One of those places was Latvia.

LATVIA? I remembered a classmate at Randolph-Macon College, whose father was a Latvia pastor. He escaped when the KGB moved across the Baltic States one night in 1944 and closed our churches, confiscated our property, seized the Methodist pastors whose fate ended either in Siberia or death. A handful escaped, including the father of my classmate, Siegfried Volstis, at Randolph-Macon. Ziggie, as we affectionately called him, was a class act: a dedicated Christian, winsome, bright and articulate. He, like his father, became a Methodist pastor. We became good friends. We both graduated from Duke Divinity School. Bishop Paul Neff Garber ordained Ziggie and me in Richmond, Virginia.

Garber, knowing I was a N.C. native, moved me from the Broad Street Methodist Church in Richmond to Morehead City, N.C. I became a member of the N.C. Conference while Ziggie continued in the Virginia Conference. In 1974 I became senior pastor of Metropolitan Church in Detroit and served until 1998.

In 1971 at the World Methodist Conference in Denver, I was named to the World Methodist Council and in 1976 to its Executive Committee and served on the executive until 2006. During that period it was a deep privilege to come to know and offer leadership in the Council. The working relationship with Dr. Alan Walker who was named in 1971 to lead global Methodism in a great evangelistic mission, opened the door to come to know Methodist and Wesleyan leaders globally.

During the quarter century I served in Detroit, the church once again placed the global mission of the church as a priority. During Metropolitan's centennial year (1984) I challenged the church to establish a million dollar Centennial Fund for global and national missions. In a 14-month period the congregation gave

\$1.9 million for this Centennial Fund.

When I received the call in September 1991 for the opportunity to become a Partner in the organization or re-opening of a Methodist Church in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, or the Baltics it was almost a "magical moment" when I heard LATVIA. Immediately, I remembered my classmate whose father escaped, the Communists closed our churches, seized our Methodist properties and our pastors. I had the overwhelming desire to choose Latvia as the country to which Metropolitan should direct a partnership. I presented the opportunity and challenge to our Missions Committee and the Administrative Board and they agreed unanimously to become a partner as a Connecting Congregation through World Methodist Evangelism. At the same time the General Board of Global Ministries was in negotiation to secure Methodist properties that had been seized in Riga, Liepaja and other communities.

A Lutheran pastor was recruited to be the first District Superintendent and pastor of the Methodist church to be re-opened in Liepaja, a city on the Baltic Sea where the Soviets had kept their nuclear submarines.

In September 1991, Metropolitan Church made the requested commitment to give \$3,600 a year for three years. In September 1992, I made my first trip to Latvia. The Executive Committee of the World Methodist Conference met in Tallinn and I made the trek from the Estonian Capitol to Liepaja and preached in three services in a weekend Evangelistic series. The response was remarkable and I caught a glimpse of the potential. In August 1995 I was privileged to be present in Lithuania when the first UM Church in Kaunas was "reborn." Following that historic moment, Bishop Hans Vaxby and I traveled to Riga for the first "annual conference" of the reborn United Methodism in Latvia in the Riga Second congregation. The closing worship service of the 1995 conference was held in Liepaja and I was privileged to preach again in our connecting congregation.

Metropolitan was the first partner Connecting Congregation through World Methodist Evangelism and for 18 years we have continued its support through the Centennial Fund. The support has increased over the years and sustained through the pastorates of three different ministers.

The key support during these eleven years since I retired has been due not only to my continuing encouragement but some key lay persons who were

Quick History (continued)

members of the VIM team and the Metropolitan Church Epworth Bell Choir who gave concerts in Liepaja, Riga and in Lithuania and Estonia. They presented the Liepaja Church the bells as a gift and the Liepaja Bell Choir has continued to serve the Latvia Church.

In addition the Centennial Fund has contributed scholarships to the Baltic Seminary for Latvian students, including four pastors who are currently serving Latvia Churches. Support has increased to include Wesley Camp and the Hope Center Ministry.

During the eleven years I have taught at Duke Divinity School, I intentionally emphasize the global mission of Methodism (e.g. John Wesley's "I look upon the world as my parish"). How exciting it has been to have Courtney and Dan Randall serve as missionaries to Latvia.

No single mission ministry has been more rewarding, personally, during my 56 years as a United Methodist pastor than my association with Latvia and Lithuania ministries.

I continually applaud GBGM for the leadership given in securing Methodist properties seized by the Communists in 1944 and the continuing support of the United Methodist Church; to World Methodist Evangelism and the

connecting congregations for continuing ministries and outreach; to the two district superintendents who served and the pastoral and lay leadership for dedication and vision; our UMC missionaries past and present; Bishops Vaxby, Olsen and our new Bishop Christian who blessed us with his presence in Tennessee in April 2009.

Above all our Lord Jesus Christ is being lifted up through the dedicated efforts and financial support of a host of connecting partners.

I am sure you join me in support and anticipation of the new Latvian United Methodist Hymnal now in the final stages of being prepared for publication in the near future. Our Latvia congregations continue to need our prayers and support during these difficult financial crises. Whatever the needs in our local congregations, double or triple those needs in our struggling congregations in Latvia and Lithuania.

Thank you for your prayers and the hope you are giving our brothers and sisters in the Baltics!

Dr. William K. (Bill) Quick
GBGM Coordinator for Partner Churches: Latvia and Lithuania



Latvia Sunset (photo courtesy of Alabama/Louisiana group)



Communion on the beach (photo courtesy of Alabama/Louisiana group)

(continued from page 1)

case full of children's clothes and blankets from their local church in Alabama. When they were given out it was like Christmas and the pride that the moms had for the new clothes and blankets for their children was wonderful.

There was also a member of the Tennessee delegation, Brittany, who went with us. She shared about how she has had a tough start to her life but has overcome her hurdles, found a new direction and encouraged the mothers there to do the same. ***This project is a very worthy endeavor that relies solely on support from donations and reminds us of just how important our continued support of this work is.***

Our next stop was Wesley Camp. It had been three years since I was last at Wesley Camp. The physical improvements in the camp and particularly in the kitchen and shower facilities were the most noticeable. We had some warm water to bathe in, which was nice, and also being able to wash our clothes was a treat. The kitchen was great and a major upgrade from cooking in the garage that was next to the house, which is what we had to do the last time.

Improving the buildings and facilities is an important aspect of coming to and working at Wesley Camp, but it is not the greatest part of going. Each time I go to Wesley Camp is a special experience. Knowing that this camp's mission is the emotional and spiritual development, primarily of young people throughout Latvia and Lithuania, helps give direction and focus to our work. But the work, as important as it is, is not what being at Wesley Camp is all about. It is definitely the people.

Each work group from the US brought a special gift. The Tennessee group provided us with inspirational song, the Dakota group brought a little bit of western song and dance to the camp and the Alabamans and Louisianans provided what we do best, and that was to cook.

American breakfast, "toned down" spicy orange salad and Cajun jambalaya for dinner gave the cooks the day off, which was nice since it was one of the cooks birthday. When the cooks asked for the recipe for what we had fixed, that was the greatest compliment that you can get.

Our Latvian and Lithuanian friends shared folk songs, customs and games with us as well as their very own personal stories. I am always amazed to hear of how young people with difficult starts are turned around by becoming associated with Wesley Camp and the church. It helps reinforce for me the strength that God's Love has through others and the ability to change a person's life so radi-

cally. We talk about it but to see and witness it is a different thing all together.

There are many highlights from camp and it is hard to pick out the most memorable. The two that stick with me were first of all; the service on the Baltic coast with everyone from camp on the evening before our leaving for home and second celebrating the fourth of July with our Latvian and Lithuanian friends. It was a particularly special moment to have an American independence celebration with friends in a foreign land and it is one fourth of July that I will not soon forget. We had fireworks and watermelon, just like at home.

The people that we meet and connect with from Latvia, Lithuania and even our fellow travelers from the US, make the experience so important and meaningful to me. Despite differences in culture and language, we have something in common and that is the love of God. Whether sharing is through devotional, song or just being there, it is palpable and that makes Wesley Camp a special place and what I consider Holy Ground.

When we share our own experiences, by living, eating, playing and working together, away from our regular lives and comfort zones, it makes us "missionaries," not just on the giving end of "help" but also on the receiving end of something very special. When you come to Wesley, you can't help but become a part of the camp and one with the people at the camp; Rihards and Ieva, Janis, Dan, Andrew, Laurijana, John and Bonnie Igmars, Mareks, Gaida; are but a few of many new friends. And being with the people puts Wesley Camp in a special place in my heart.

The seeing and reconnecting with my Latvian family and the feeling that I am back home carries the Wesley Camp experience for me to a higher level. You don't know what to expect when you go to Latvia and even ask "What contribution can I make at a camp on the other side of the world?" But, when you are getting ready to leave, the tears flow, lives are changed and the camp has done its "work" on you.

I encourage everyone to consider going to this special place because we can all contribute, no matter how limited we may feel our talents are. And in return we will receive much more than we give in the form of God's Love.

John Morrison: Alabama/Louisiana Delegation
Fayette First United Methodist Church
Fayette, Alabama

University United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Our trip to Latvia in June was an excellent mission trip in that we accomplished more than we intended and we learned more than we could have imagined. The Latvian people were, by and large, very generous, sweet, loving and happy. They were as excited for us to be there as we were to have arrived. The kids we taught in Vacation Bible School (VBS) were as excited and workmanlike as you will ever find in a teenage group.

The greeting we received at the Kuldiga Methodist Church was hearty. There were some of the VBS kids and many of the adult leaders and lay teachers present at 4:00 p.m. on a Monday. Some of the kids had been present two years ago and Kristen's pictures brought a smile to their faces. Others laughed at how young those ladies looked in the snapshots. When you are a teenager, 2 years is a LONG time.

The VBS theme was, "Talking to God" in which we learned about the why, how, what, and when of prayer. We had our VBS games, crafts, lessons and (my favorite) snacks every day. The older girls then got busy scraping, priming and cleaning the youth room. You have never seen youth respond to a work request like this. They were laughing and grabbing old cleaning clothes and getting right to work. They worked hard and took pride in what they did.

It was fun to watch (no, Chris didn't wear women's clothes and help out!).

We used our two adult Bible Studies (Wednesday and Friday) to focus on "What is the Church" and "Three Things to Living a Godly Life." In both cases, there was lively discussion/disagreement between the participants.

Sunday was our Church service where we celebrated the youth and the VBS as well as honored the Bible Study group. We exchanged gifts and told each other how much the work that had been done and the prayers and friendships meant to one another. We left enough money to buy an Oscar Schmidt guitar for the youth to use. We had previously paid for the repainting of the façade of the church and the supplies to fix up the youth room.

Saying goodbye was not easy. The people were wonderful and we couldn't help but feel like we were leaving a place that needed us and desperately needed God. Pray for these people. Pray for their country. Pray for their church.

Chris Maulden
Kristen Boshears
Norris TN



Christian friend of Edgars who is repairing the facade.



Completed work on the facade of the Kuldiga church.



Chris Maulden singing with the youth on Sunday morning.

*Best wishes to
Chris
& Kristen
who will be
married on
December 26 at
Norris UMC!*



Kristen Boshears teaching VBS the first day.

We went to Latvia in order to meet the people there. Good Shepherd United Methodist Church has been a connecting congregation with the congregations in Matras and Tasi since 2004. We are located in **Waldorf, Maryland**, twenty-five miles southeast of Washington, DC. For several years we exchanged greetings and prayers and financial support with our friends in Latvia, but no one from our congregation had been to Latvia. Five of us set out on July 25 to spend two weeks meeting people, building relationships and sharing in ministry. We would have the privilege of visiting several of the churches, meet pastors and leaders, and spend a week as helpers/counselors for the children's week at Wesley Camp.

The younger ones in our group among us were interested in meeting with the youth and children at the camp. The camp setting was ideal for this: there would be lots of teenagers who would be at the camp as "shepherds" for the children. There would be lots and lots of children at the camp (ages 6-14) this week, 110 in all plus the camp staff and leaders. Despite the barriers of language and experience Emma Larsen, Alina Busch and Sarah Kells made many new friends during the week. They hope to return again sometime.



Eating time at Camp Wesley. There were so many campers that many meals were served and eaten outside. (Waldorf, MD)

Bob Kells was particularly interested in offering puppets to the camp and providing the campers instruction in their use. Bob and his daughter, Sarah, take part in a puppet ministry at Good Shepherd Church. Our group brought six puppets as a gift to Wesley Camp and Bob was able to work with some of the campers and program staff to show them how to make the most of the puppets and new puppet stage.

For my part, I was primarily interested in the connections we could make with the United Methodist congregations and leaders we would be meeting during our visit. I met and spoke with several ministry students and pastors. We were able to share some of the issues and successes we face in the church and pastoral ministry. I was impressed with the challenge these pastors face. We take our religious freedom for granted in the U.S. In Latvia, they preach the gospel to people that have been told there was no God. Now with a small number, they are rekindling the hope and possibilities that faith in Jesus Christ makes possible.

Our trip took an unexpected turn near the end of our trip. I was walking on my own at the camp and fell on some loose board behind one of the old farm buildings. It quickly became apparent that something was wrong. Dan Randall and others took me to the regional hospital in Liepaja where x-rays show a badly broken leg. I spent four days in the hospital there before I was able to come back to the U.S. for surgery. (Thank goodness for the insurance policy available through GBGM). It was disappointing to end the trip in this way, but I found that God was working even in such misfortune.

We all came home excited about what we'd seen and done, and grateful for the friendships we had made with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We look forward to building further upon what we did this summer.

Steve Larsen, Pastor
Good Shepherd UMC
Waldorf, Maryland



Pastor Steve Larsen learns the hard way that he needs to mind the warning tape.



Emma Larsen, Alina Busch, Rev. Edgars Sneiders, Bob Kells and Sarah Kells at the church in Matras. (Good Shepherd UMC)

Seven youth and three adults from the Dakotas Conference (North and South Dakota) arrived at Wesley Camp full of anticipation, curiosity, and enthusiasm. We knew little about the location of the camp or what work we would be doing. Our trip over was somewhat challenging for us and those in Latvia due to airline problems and the team splitting three ways and arriving on three different days! Our team was compiled from across the Dakotas, and our plans to 'build the team' in Copenhagen vanished, however when finally all together, the youth quickly assimilated into a wonderful team who were anxious to immerse themselves in their new environment.

We found ourselves doing general work around the camp, and spending wonderful time meeting new friends as we worked and worshiped together. Manager Dan Randall had requested that each group represented do a "country night" so we did a Dakotas' Night complete with cowboy hats and bandanas, and taught them a little

line dance. The food, worship and fellowship were wonderful.

All of us on the Dakotas Team found ourselves so blessed by the relationships that were formed. We toured Riga and the Occupation Museum as well as the Holocaust Memorial. These were understandably difficult in some ways for the youth, but we were all so happy to have the opportunity to hear and learn the history of our new friends.

We all took home much more than we brought and we are looking forward to returning to Wesley Camp the summer of 2011.

Team participants: Brian Anderson, Cynthia Konechne, Courtney Wilson, Sara Heverly, Kayla Price, Lindsey Wicklander, Samantha Tonak, Diane Weller, Sandi Wicklander and Rev. Lou Whitmer

Youth and Adult Team from the Dakotas Conference

Rev. Lou Whitmer is pastor of the Kimball UMC which is part of the Kimball Protestant Parish in Kimball, South Dakota.

This mission team was comprised of youth from across the Dakotas Conference...Rapid City, SD, Kimball SD, Washburn, ND and Lisbon, ND

Pastor Lou says, "The Dakotas Conference is large in territory and small in people!"



No question about it! The Partner Church program, initiated by the General Board of Global Ministries after the fall of the Soviet Union has been a key to United Methodism's growth. Our denomination had the opportunity to enlist United Methodist Churches in the U.S.A. to partner in opening churches in the former Soviet Union countries. It was later extended to include other countries in Africa and Asia.

Initially a local church could become a 'partner' by covenanting to give \$300 per month (\$3,600 annually) for three years. The monthly support would pay the salary of a pastor, provide the pastor a place to live, and provide funds to rent a building to open a congregation. "What a missional bargain!" many pastors and laity reasoned. I remember it was an opportunity for a local United Methodist congregation to really connect with the Wesleyan affirmation: "The world is my parish."

A prototype of the Partner Church program was on the same order of the World Methodist Councils' Evangelism efforts to organize new congregations, a model which worked in Latvia and extended subsequently to other countries.

The need for our denomination and the Wesleyan family to extend the breadth of our church's reach had become more and more evident and I affirm the joint work of both Global Ministries (GBGM) and the World Methodist Council. After all I had served for 10 years on the World Methodist Evangelism Committee with Dr. Alan Walker of Australia, the first global head, and subsequently with his successor, Dr. Eddie Fox.

I am convinced that the Partner Church program of Global Ministries and the Connecting congregation program of World Evangelism have provided United Methodism and the Wesleyan family of faith to move in areas where we hitherto had no witness at all, as well as extend our Wesleyan faith in places where the church had already been in mission.

Churches that Partner and Connect are vital links to Methodism's extension of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and I heartily endorse the commitment.

A congregation (or even an individual) makes a three year commitment to adopt a Partner, giving financial and prayer support to either establish a new congregation OR to support an existing congregation. Presently a church, or a 'cluster of congregations, usually 2, 3 or 4 will covenant to faithfully pray and financially support this effort.

Allow me the personal privilege at this point for a witness. While serving as senior pastor of Metropolitan Church in Detroit, a congregation I served from 1974-1998, we seized the opportunity in 1991 to become a covenanting partner in the reopening of United Methodism in Latvia at Liepaja. As the first one to connect through WME, it was a privilege for me to go in September 1992 to preach in a three night evangelistic effort. Subsequently a Volunteers in Mission team would go to help repair the building. Later the Epworth Bell Choir of Metropolitan would go to Liepaja and other churches in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to give concerts and to witness. The Choir presented the Liepaja Church with a set of handbells, a \$15,000 gift which has continued to serve and to witness.

However, we did not stop after the first three years. We have continued every year since (for 18 years) to partner and connect with Liepaja. In addition we have provided scholarships for Latvia ministerial students at the Baltic Seminary including at least 4 current pastors. Metropolitan's support has widened to include the Wesley Camp and the ministry to the unwed mothers (Hope Center) initiated by Rev. Gita Mednis.

I need to emphasize that a commitment to Partner or Connect with a congregation is an effort to do more than to send a monthly check, it means we offer prayer support, volunteer to find ways to be in mission with our Partner congregation. And I often remind churches and mission committees that when we are an instrument of God and the church to start a new congregation, it is my prayer that the experience will lead us beyond a three year commitment. Metropolitan is but one of several churches (e.g. William C. Martin UMC of Bedford, Texas and Riga First and our most recent Friends of Latvia and Lithuania host in Maryville, TN who have been the longtime connection with Riga Second). The spiritual reward of seeing a local congregation emerge, grow and serve Christ encourages and strengthens a local congregation in the American church.

For the past decade I have been privileged to work with the General Board of Global Ministries Partner Church program. The economic crisis that has hit the USA churches has been doubly critical in the Baltics. As GBGM has been forced to cut back staff and support because local churches have been forced in so many communities to fail to meet apportionments, ***we need Partner congregations more than ever.*** Many of our churches in Latvia and Lithuania now need two Partners to connect with the desperate financial need facing (continued on page 15)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's a pleasure to share some reflections of the 2009 Annual Conference in Latvia that took place August 21-23 in Kuldiga UMC from an office worker's standpoint. Since every single year we have had a conference just in Liepaja or in Riga, then the district office was really surprised by the courage and confidence shown by little Kuldiga UMC who responded quickly and positively to the quiet calls for a town in Latvia that would be willing to "change the history" and host a conference. I must say that we are happy with the choice to hold our annual meeting in Kuldiga because all went smoothly and with almost no hitches (I will tell you later about that "almost" part).

As far as I know the Latvian Conference is the last of all in our region and to me as the office manager who needs to translate all reports into English it is an advantage, because I have the translation work spread out through the year (in March I usually have to translate reports for the FOL gatherings in US). Firstly, it means less work to be done in a particular time of the year, secondly, I can refresh my written English on regular basis – at least twice a year.

This year the preparation work had some improvements from last year (as the office learned from own mistakes) because this was only the second Annual Conference for our new staff led by DS Gita Medne. This time we were wiser in planning and organization, although not always we were able to get done all that was planned, because of our own limitations...

Of course, there were some flaws too - due to miscommunications and office appliance disorders. However, it was a learning experience (as it always is) for us all to make use of it in the future and to be better next time. As in that famous saying – God has called us and is qualifying us on the go! We are thankful to God for leading us through the preparation stages in good health and for not letting us lose confidence in Him and in one another no matter how difficult it seemed sometimes.

This was not only just the second Conference for the new district office but also it was led by a new Bishop – Christian Alsted from Denmark. We had heard some stories before that our new Bishop is quite strict in following time limits and that he is VERY tall (ca. 6'6") and that is quite a big difference from the last Bishop who was ca. 6'... It meant that he will always be the tallest guy in the room when visiting Latvia UMC! Actually, now that we have met with our Bishop and spent time together all we will remember is his good, devoted heart, sharp mind and faith in God. I have a feeling that Latvia will have a good cooperation with him during his tenure in the Nordic and Baltic Episcopal area.

It seems that the Conference started and was finished in a moment – all went as planned, except on one late afternoon our work was interrupted by two kids on bikes who threw some pepper gas into the open windows of the church we sat in and ran away, so we were forced to go out for 30 minutes and breath some fresh air. As Bishop later reflected upon that – sometimes it is needed for the church to go out in the streets! That half hour was spent singing praise songs near the church – to me it was the first time to play guitar on the street near church and I liked it! It had that feeling that this way you can testify to people about how great is our God.

This year our DS suggested that we invite 2 representatives plus Pastor (instead of one plus Pastor) from each congregation to the Conference so they could get to know each other better and more people would get acquainted with the structure and organization of Annual Conferences. We have come to a conclusion that a chance to see what is going on on the higher levels of church organization really helps people to move forward in local churches, because they get a broader look at things, a better understanding, a more clear guidance.

Besides our own Conference attendees we had some guests also – DS of Lithuania, John Campbell, our friends Joe Acker and Charlie Clark and students Jennifer and Andrew from US. We are thankful for all the support and work done by Joe and Charlie, as well as the work done by the students in the summer in Latvia. Andrew spent more than 2 months working in the Camp Wesley and Jennifer was a great support to Kristine Vainovska at the office preparing for the Conference. I cannot miss out and not express our gratefulness on the devotion of our missionaries while working in Latvia who received a standing applause during Conference for all the sacrifices and input to get everything done despite the birth of their baby and tough tasks to be done at Camp Wesley.

As I reflect and think about these 3 days in August spent in Kuldiga. They seem as a plateau that has been reached, everyone has been greeted upon reaching it, given directions and encouragements, and received farewell to meet again next year. Like a big family we reunited, shared stories, had fun, made some serious (and some – not so serious) decisions, thanked everyone for coming and left with a hope in our hearts that next year will bring us more great experience, challenges and love to share with others.

May God lead you and bless you all!

In His name,

Rihards Germans
Office Manager
UMC in Latvia

Latvian Church Empowers New Worship Leaders

with help from North Alabama Conference
(Written: 8/25/2009 for NAC e-Voice)

A group of six musicians from the North Alabama Conference recently traveled to Camp Wesley, near Liepaja, Latvia, to offer a workshop for worship leaders of the Latvian United Methodist Church.

The group was invited to lead the event by Dan and Courtney Randall, missionaries serving in Latvia from the North Carolina Conference. Dan is director of Camp Wesley, a project well known to our conference, and Courtney is Director of Christian Education for the Latvian UMC.

The invitation was extended to Bob Bentley, a regular visitor to Latvia through the Alabama Young Adult Chrysalis Community's support of Baltic Chrysalis. It was an invitation Bentley gladly accepted. In the months that followed, it was decided that a worship band would round out the team to lead the workshop. That was easy—Bentley is a member of the Embers Praise Band at Lester Memorial UMC in Oneonta.

The workshop began on a lovely summer evening in June and lasted four days. Most of the participants were youth and young adults eager to liven worship in their local churches.

Besides Bentley, four other team members had roots in Lester Memorial: Mitchell Nelson, who currently plays keyboard for the Bridge Band at Tuscaloosa First UMC, James BeShears, a guitarist for the Bridge Band, John Carl Hastings, a staff member at the Auburn Wesley Foundation, and Anna BeShears, recently named Director of Youth and Children's Ministries at Lester Memorial. The sixth traveler was Rachel Sparkman, who works with youth at The Bridge in Huntsville. She is the daughter of the Rev. Robert and Debbi Sparkman of Hartselle First UMC and Bentley's niece.

Several of the team members blogged or posted updates about their journey on their favorite social networking sites. Here are some thoughts shared by John Carl Hastings.

"When I think about the most desirable destination for missions, Latvia isn't necessarily what comes to mind. The trip, however, turned out to be one of the most profound and formative experiences of my life. In the five days we spent at Camp Wesley, God seemed to move in all that we did: in the worship, the discussion, the laughter and even the silence.

Though my job prevented leaving until Thursday, the majority of our team left on Tuesday, June 23 for Riga. After hours upon hours of traveling on Thursday and Friday, I met with Bob, our team leader, at the airport and we departed in our rental Europcar. Our goal for this trip was to conduct a workshop on leading worship for

young adults in the Latvian United Methodist Church. Our brothers and sisters that we met were all in their late teens and early twenties, and quickly bonded with our entire team.

The workshop began on Friday morning as I was still traveling, but lacked the traditional workshop feel that I associate with such things. What started as a semi-formal learning experience was transformed into simply a time of singing and worship. Our team started out leading, but gradually incorporated our newfound Latvian friends into our "band." After teaching and worshipping through song, we would gather to discuss the many facets of leading worship—from what worship is and why we do it to the difference between worship and performance.

Perhaps it is cliché to say, but though we went to Latvia to teach about leading we ended up learning just as much as we taught. Because of Soviet oppression, the Church is only slowly beginning to take root again. As a result, the young adults we fellowshiped with worshipped with display a passion that is normally unmatched in our culture. Unlike North Alabama, most people are not assumed to be Christian or go to church. Their faith was as genuine a commitment as I'd ever seen.

We left Camp Wesley on Sunday and took a few days to travel around Latvia and Lithuania, visiting local monuments and restaurants and simply enjoying the fellowship that God allowed us to have with each other. It was week of exhausting traveling and service, but I was truly shown God's love by the Latvians we met, as well as the community we experience when we meet our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world."



Young adults from North Alabama share their gifts with new friends in Latvia.

Greetings from Gita

Rev. Gita Mednis

Dearest Family in Christ on the other side of the Atlantic,

Greetings in the wonderful name of Jesus our Lord. The summer has sped by and has brought many wonderful moments of fellowship with some of you. Some of our friendships have deepened, some renewed and some have begun. We continually praise our mighty God for this wonderful gift of fellowship with you.

The summer was filled with a variety of camps. Many children and young people had the opportunity to live together in Christian fellowship, hear the good news of the Gospel and pray together.

We rejoice that Kuldiga accepted the challenge and honor of hosting our Annual District Conference. Our new Bishop inspired us and challenged us to continue to be an active presence in our communities. The Conference was a wonderful time of togetherness as the Body of Christ.

Two of our clergy are on maternity/motherhood leave. Our family grew – pastor Ilze Paukse gave birth to a little boy, Reinis in June and pastor Inese Budnika gave birth to a little girl, Marta in August. We will all remember Marta's birthday because her birth was announced at our Conference. Joe Acker, stood up and had the honor of congratulating and informing pastor Arijs Viksna on the birth of a new granddaughter.

At our Annual District Conference, some changes were made to the appointments to accommodate the vacancies left by the new mothers. Ansis Paukse was appointed as Local Pastor serving Jelgava congregation, Gunta Grina, Local Pastor serving Kuldiga congregation, Vivita Barenite, student local pastor part-time serving Kuldiga, Janis Grunte, student local pastor part-time serving Riga 1.



It was a good summer despite the severe economic crisis and chaos that Latvia is experiencing. Each congregation has been trying to find means and opportunities to help those in desperate straits. We ask for your continued prayers for our congregations, our ministries and for our beleaguered country. Experts say that next year will be worse.

We are together with you every Sunday when we light our candles of Thanksgiving for you and ask God to bless each one of you and your congregations.

May God continue to guide us, strengthen us and fill us with His Holy Spirit as we go into the world to be His love, His light, His mouth, His hands and feet. Together we can be both the light and salt of His Earth.

Gita



Latvia children and youth with Alina Bush, third from the left and Emma Larsen, third from the right. (Good Shepherd UMC, Waldorf MD)



Cyndy Wright (Alabama) at the Hope Center in Liepa.

White's Chapel UMC Texas



Madeline Payne made friends quickly with Krista and Guarda at Camp Wesley.



Conner led one of the crafts, showing the kids how to make Lanyards. The beads were a big hit. "Hot Potato" was a fun game to play outside.



Vivita, the Camp Activities Director, organizes face painting for the kids. It was a big hit with the boys and girls.



We were greeted by our friends Oskars, Evia, Gustav (5) and a new baby girl (who was born 4 days after we arrived).



Richard and Julie built a puppet theater to accompany the puppets provided by Good Shepherd UMC.



We walked to the beach each day for some fun in the sun. The water was much colder than the water in Texas, but Conner and Madeline did not seem to care.



Kaspars and Yanis helped Richard with rewiring the pump house and garage.

Richard and Julie Payne Connor and Madeline



Julie, Madeline, Richard, Conner Payne



Veronica and Nadia expressed God's love through hugs and smiles.



Dan ran the camp while Courtney took care of their new baby girl in Riga. Madeline gave Dan tips on "raising little girls."

White's Chapel (Southlake TX)



The crowd sings the supper prayer before eating.



Clean-up was as much of a chore as cooking for this many youth! Each group took turns doing the dishes.



The Kitchen Crew did a great job feeding a crew this large. Three hot meals were served each day. Madeline enjoyed working in the kitchen putting butter on the bread.



"At camp, I met a girl named, Dart, and many other cool people that I got to hang out with each day. It was really easy to make friends in Latvia."

-- Conner Payne

On our first trip to Latvia we only stayed in Riga. This time, we visited both Hope Centers. We spent a day at Liepa, Ciesis, and Sarkani, UMC. We traveled from the sea to the forest, and saw a few castles along the way. Oh, what a beautiful country! We were also very honored by an invitation for dinner at Evija and Oskars' home in Jelgava. We had met this couple on our first trip to Latvia, and they had stayed with us during the Choir trip. We left Latvia already planning our next trip.

Richard & Julie Payne,
Conner & Madeline



Madeline showed the kids how to make "cat whiskers" and many other fun things with string.

"even though we didn't speak the same language, we still found a way to play lots of fun games"

-- Madeline Payne

Partner Church Program (continued from page 10)

pastors and congregations. The economic crisis facing America is a call to committed congregations to pray and support our 'infant congregations' we have given birth to in Latvia. If your church is finding it difficult to continue a partnership by itself, find a sister church to join with you.

This past year as been a difficult one for me as I have undergone major cardiac surgery but as God is renewing my strength, I know that God can strengthen and encourage our Latvian partners as we move forward.

We are in a congregational time-frame when churches begin to plan and prepare budgets for 2010. It is vitally important that leaders like our Friends of Latvia make sure that the missional needs of our Partners in Latvia

continue to be included in our 2010 missional outreach as we fulfill the call of the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, to "go into all the world" to proclaim the Good News that God has sent us a Saviour!

Thank you for all you and your congregation are doing to strengthen the Gospel's call and claim!

JOY-fully,

Dr. William K. Quick (Bill)
GBGM Partner Church Coordinator

The Last Page



Dana Nance
newsletter editor

Planting Seeds of Hope

Five Star & Global Mission
Partners Programs

I recently learned that **Step 1** of The Five Star Program is a Central Texas Conference initiative designed to serve as a starting point for mission involvement by recognizing the churches that accomplish the following requirements in

a given calendar year:

- * Give 100% of assigned apportionments.
- * Have an ongoing program of mission education.
- * Serve the local community through outreach
- * Contribute to a conference, national, international or UMCOR Advance Special
- * As a step toward becoming a Global Mission Partner, make a financial contribution of any size to a United Methodist missionary

Step 2 is a Covenant Relationship: The Covenant Relationship Program of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) enables congregations to establish a mutual relationship with a GBGM-trained United Methodist Missionary. Your congregation will provide financial and prayerful support of missionaries and grow in understanding the context in which these missionaries serve.

- * Make a financial commitment of \$2,500 or more per year (or \$5 per church member per year). Partner churches are encouraged to make a three-year commitment.
- * Your congregation will be notified when a visit from the missionary can be considered.

Meadowbrook UMC has been a Five Star Church for many years. Hmm, I wondered, why hasn't the church taken this next step? After inquiring of the Outreach Committee, Jim and I were invited to the next meeting to talk about Latvia. We shared about the commitment we have made, told how easy it is to give through the Advance and asked if the church would be willing to partner with us in supporting two GBGM-trained missionaries that we know, who live in Latvia!

Step 3 The Global Mission Partners Program provides an opportunity for congregations to further expand their support of missionaries to include partnerships with missionaries sent out by United Methodist churches in other countries. Through this program, the GBGM recognizes congregations that accomplish items 1-3 in Step 1 as well as the following 3 requirements:

- * Establish a Covenant Relationship in support of a GBGM-trained missionary with \$2,500 or \$5 per church member per year.
- * Pledge support for a Person in Mission sent by a partner church in another country at \$1,000 or more per year (or \$2 per church member per year).
- * Share your experience with two neighboring congregations. <http://gbgm-umc.org/advance/gmp.html>

God has prepared the soil of someone's heart to hear your stories of Latvia. Plant seeds of hope for the Hope Center, Camp Wesley, Pastor's Salaries and the churches in Latvia for indeed "the world is our parish."

Ways to give.....

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

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.

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 your pictures and tell about your trip to Latvia this summer!

Share your pictures on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1416994405&ref=name#/pages/Friends-of-Latvia/76939152110>