

# FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 2; Issue 3

September 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.

## In this issue...

### Page 2

Notes from the Chair

### Page 3

Co-Chair Chat

### Page 4

VIM Trip to Kuldiga

### Page 5

Connecting  
Congregations

### Page 6

Greetings from Gita

### Page 7

Annual Conference  
Reports

### Page 10

Faithful Men

### Page 12

The Last Page

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## Smithfield TX UMC Partners with Cesis Latvia UMC

My heart is filled with joy to announce that on June 15th, 2010 the Church Council at Smithfield UMC in North Richland Hills, TX has approved a motion to enter into a 3-year Partner Church covenant with the Cesis UMC in Cesis, Latvia in compliance with the In Mission Together program. This covenant resulted from the clear and present Spirit at Smithfield UMC and the enthusiastic support of Rev. Lisa Neslony, Church Council Chair Mike Kearby, and Finance Chair Curtis Parker.

The covenant formally began August 1st 2010. We are called to His purpose . . . and we sense the interceding Spirit.

In Christ,  
Randy Tolleson  
[rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)



## Cesis Building Fund

The funding for the purchase of the Cesis United Methodist Church building in Cesis, Latvia is off to a good start. As of September 3, 2010 a total of \$35,427 has been received. This amount, along with a \$35,000 loan, should be enough to cover the cost of the building.

Funds are very much needed to pay the \$35,000 debt. FOL was honored at the Latvian annual conference for its part in the purchase of the Cesis church building. Joe and Linda Acker were called forward to receive recognition for FOL. The presentation included a lovely hand carved map with a metal candle holder in the shape of the cross mounted on it. It also featured a metal representation of the Methodist flame and a small piece of amber in each region of the country where there is a Methodist church. This gift will be shown at the next FOL meeting. Following very complimentary words concerning the efforts of the FOL group in this purchase, the congregation rose for a prolonged standing ovation.





If I could only claim credit for this, I would feel so proud and important. But I can't. I can only think about it and understand that I have been a little part of God's plan for a small United Methodist Church in Kuldiga, Latvia.

What I am referring to is a goal set during the recent Latvia/Lithuania Initiative Conference in Lancaster, Ohio. God

asked me to seek one church that could work through GBGM or World Vision to support a church in Latvia.

When God planted this seed, I had no idea how it would be accomplished. I just thought that I must seek churches that are not currently supporting a new church through World Vision or GBGM and share my story. If I could share the story of the Kuldiga UMC, God would take care of the rest.

It all began when I attended a Volunteers in Mission Leaders Training at a large church in Knoxville, TN. At the beginning of the meeting we were asked to identify ourselves and tell of our VIM team experiences. I told about my past VIM trips to Latvia and the team I was leading there in June. After the end of the meeting, Suzanne came up to me and asked questions about my June trip to visit Kuldiga Latvia. She asked if it was possible to go on the trip. The airfare had already been purchased, so I informed her that I would need to check with the airlines. Two days later Suzanne was a part of the June 2010 team to Latvia. She is a member of the Maryville UMC and on the mission committee at the church. Suzanne mentioned that her church needed to be more involved in foreign missions and she would like to see this happen.

During the prayers and celebrations time during the service at my home church, I announced the addition of Suzanne to our team and marveled that God had sent her our way.

It was my thought that perhaps the Maryville Church could become a sponsor of the new Cesis congregation in Latvia. Upon emailing Kristine Vainovska at the District Office in Riga, I found that Suzanne could travel with Rev. Gita Mednis to the first meeting of the Cesis UMC in their new sanctuary.

While we were in Latvia and after Suzanne had experienced the need at Cesis, I learned that a United Methodist church in Texas had become a sponsor of the Cesis UMC. Reporting this to Suzanne with regret, I informed her that her church could become a second sponsor of Cesis, support specific needs at Cesis or join our group of three small Methodist Churches that was currently supporting Kuldiga UMC.

Back in Tennessee Suzanne presented her recommendations to the Maryville UMC Mission Committee and they have decided to join our Kuldiga Partnership. She is also working through several Sunday School classes to provide support for the new Cesis congregation.

Isn't our God an awesome God! He uses us in ways we can never imagine and uses all the willing people of the world to accomplish His Will. Praise God that He made me a small part of this process.

How is God using you to accomplish His will in Latvia?

Jim Hayes, Chair  
jrhayes46@bellsouth.net



Picnic sponsored by the Kuldiga UMC for our team members.

## River of Living Water

When you think back to your most cherished moments the hugs and smile of our friends in Latvia are certainly near the top of the list. Two more United Methodist congregations have connected to begin making more cherished memories in this river of living water.

The Smithfield UMC church council in North Richland Hills, Texas has approved a 3-year In Mission Together Partner Church Covenant with the Cesis UMC. A letter was drafted from the Smithfield congregation to the Cesis congregation asking permission to join with them in our journeys of faith, love, and hope. Planning is underway for the first covenant trip to Cesis on or about June 8th, 2011.

These congregations are living Paul's guidance to the Romans in chapter 12; verse 10: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly

love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the LORD. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."



Imagine the miracles large and small that these brothers and sisters will witness and reveal. They'll see evil falling and the Truth revealed. Pray that they will have no hesitation in speaking their witness of these things.

Randy Tolleson  
rstolleson@att.net

Several women from Martin United Methodist Church in Bedford, TX met Gita, Kristine and their hosts for breakfast while they were in Texas in April.



Pictured are Margie Greenhoe, Dana Nance, Dana McCarty, Gita Mednis, Joy Cook, Roxanne Dougherty, Carol Fisher, Kristine Vainovska, and Linda Robinson.

Are you a Tom Thumb or Randalls shopper? Did you know that 1% of your purchases can be used to support the reemerging church in Latvia?

Your price and discount remain exactly the same and Tom Thumb/Randalls contributes the 1% to help. It couldn't be easier.

Give the Tom Thumb / Randalls folks this number "Charity 12384" to link up. If you aren't using the Reward Card then sign up!!

(Note . . . if you already have your Reward Card linked to a charity this is not a request to disconnect that linkage)

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:23-25

OUR CONNECTION THROUGH CHRIST

In June 2010 I was the leader of a Volunteer in Mission team to visiting a small United Methodist Church in Kuldiga, Latvia. The team represented four United Methodist Churches and one non-denominational church in Tennessee. As leader of the group, I was the only team member with prior experience in Latvia. From the time we landed in Riga, Latvia, and through our time with members of the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, God's presence was felt by all the members of our team.



The team at the Zageri Farm and our hosts (near Kuldiga).

Two experiences were especially significant during our visit. In Riga the team attended the Riga First United Methodist Church, pastored by Rev. Gita Mednis. During the service the Lay Leader projected music and Bible passages on the church wall for the members of the congregation. The language was new to us, but the meaning was the same as in our churches in Tennessee. When the Lord's Prayer was projected on the wall, our team immediately knew what it was and began reciting the prayer in our own language. And later when the song, "Here I Am, Lord" was projected on the wall, the team began to sing in our own language. The tune and the meaning were the same for the team as the Latvian members of the congregation. As I sang the words along with our Latvian friends, tears welled in my eyes and I felt a connection to these Latvian Methodist Christians who are different and yet the same. We are all connected by our faith in Jesus Christ and our Methodist heritage.

Another experience during our visit related to

team finances. I have been to Latvia three times and team member expenses have been around \$2,000 for each team member. In addition to this amount our churches contributed additional amounts of \$500 to \$1,000 for work at the Kuldiga church and extra expenses. As a detailed person, I planned the team expenses for our trip and did not expect very much surplus money. God had other plans for our money and by the end of our time with the members of the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, we had spent \$1,000 more than expected for renovations to the church sanctuary. Still, when I analyzed our expenses at the end of the week, I realized that the team had brought \$2,500 more than was needed to complete our trip. The team prayerfully sat down and discussed ways we could use the money to help support the ministry of the

Kuldiga ministers and also support a new start-up congregation in another Latvian city and the

HOPE Center for unwed mothers. God had taken our money and multiplied it in ways we had never expected. He had used



Team members on a brick bridge in Kuldiga.

money sent by members of our Tennessee congregations in ways to further His Kingdom in Latvia. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Jim Hayes, Team Leader  
 VIM trip to Latvia,  
 June 11 – 21, 2010  
 jrhayes46@bellsouth.net

**Latvia United Methodist Churches  
and their Connecting Congregations**

<b>LATVIA UMC</b>	<b>SISTER CONGREGATION</b>	<b>CITY, STATE</b>	<b>CONTACT PERSON</b>
Cesis	Sweetwater UMC	Sweetwater, TN	Rev. Carl Oaks, pastor
Cesis	Smithfield UMC	N. Richland Hills, TX	Randy Tolleson
Jelgava	Middlebrook Pike UMC	Knoxville, TN	
Kuldīga	Norris UMC	Norris, TN	Jim Hayes
Kuldīga	Sinking Springs UMC	Clinton, TN	
Kuldīga	Wears Valley UMC	Wears Valley, TN	
Kuldīga	Maryville First UMC	Maryville, TN	
Liepāja	Metropolitan UMC	Detroit, MI	
Liepa's Latvian	First Tullahoma UMC	Tullahoma, TN	
Liepa's Russian	State Street UMC	Bowling Green, KY	
Mātras	Joy SS Class	Hermitage, TN	
Paplaka	Canton UMC	Canton, GA	Danny & Vickie Lindsey
Riga 1st	Martin UMC	Bedford, TX	Ross & Mary Carnes
Riga 2nd	Fairview UMC	Maryville, TN	
Riga Russian		Doesn't have yet	
Sarkaņi	First UMC	Trussville, AL	
Tāši	Lakeland District	Enniskillen, Northern Ireland	

Please send name/e-mail for contact person to Dana Nance [djnance@sbcglobal.net](mailto:djnance@sbcglobal.net).

**BISHOP ANNOUNCES PASTORAL APPOINTMENTS**

Bishop Christian Alsted announced the pastoral appointments for the coming year at the annual conference of the Latvian district of the Methodist Church. At the conference Gunta Grina was confirmed as a probationary member of the conference, and Janis Grunte was confirmed as a student local pastor. Special prayers were offered at the conference for all of these as they embark on a new year.

During the conference Bishop Alsted gave several challenging messages. He challenged the pastors to promote growth of the churches and to reach out into their communities. He also challenged the lay representatives to carry back to the churches the need to lead in giving and supporting a culture of giving in the churches. He pointed out that only 20 percent of the annual budget of the district is provided by the Latvian churches.

The appointments are as follows:

Liepajas Church	Arijs Viksna and Gunta Grina
Matras Church	Edgars Sneiders
Tasu Church	Edgars Sneiders
Paplakas Church	Arijs Viksna
Kuldigas Church	Gunta Grina and Vivita Barenite
Jelgavas Church	Ilze Paukse
Rigas 1 Church	Gita Medne
Rigas 2 Church	Andris Vainovskis
Rigas Russian Church	Ansis Pauksis
Cesu Church	Janis Grunte
Liepas Russian Church	Vera Titovica
Liepas Latvian Church	Ilzite Ozola
Sarkanu Church	Ilzite Ozola
Chaplain of Wesley Camp & Community of Faith Planter	Inese Budnika

Dear Friends,

Greetings from sunny, and finally a little cooler Riga! We have experienced one of our hottest, if not hottest summers on record. For those of northern climate, the heat caused many health issues. God was with us and the dire predictions heard from the news media each day fortunately did not materialize. It was hot but not unbearable. Those who got ill from the heat recovered.

I hope this finds you well. Rested, relaxed and ready to start a new year of church activities and opportunities to grow in faith and service.

Next week, we go to Liepa for our Annual District Conference. How exciting to be able to have our conference in Liepa – in the new Sanctuary. Thank you, thank you to all of those who selflessly sacrificed so much to make this a reality. Those of you who were on the first VIM team lead by Gary Fowler to work on the Liepa building, will be amazed when you see how the building has been transformed into a worship space truly honoring God. Holt's group who were present and worked every summer on the transformation, already got a pre-glimpse.

So much to be thankful for, so many thanks to give! The Cesis congregation has been given the gift of having their prayers answered. The congregation is going to have their first vacation Bible school next week, led by a team from the Farmingdale, UMC led by Pastor Wayne Richards. Several of the original members have begun to attend worship and their is growing interest in the community about Methodists. The location is an incredible advertisement for the whole of Methodists in Latvia.

Camps were a great success. It was wonderful to have Steve Elliotts group again to help lead the youth camp. Our youth are growing in faith and in commitment. Our young adults are actively training and empowering our youth to assume more responsibility for leading the youth work. Kristine Vainovska is now our LAMB youth coordinator.

We are grateful for Joe and his team who helped us get Camp Wesley ready for the campers.

Jim Hayes brought a team to work at Kuldiga and that friendship continues to grow! It was a joy to lead their charge conference and see the improvements and hear of the wonderful time spent together.

We had a team come from Great Britain! 17 Methodists from the East Anglia District spent a week at Straupe working on the first floor and the foundation. It was wonderful for us to get to know each other and worship together.

Pastors Ansis and Ilze Paukse with their son visited their connecting congregation in Tennessee. This was a wonderful opportunity to meet, worship with and experience the life of an American congregation.

We are looking forward to the Faithful Men's choir visiting this September as well as a team from Maryville District who will lead Pastor and Lay Seminars.

We are actively looking for ways to reach out and form new faith communities. Several of our pastors have already done some groundwork in this direction.

Administratively, it is becoming more difficult to find enough time to do all that needs to be done. Financially, we face two

major issues along with the ongoing issues.

The first is Kristine Vainovska's future salary. There is no more funding for her. She received her final pay for August. Most of you know how valuable Kristine has been to the church. For the last 3 years, Fairview UMC and the Faithful Men's choir has been providing for her salary. Now there is no more funding. God has called Kristine to the ministry. She is ready to answer the call and hopes to begin her studies in January via the internet. She also wants to continue to serve the church. Kristine at present is working as Youth Coordinator and VIM team coordinator and wants to continue this alongside her studies. If any church has the where-with-all to help fund her salary, we would be able to continue to be blessed by her ministry and gifts.

The second, which has been with us from the beginning is pastors salaries. The number of pastors serving the church is growing --- wonderful news---but a greater strain on the already stretched pastor fund which guarantees minimum wage. The graduating students coming into full time ministry, are saying that they can not possibly live on the wage being paid. They can not afford housing, gas and food from minimum wage. More is being asked from each congregation to cover apportionments, part of the wage tax burden and special donations for Methodist worldwide causes. The rate of unemployed in our congregation is growing and therefore our offerings becoming less. The only way to solve this is to have bigger and more congregations, but this takes time. In scrutinizing the pastors salary fund expenditures and trying to minimize the outlay, we have decided to no longer fund health insurance for the pastors and office staff for next year and also not gift each pastor and their family a fruit basket as a Christmas remembrance and thanks. Nothing else is left but salary and taxes.

There are wonderful positives alongside the problems. We are growing in faith and acceptance in the ecumenical community. I have been invited to speak at more ecumenical gatherings despite being the only woman leader of a denomination. There is an excitement in the church – anticipation that the revival is truly about to begin!

We are all working together in the realization of the Franklin Graham Hope Festival which will take place in Riga in November.

We have wonderful new pastors coming into the ministry. They are young and passionate.

God is truly blessing us in so many ways and you are so much part of the blessing. Every Sunday we continue to light a candle and pray for you. Without your prayers, love, visits and financial help, we would not be. Many would have been left deluded by the existing religious climate and many would not have had the opportunity to experience the love of God along with the agape love of fellowship in Christ.

May our Gracious God continue to bless each and every one of you, your families and your congregations.

Gita Medne  
GitaMednis@aol.com

**TULLAHOMA UMC RECEIVES APPRECIATION**

The annual conference of the Latvian District of the Methodist church was held in the new worship center of the Liepa UMC. This facility, which has been under construction for several years, was accomplished with support of the First United Methodist of Tullahoma, Tennessee. Most of the funds for this construction were provided by Tullahoma and much of the planning and work was accomplished by their VIM teams which made multiple visits to Latvia for this purpose.

The team leader for this project was Holt Cason who not only led the team but was much involved in the fund raising efforts which made this project possible. At the conference Ilzite Ozola, pastor of the Latvian congregation at Liepa, paid tribute to the great work of the Tullahoma church in making the beautiful facility possible. She offered special tribute to Mr. Cason. Her thankful words were greeted by a standing ovation from the packed house attending the conference.

Pastor Ozola also paid tribute to the Farmingdale, NJ UMC for their continuing support of the Hope Center, and their work on the after school study center and on the Straupe facility. Pastor Wayne Richards from Farmingdale was present to acknowledge this recognition.

**WESLEY CAMP BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETS**

The newly constituted board of directors for Wesley Camp in Liepaja, Latvia met for its annual meeting at Riga FUMC on Thursday August 26. The 11 members of the board include Bishop Christian Alsted of the European NE Conference who convened the meeting, the District Superintendents of Latvia and Lithuania, and two members appointed to the Board by each of these officers. The Board also included the chairs of the Wesley Camp committees of the Friends of Latvia and the Friends of Lithuania organizations.

In addition to approving the editorial changes for the by-laws of the board, new officers were selected. The new officers are: Chair, Joe D. Acker representing the Friends of Latvia; Vice-chair, Steffen Tvilling of Denmark; Treasurer, Mary Garber representing the Friends of Lithuania; and Secretary, Gunta Grina of Latvia. Standing committees were appointed to oversee finances, buildings and grounds, and personnel. The financial report was given by Inga Rate who is employed as bookkeeper for the camp. Special note was made of those who provide continuing support to Wesley Camp. The Chair of the Board made a report to the annual conference of the Latvian district. This report was well received.

Joe Acker  
jdacker@centurytel.net

**CESIS BUILDING FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

Purchase price for building: 33,000 Ls (25,000 at closing and 3 payments totaling 8,000 Ls) At the current rate of exchange this would equate approx. \$66,000.

Remaining to be paid: 2 payments of 2,666.66 Ls (at current exchange rate approx. 5,333.33 each or a total of \$10,666.66)

Received to date:	
FROM	AMOUNT
Farmingdale UMC	\$10,000
Individuals	\$10,000
Individuals	\$10,000
Individual	\$ 1,000
Individuals	\$ 500
Martin UMC Genesis SS class	\$ 800
Smithfield UMC	\$ 2,000
Smithfield UMC	\$ 257
FUMC Carrollton, GA	\$ 250
Meadowbrook UMC	\$ 420
Individual	\$ 100
Individual	\$ 200
Total	\$35,527

\$50,000 was sent at closing (\$35 k borrowed and 15K of the gifts) Approx. \$20.5 k should be on hand at the North Alabama conference center. At the current rate of exchange it will take approx. \$10,666 to make the two delayed payments. Roughly \$10,000 could be paid on the loan but I suggest that we wait until the final two payments are made before paying on the loan.

PLEASE NOTE: The rate of exchange will change rapidly if (as) the value of the dollar falls against foreign currencies. I strongly suggest that we consider sending enough money to UMC Latvia to purchase the 5,333.33 Ls immediately. These funds should be held in Lats until payments are due. This would limit our exposure to further devaluation of the dollar. Please let me know how you feel about this.

Latvia Congregation Reports from the Annual District Conference are available from the Latvia District Office for Connecting Congregations interested in receiving the report. Contact the District Office at [methodistu.birojs@gmail.com](mailto:methodistu.birojs@gmail.com).

# Pictures from the Cesis Congregation



## Friends of Latvia to make disciples of Jesus Christ

To:  
**Scott Sellman, Treasurer**  
**North Alabama Conference UMC**  
**898 Arkadelphia Rd.**  
**Birmingham AL 35204**

*Make checks payable to:*

**North AL Conference of UMC**  
**(IMPORTANT)**  
**FOR: CESIS LATVIA INITIATIVE**

## Gift Transmittal

Please complete below and enclose with your gift  
 for the Cesis Building Fund.

### CHECK YOUR PREFERRED METHOD TO GIVE:

- Single gift amount
- 3-Year Pledge amount  
(reminders will be sent)

Your church name and address

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Your name and address  
*(receipt mailed to your address)*

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Hello, Randy

I read your letter – request to join us in our faith journey and be our partner congregation - to Cesis congregation on Sunday's Church service. Your proposal was taken by Cesis congregation with great pleasure and hearty gratitude to God and to all of you.

Cesis congregation is not numerically large yet, but people come to Church services regularly. Actually, the congregation has just now started to develop really, as just now we have obtained a house for the Church.

Before that people came together for Sunday Service in some private house two times a month. Now, in July and August, having our own Church, we are planning to minister Church Service already three Sundays a month. Starting from September, if God will give us such a possibility, we suppose to master Service every Sunday and have Bible studies and prayers evenings on other days every week.

In addition, many of those who are already actively involved have expressed a desire to be baptized and admitted as members of the United Methodist Church. If God will open up the opportunity to find an accommodation in Cesis for my family (unfortunately, each driving from Riga to Cesis pays approx.

\$40), we could already in September start the training courses for those who want to be baptized.

Our pastor is Gita Medne. As she is also the pastor for the 1st congregation of Riga, I have her trust and the authorization of the Latvian United Methodist Church ordained pastors' board to serve as the evangelist in Cesis church. Rigonda Verdenfelde is the manager for Cesis congregation.

Only about 3-4 people from the congregation have access to the internet and email & Frankly, I do not know whether any of the church can speak English.

Currently, my wife Inita helps me with the translations. Myself I have just recently started to learn English and can say just few short sentences. I hope I will know a bit more by the time you will be visiting Latvia. :)

Please find enclosed some photos taken during the Church service last Sunday.

May God bless you richly,  
In Christ's love,  
Jānis Baumanis  
jaanis.b@gmail.com

Members of Cesis United Methodist Church who are so very thankful for their place of worship.



From September 19th through October 1st, the Faithful Men from Fairview United Methodist Church in Maryville, TN will be going to Latvia for our 6th tour in 10 years. It is amazing to us that these people who have a long history of exceptional music, actually want to hear us sing again.

There will be seven of us leaving on September 19th. The rest of the choir will arrive in Riga on September 24th. We are not sure what the early group's assignment will be but mine will be to video tape as many of the pastors as possible. This will be used to create an advertising tool to promote the need to raise funds for the pastor's salaries. I want to be able to show what is not being done because these men and women are not able to invest the time and effort as pastors on a full time basis because they do not make enough to pay their own bills. They either have to rely on a spouse's income or have a full time job outside of the church.

I want to ask them what are the needs of their communities that are not being met, what needs do their congregations have that are waiting for someone to have the time to address and what of their own dreams are still just dreams?

We have to compete with a lot of needs now. There are floods, earthquakes, oil spills, unemployment and a political year that are screaming to our congregations for attention. We have to show that here is one area that one church, one Sunday school or just a few people can make a huge difference with small, regularly scheduled donations to the Advance Special for Pastors' salaries. We can show that their involvement is doing and that they can create a special bond with the pastor they are supporting. We can encourage the sponsors go to Latvia to see first hand what is needed and what they can do. Those of us who have had the privilege of being welcomed in Latvia know this is a life changing event.

I hope to convince the FOL to assign pastors to the various churches represented in the FOL so

that they can be the main source of energy to raise these funds. Having been a part of fund raising for years, I know that having a specific individual to identify is the best way to get people to give of their hard earned funds. If a church is struggling getting the funds, then the rest of us can be there to help.

The Faithful Men have agreed to go to the churches where we are invited to sing in worship to show the video to gain more support. I hope we are successful. We will try to go on mini-tours of smaller churches or have them come together for a larger worship experience. If we get a number of churches to sponsor one pastor, then we have had success.

The Maryville District is going to make a video to be used in the Holston Conference to encourage more churches to have a connecting relationship. This will also enhance the pastor's salary. Allen Garrett is one of the prime movers in this. There is also a calendar for sale that spotlights the different individual Latvian Churches and their pastors. These sell for \$10.



Currently, I am raising funds to continue to pay the salary of Kristine Vainovska. Her contract with the Faithful Men and Fairview expired

in August. We have September covered and there is \$200 donated per month for one year that has been raised for the remaining months. We need more help.

Pray that we are going in the right direction. Pray that we all have success in this important task. We pray and try to listen to see if this is the way that God intended when he involved this choir in Latvia. Also, pray that the men behave in Latvia again.

Chuck Gildrie  
gildrie@gmail.com

To date, this year, we have given a temporary home to 14 young women and their babies, some short term some long. We have directly helped 72 with consultations, used clothing and help finding children's furniture or baby formula.

The most immediate, visible success this year, is a young mother who has been with us for almost 2 years. She refused to continue her education fearing the ridicule she would receive from the other students who would be younger and label her as a "bad girl" for being a teen mother. She repeatedly told us she would run away if we forced her. She has a history of running away from every institution she has been placed in. The Hope Center is finally the place she has accepted as her "home." This past year, the barrier was finally worn down. She attended school regularly, is greatly liked by both the faculty and students and now acknowledges her need for education. The Hope Center Director has been able to convince Social Services to leave her at the Hope Center the coming year. When she reaches 18, her daughter will be old enough for child care and she will be able to finish 12th grade in Riga.

Other highlights are the training of the unskilled staff, young mother's acceptance of the psychologists' teaching and better communications within the organization. The work has also expanded. More services to single mothers were handled in Riga. Consultations and help with Social Services, food staple packages as well as used clothing distribution assumed a greater role in our work. The economic crisis in our country caused more hardships and needs.

Our staff also traveled around small towns giving seminars and advice on pre-natal care as well as newborn baby care.

Our staff also traveled around small towns giving seminars and advice on pre-natal care as well as newborn baby care.

This summer we also were asked to give sanctuary to a young mother with her 2 year old. The mother was repeatedly physically abused by her husband and too afraid to call the police. The husband threatened to take away their son if she complained. Friends asked us to hide her and give her a place to live. She asked that we not contact Social Services for fear that her husband would track her.

She is living with us. She looks like a completely different person having lost the constant fear. She is looking for a job and hopes to be able to pay for her own upkeep.

Due to the financial crisis, even less support has been received from Social Services. Also the municipalities have reduced their social outreach budget so they are extremely reticent in committing funds for sending their young pregnant women who need our help. Their seems to be more of a "get them off our rolls" attitude then general apathy toward their plight.

This past year exceptionally high heating costs were incurred. This made huge demands on our budget which were not expected. We had experts review our heating system in hopes of deterring any unnecessary gas usage.

It has also been a challenging year in our relations with the Orphan's Court. For example, they had sent a young mother and child to our Center to be taught how to take care of herself and child. She became a very caring mother and was making very good progress. She returned to Riga where she was given an apt. in a welfare building. The room was in terrible disrepair. The Hope Center Directors, as volunteers, wanting her to have a clean place to care for her child, remodeled the apt. The church enfolded her into its community. The orphan's court decided to take away the child stating that the Center and church were helping her too much. They, unbeknownst to the mother and us, had promised the little blond, blue-eyed little boy to a family. While the case was being appealed, the

little boy was already placed in the new home and adopted. Such are our existing laws which hopefully will be changed. It was a very heartless decision. It is hard to understand why the government spent money and our time on preparing someone to be a good mother only to take away the child.

This year our goal continues to be to help all those who need help. We plan

to continue to help young mothers in Riga as well as continue to provide the services in Liepa. Several young mentally challenged mothers have been sent to our Center. They have learned to take care of their children and are very devoted mothers. We now see that these young mothers have little chance to keep their babies unless a safe and caring home is provided for them.

This year our goal continues to be to help all those who need help.

We have consulted with Social Services and they would be very interested in having such a facility where these young mothers with child could be

placed. There is no such place in Latvia. The Hope Center Directors are now looking to expand their outreach and utilize the Hope Center's Straupe house as such a group home. The idea would be to offer this home to these young mothers with children until the child is old enough to go to school. These mothers need oversight, but for the most part, they are capable of working as well as caring for their children. They have the capability to learn and grasp new ideas, it just takes them a little longer and the training has to be repeated. This is a new opportunity to serve that is being explored.

The Hope Center is blessed to have both Gita Binane and Rigonda Verdenfelde to lead the ministry. They are tireless and never count hours. They are underpaid but never complain.

It continues to be an honor to be Christ's heart and hands to these neglected and undervalued young mothers and their children. We thank you for all of your help and support.

We thank you in the name of all those you will never meet but whom you have helped and made a difference in their lives. We look forward to the day when this ministry will no longer be needed in our country and our world.

Gita Medne,  
chairperson  
Hope Center  
GitaMednis@aol.com





Note to self: don't schedule a FOL newsletter at the same time Bible Study Fellowship starts a new study and 20 leaders order name tags!

It's been a busy summer! I don't know about you, but I can get so busy with things at home, in our church and com-

munity that it's easy to set aside the needs in Latvia, if someone doesn't remind me occasionally. Hopefully the quarterly newsletter is the reminder that we all need to ask ourselves "Am I doing all that God has called us to do to help our friends in Latvia?"

Pastors Salaries, the Hope Center, Wesley Camp, Kristine's salary, the Cesis Building Fund .... it can all seem overwhelming at times – but GOD!

Our God is Sovereign. He know the needs. He has provided many of us with extra resources to share with others. What a witness to the power of God that we can pool our finances and make a difference in the lives of children and youth, young adults and the elderly across the ocean.

Thank you to those who have listened for God's voice, denied yourself, obeyed God's call and shared of your time and resources to help those in need.

*Matthew 23:40*

*The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*

## Who's going to Latvia in 2011?

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.

September/October - Faithful Men  
Fairview, Tennessee

## Reminders

When you send pictures, please include the names of those in the picture, whether from your church group or one of the congregations in Latvia.

I would still like to make a "Friends of Latvia Photo Album"

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

Thank you to all who submitted articles, reports, and information for this edition of the Friends of Latvia Newsletter.

The Fall Newsletter will be published in December, unless I'm rocking my new granddaughter, who is due in November!



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

### Jeremiah 29:11

"FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU," DECLARES THE LORD, "PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU. PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE."

### Ways to give.....

<http://new.gbqm-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