

FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 3; Issue 2

September 2011

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.



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Latvia Churches Celebrate 90/20 Years

Annual Conference and 90/20 Celebration Report

The Annual Conference of the Latvia United Methodist Church (LAMB) was opened at Camp Wesley August 25, 2011, by Bishop Christian Alstead who presided throughout the conference. The afternoon session was highlighted by the reports of the pastors of the individual congregations. The evening worship service was held at the Matras Church, which is the closest congregation to Wesley Camp. The worship service included some very inspired singing particularly that of Wesley Rouse of the Fairview UMC in Maryville, TN. The sermon by Dr. Jerry Russell, also of Fairview UMC, was very well received by those in attendance. Following the sermon, Bishop Alstead and pastor Edgars Sneiders led the service of Holy Communion.

The business session of the conference took up most of the day on Saturday. The reports covered many of the programs

and services offered by LAMB including Wesley Camp and the Hope Center. The financial report was presented by the new accountant as well as the proposed budget for the next year. The closing remarks by Bishop Alstead were challenging and thought provoking.

(Continued on page 6)

*You were invited to
Celebrate at Camp Wesley
The 90th Anniversary
of the
Methodist Church in Latvia
and
the 20th Anniversary of its Rebirth*

*Saturday and Sunday
August 27-28, 2011*

Sunday Worship at Liepaja UMC

Thank you for your prayers and partnership
in the work of LAMB.

90/20 Celebration,
Hope Center, Bambi Room,
Puppets, Wesley Camp
it's all here in this edition
of the Friends of Latvia
newsletter!



Bambi Room June 9, 2011

Blessings

As another summer winds down, we reflect on the blessing of having friends halfway around the world connected by a Lord expecting love from us. Personally, my summer blessing was to join a team from Smithfield UMC, North Richland Hills, Texas in a visit to the UMC Cesis to see the faces of Christ's love, ready to welcome us with flowers, as we arrived in Cesis. If, as a result of our time together, our friends in Cesis grew in faith half as much as the Smithfield team members, then our prayers were again answered.

We grow busy and underestimate the power of the love Christ has commanded. Cesis reminded us of the power of this river of living water, this Holy Spirit bringing the love of our Christ, that has carried us to this day from

all corners of the globe. This river has brought forth love for centuries and illuminated our hearts when Christians first meet to this day. Thank you for wading into the river and for your contribution of infinite love.



Randy Tolleson
Smithfield UMC, N. Richland Hills TX
rstolleson@att.net
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILBqINWHaPs>



The Might Men always ready to help carry the load.



Jaanis and Inita bringing more joy.



Three Texas ladies in Cesis.



Our new friend ... and she's 105 years young!!! She saw the emergence of the automobile.

On June 22 a Volunteers In Mission Team of eight arrived at Wesley Camp with the hope of completing the first tent platform/cabin/bunkhouse. The team consisted of Drs. John Morrison and Jan Hudson from University United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, LA; Mr. Richard (Bud) Vann from First UMC in Winter Park, FL; Mrs. Cindi Wright from White Springs UMC, in Fayette, AL; Lynn Marie Smith and Shane Fair, from Hannah UMC in Gordo, AL; and Jim Shepherd and Joe Acker from FUMC in Fayette, AL. Joe Acker was the team leader.

The platform was placed on the edge of the apple orchard near the rear of the old garage which is located behind the Holston House. It is approximately 19' square, sits on a very strong footing, 12" by 12" with double re-bars in order to support the eventual cabin/bunkhouse which will be built on it. The foundation is made of two layers of concrete blocks. This allows for plenty of clearance during the heavy rainy season and the winter snows. The framing consisted of treated and untreated lumber purchased locally. A combination of 2" X 6" and 2" X 8" lumber was used to frame the deck/floor. The deck, which will become the sub-floor for the cabin/bunkhouse is made of treated 1" X 8" planks. (All dimensions are approximate equivalents to metric dimensions.)



Although the process was hindered by delayed deliveries and threatening rain, it was completed by Friday, July 1. Weather forecasts predicted 60% chance of rain Wednesday through Friday. It rained all three days in the nearby area but did not rain at Wesley Camp until late Friday, approximately two hours after the project was completed. The team was scheduled to leave on Saturday morning July 2. The accompanying pictures show various stages of the process and the

Saturday morning pressure test when everybody in camp for Wesley Days gathered for a group picture.

In addition to building the platform, the team cut some grass and helped to erect the large tent which was given to Wesley Camp by the Danish UMC. The tent will be utilized during the annual conference of the Latvia Methodist church in August. The team also worshiped with the Liepaja, Riga, and Cesis congregations and delivered handmade blankets to the Hope Center.



The team wishes to express its appreciation to Kristine Vainovska for logistical support, Romans Budnika for help in purchasing materials and working on the platform, and to the youth from Latvia and Lithuania who helped on the project.

A second platform is scheduled to be built at Wesley Camp by a team from Tullahoma, TN in August. This team will also place a drop-in ceiling in the dining hall in the Alabama Building.

Joe Acker
First UMC
Fayette, AL
jdacker@centurytel.net



- Pictures
1. the trench
 2. the blocks
 3. the framing
 4. the group standing on the platform

I find it amazing that I am counted among the privileged to be able to hear the stories and visit with the young girls in Latvia that are choosing to give birth to their children and participating in the Hope Center ministry. God is good to touch these lives and thereby touch ours as well. Doing so is not necessarily choosing the easiest or simplest path for their lives. Yet, the beaming faces and the life evident in the lives of the children speak volumes to the blessings and returns that this ministry is receiving.

The skills learned and the nurturing in a comfortable environment has done much to stir hope in them that life is worth the living. Beyond the training and practical life skills, the girls are learning what it is to serve others outside their nuclear family. They have the opportunity to engage in Bible study, worship and have served the greater church by providing hospitality to pastors and lay leaders gathering in District meetings.

I asked my own Sunday school class(es) here in the US what HOPE means to them. Many tie it to Faith. The Apostle Paul agrees with them writing such verses as 1Cor 13:13 and Romans 5:1-5. HOPE is intimately connected with FAITH which understands that we rejoice in the hope of glory of God, meaning that we have an expectation to see and experience the glory of God personally. What a marvelous thought!

I've wondered at times, how is it that these young ladies have so much HOPE. Many have come through such

difficult circumstances to get to this place. I find my answer in the scripture in Romans. For Paul tells us that through tribulation, perseverance is produced, in perseverance character is realized and character expresses itself in HOPE. And Paul continues reminding us that "Hope does not disappoint."



God is good to provide such blessings through trials. Yet, the question remains, whose hands will our God use to minister and nurture these and future girls in this ministry? Are your hands available? Are you busy right now? Much has been done for numbers of these girls and much is still yet to do. I invite you to organize, to travel or to offer other gifts and talents to the support this ministry. The GBGM Advance # is 3020447 should you wish to give financially.

Another verse speaks loudly concerning the role of HOPE in our walk. Hebrews 6:19 says: "This HOPE we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil."

God Bless,
Jim Nance, Hope Center Chair
Meadowbrook UMC, Fort Worth TX
nancejl@sbcglobal.net



Two young moms and their sons at the Hope Center in Liepa.



Transforming Lives through Bible Study, Hope Center, & Bambi Room



Jim led Bible Study at Riga 1st on Wednesday evening with Rihards Germans & Gita Mednis translating.



Thursday afternoon was spent with the Liepa Hope Center staff, moms and their baby boys.



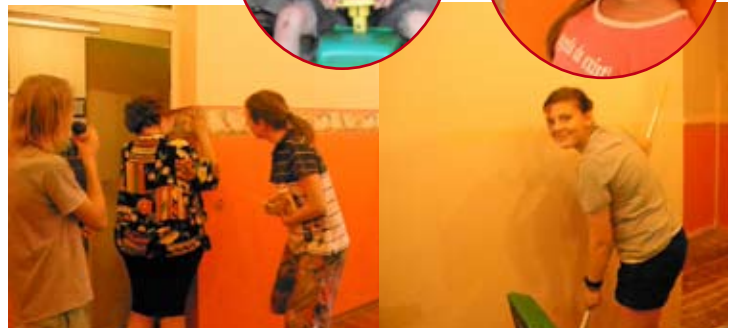
It was decided that we would replace the flooring and paint the Bambi Room at Riga 1st. The room is used as an outreach during the week providing childcare for working moms.



Gita Binane, Rihard Germans and Janis preparing the room for paint and new flooring.



Three years ago when we worked on the sanctuary floor there were four Texans and two Latvians. This year there were two Texans and a whole bunch of Latvians working to transform the Bambi Room for these precious faces. If you would like to help in funding this project you can give online through The Advance <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/advance/Hope Center>. Project Number: 3020447



Sunday morning we attended church at Riga 2nd listening to the Praise Group from Riga 1st sing worship songs. In the evening we attended Riga 1st where the youth put on a puppet show under the direction of Bob Kells and Kristine Vainovska.



On Monday, June 13 the Bambi Room had a party to celebrate their new room.



Bambi Room June 13, 2011

Dear Friends,

In 2006 the Southwest District of the North Alabama Conference began a program of providing vitamins for the elderly in Latvia. We have sustained that program through these years with major assistance one year from Fairview in Maryville. For the last three years the Hannah church with our help has provided the funds for this program which has grown significantly. For each of these years the amount of USD provided has been \$7,000. Hannah provided the funds and the vitamins were purchased locally in Riga.

Last year, knowing that we would not be at Hannah after the winter of 2010-2011, we tried to involve the district again in this project but met with very limited success. This year I have been praying and searching for an answer as to a source of funding for the vitamin program and have not been able to find an answer. When I was in Latvia in August, I discussed this with Gita M. and we agreed that I should let the FOL leadership know that I am no longer in a position to lead in the raising of funds for this program.

The scope of this important work can be seen in the report made at annual conference by the leader of Dia-

conal work in LAMB, Vera Titovica, pastor of the Liepa Russian congregation. It reads:

"During Christmas we continued our Vitamin project led by Joe Acker and Hannah church who provided the necessary funds for us to buy and distribute 600 m. (monthly) doses of children' vitamins, 440 m. doses of adult vitamins, 680 m. doses of vitamins for seniors, 150 m. doses of Calcium pills and 50 m. doses of fish oil. It was all distributed during Christmas time. We cannot express how much it meant for the people in our churches, especially, in the countryside congregations where people are sometimes struggling to buy food, not mentioning vitamins. ..."

My prayer is that someone will step forward to continue this vital health maintenance program.

In Christ,
Joe Acker
jdacker@centurytel.net

Contact Joe if you, your Sunday school class, or church would be able to help fund this program.

(Annual Conference Report continued from page 1)

Following the close of the business session and dinner, a time of sharing the experience and meaning of connecting congregations featured Dr. Jerry Russell and Wesley Rouse. Many of the connecting churches were able to give insights on improving the relationship with their sponsoring churches.

Saturday was a day of fun with each church presenting singing groups, skits, and storytelling. Each of the sessions of the conference was filled with worship and praise.

The final session of the conference was held at the Liepaja UMC on Sunday morning. This was the celebration of the 90 years of Methodism in Latvia and the 20 years since its rebirth. The worship service was led by District Superintendent Gita Mednis. The Methodist Bell Choir performed several outstanding compositions during the service and the combined choirs of the LAMB churches presented some outstanding choral music. Bishop Christian Alstead presented the sermon which was followed by greetings from the leaders of several other denominations in Latvia.

At the close of the service the Bishop announced the appointments for the coming year. A celebration banquet was held after the close of the service.

-- Joe Acker

2012 Pastoral Appointments

Liepaja - Arijs Viksna and Gunta Grina Sologuba
Paplaka - Arijs Viksna
Matras/Tasi - Edgars Sneiders
Kuldiga - Gunta Grina and Vivita Barenite
Jelgava - lay preacher, Janis Baumanis
Riga 1. - Gita Medne
Riga 2 - Andris Vainovskis
Cesis - Janis Grunte
Liepa Russian speaking - Vera Titovica
Liepa Latvian speaking - Ilzite Ozola
Sarkani - Ilzite Ozola
Garoza Project - Ilze Paukse

CESIS BUILDING FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The status of the account 5/30/2011.

Initial loan.....\$35,000
 Balance 5/15/2011.....\$16,066
 Payment 5/26/2011.....\$15,000
 Balance in account 5/30/2011.....\$ 1,066

Balance on loan.....\$20,000
 Balance in account 9/7/11.....\$ 2,626
 Amount needed.....\$17,374

(Gifts received in 2011.....\$4,132)

Thank you for your support in repaying the loan for the Cesis Church Building.



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

Your name and address
(receipt mailed to your address)

A recent business trip to Eastern Europe gave me an opportunity to reconnect with our friends in the Latvian UMC and check in on some “seeds” planted during my first trip to Latvia two years ago. In July 2009, I led a mission team to Wesley Camp to assist with one of the summer camps for children. This year, I was able to “piggyback” on a business trip so I could spend the weekend of June 10-12 catching up with friends in Riga.

When I arrived on a Friday afternoon, I found Rev. Gita Mednis, District Superintendent for Latvia and pastor of Riga First United Methodist Church (UMC), overseeing the repainting and re-flooring of the nursery room at Riga First. Gita visited my home church, Good Shepherd UMC in Waldorf, MD, in May 2010, to share with our congregation some of her experiences about the ways God is working to bring healing and wholeness to the people of Latvia through the UMC and other churches.

It was great to catch up with Gita and to meet Jim and Dana Nance, who were helping finish up the renovation work in the Bambi Room, but I had another purpose in making the trip. I wanted to reinvigorate the puppet ministry we helped start during our summer 2009 mission trip. That year, the mission team from Good Shepherd (Rev. Steve Larsen, his daughter Emma, Alina Busch, my daughter Sarah and me) spent a week at Wesley Camp where we made friends and shared our faith in Christ with some of the nearly 150 young people at there. Sarah and I also taught several volunteers how to use puppets in Christian ministry.



We started with the basics and taught in English. (I still remember how odd it was to say my lines, puppet in hand, and wait for the translation before the next character could speak). By the end of the camp, however, the six young people we worked with performed a sketch in Latvian at the worship service that closed out the camp. That was a powerful affirmation that with God’s help, we had planted some seeds for a puppet ministry to take root in Latvia.

My goal for this year’s visit was to “water the seeds,” so to speak, by sharing more about how the puppets could be used during worship. I had several e-mail exchanges with Kristine Vainovska prior to my trip to work out what we could accomplish in three days. Kristine is a tremendously talented servant of Christ who has a passion for drama. She is also tremendously gifted in working with youth and young adults.



Making props before the show. Pictured are Simone Vainovska, Kristine Vainovska, Reinis and Karlis Ozols.

Kristine invited several youth to come to the church Friday afternoon to work with the puppets. Six young people answered the call. I was delighted to see among the group two of the puppeteers we had trained at Wesley Camp two years before—Karlis Ozols and Simona Vainovska. Friday afternoon



Ramona Vainovska was the youngest puppeteer with the prettiest smile.

and evening we worked on the fundamentals of puppetry. On Saturday we made signs for the song we would perform during Sunday’s worship service. Kristine translated a sketch I wrote for a talent show at La Plata UMC in Maryland into Latvian. The song was still in English but Kristine translated the lyrics into Latvian and put them into a powerpoint show for the service.

Sunday evening came and it was time for the puppets to go on. So how did they do? They were terrific! The sketch went off very smoothly and the song was loads of fun. The puppeteers did a good job making their characters come to life. All the signs went up at the right time in the song too—no small feat for any puppet team. I even had a walk-on role at the end of the sketch as a stern school principal. Thankfully, my only job was to clear my throat and look serious. I think that translates into just about any language.



Post performance photo op. Pictured are (l) to (r) Simona Vainovska, Karlis Ozols, Reinis Ozols, Ramona Vainovska, Tereza Zamberga, Antra Vecankuma, Kristine Vainovska, Bob Kells

The whole weekend was a great success. I left Monday morning thanking God for the chance to reconnect with our brothers and sisters in Latvia. I was also grateful for the chance to work with Kristine and the young people who came out to learn more about puppetry. Like puppet teams everywhere, they are true Christian storytellers who share the good news of Jesus Christ through this wonderful medium. Please continue to pray for them and for creative Christian ministries everywhere that use the arts to tell others about God’s love.

Bob Kells
Good Shepherd UMC
Waldorf, MD
RKells2@verizon.net

On Pentecost Sunday, after church and lunch, we went visiting...

First, we visited a dear lady named Laiga. When we were almost to her home, Janis says, "Everyone get your cameras ready." When we drove up to her house she is playing the accordion. It was so cool! "Everybody Polka" She had a very nice home, very beautiful things. She collected angels and made greeting cards. She had the most awesome flower garden. She was so gracious. The ladies Ilga, Lucija and Laiga had made potato pancakes and homemade jam, fruit juice, and tea. It was served with china, silverware, glassware...and fresh flowers everywhere. Laiga told us she had been very busy and traveling, so she had not been attending church lately. She was so thankful for our visit, to show her we cared about her and loved her.



Pictured: Bill Manning, Laurie Rollins, Lucija, Tommie Wells, in front of home of Laiga Stzazdira, Janis Grunte, Sarah Rollins, Sandy Tolleson, Miranda Manning, Randy Tolleson.

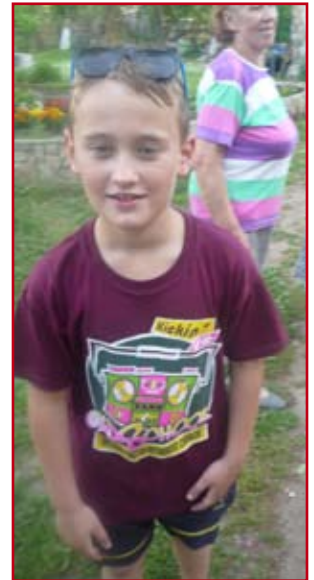
Next, we visit Nanija. She lives in an apartment with two cats. She is the mother of Iveta who runs the lodge where we stay. She was one of the charter members of the Methodist church in Cesis, she is the UMW

of Cesis. Nanija is also in the video we made for VBS. She was standing on the landing in the back of the children while making the video, and I asked Ilga why she is there? Ilga says "the children will be good while she is watching." Oh yes, and she had for us Janis Cheese, mints, chocolates, lemonade... all served with china, glassware, and of course, fresh flowers. Nanija asked us to sing a song for her, so we ALL sang, "Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this Place," and it never sounded so wonderful. We laid hands on her and prayed for her health. She was so happy for our visit. Tears all around. She gave us a gift, chocolate covered cherries...she did not have much but she gave us this gift. She was so special. Back at the lodge, her daughter told us that her mother could not stop talking about our visit.



Pictured: Randy Tolleson and Miranda Manning in the home of Nanija Sproge.

Last stop, a young family with 7 children. Samanta, Edys, Markss, Mauris, Rudis, Janis, and little one. They lived on a property with a very large yard. There were children, adults, dogs, cats, all over, and such a happy place. The yard was so amazing, beautiful flowers everywhere, and vegetables too. Samanta said they love their home and big yard. They play games all the time. This was the home where they held church service before the building was found for the current Cesis Methodist church. They do not have video games, fast food, malls, or cars but they are so blessed.



We went to Cesis to show everyone God's love, yet they were the ones that showed us many times more.

Laurie Rollins
Smithfield UMC
Smithfield TX
laurierollins@texashealth.org



Pictured: Randy Tolleson and Miranda Manning in the home of Nanija Sproge.

Gratitude
turns what we have into
Enough

On Monday, June 20 a group of twelve tearful and tired Latvian friends departed from the McGee-Tyson Knoxville Airport to begin their return trip to Kuldiga, Latvia. Members of the Kuldiga United Methodist Church, the group arrived in Knoxville on Thursday evening, June 9 to begin their visit to the supporting congregations in Norris, Sinking Springs, Wears Valley and Maryville. Five members of the group stayed with host families in Norris and seven members stayed with host families in Maryville.

Planning for the visit began in June 2010 when a mission team from the supporting churches returned from a trip to Kuldiga. During this trip members of the Kuldiga UMC opened their hearts and homes to members of the mission team. On the return trip to Tennessee team members decided that God was calling them to invite our Kuldiga friends for a visit into our homes and hearts. Several fundraisers were sponsored by the supporting churches to pay for the airfare and expenses of the Latvian visitors.

While in Tennessee the group experienced Henderson Settlement, Habitat for Humanity, Second Harvest Food Bank, Dollywood, the Museum of Appalachia, a canoe trip down the Clinch River and attended music concerts



in Maryville, Norris and Knoxville. Group members were treated to a wide variety of foods at covered dish dinners, picnics, and cookouts. They ate meals at several area restaurants, including Cheddars, Cracker Barrel, and Calhouns.

Our guests experienced the lives of their host families and became temporary members of the families. The two Kuldiga United Methodist Church ministers were part of the group and preached at church services at First UMC, Maryville and Norris and Sinking Springs UMCs. The Kuldiga ministers visited with Holston Conference Methodist ministers and discussed ministry with youth and adults. The ministers and group participated in outreach ministries sponsored by the supporting churches and marveled that there were outreach ministries they

could begin in Kuldiga.

The First United Methodist Church in Maryville sponsored a farewell meal and church service. During the service supporting church members and our Kuldiga friends spoke about their wonderful experiences and love for each other. Gunta and Vivita, the two Kuldiga ministers were presented with money to purchase a cross for the Kuldiga UMC upon their return to Lat-



via. After many tears, hugs, and goodbyes the Latvian friends proceeded through security to await their flight back to Latvia. They left many friends in Tennessee who will miss them and long for a time when we can see them again in Latvia.

Jim Hayes, Kuldiga Latvia Coordinator
Norris UMC
Norris TN
jrhayes46@bellsouth.net



The year 2011 has brought many changes for me. The most surprising change has been going on a mission trip to Latvia from July 23rd through August 2nd. The mission trip part was not a surprise as I have been on a few of them before, however, I had never been to Europe and wasn't even sure Latvia was a country before doing more research. All I knew was that the Lord was telling me to go and so I went and took a friend from church, Lauren Sheehan, with me.

Lauren and I made connections in Latvia and visited four ministries while in Latvia. We spent time with a pastor and his wife from Ogre, visited Sparrow's Nest Orphanage, YWAM – Riga, and the Hope Center. At the Hope Center, we were able to connect with the director, Gita. Gita picked us up in Riga and it was a good thing otherwise we would have ended up in Liepaja instead of Liepa which is about 3-4 hours in the other direction as it is along the Baltic Sea. It was also good to learn a little about the Hope Center before arriving there and meeting the ladies.

When we got to the Hope Center, we were greeted by the mothers and their children. Lauren and I walked to the store with Ina, one of the mothers and her two boys. Ina was in charge of buying the groceries that day as she was going to be cooking the meals the next day. We were humbled when Ina insisted that she buy us an ice cream cone and would not take no for an answer. This describes Ina's generous and kind personality well as we would get to know her during our short stay at the Hope Center. Ina was the newest of three to be at the Hope Center as she had only been there a week. She told us that she came to the Hope Center after hearing about it through a child care her son attended in Riga. Ina was in a relationship with her son's father who was currently in jail for drug charges. Lauren and I were able to share Christ's love with Ina who had a hard time understanding the forgiveness that Christ offers. Ina attends a Jehovah Witness Church with her mother and she stated that she did not feel welcome at the church until she "get's her act cleaned up" as she is not married to her children's father.

Lauren and I told Ina that Jesus loves us despite what we have done and He died for our sins. Not only that but he wants to have a relationship with us! We were able to pray with Ina that evening that the Lord would reveal Himself to her.



We enjoyed our time at the Hope Center and getting to know the ladies that the Lord has placed there. Please join us in praying for Gita, the staff, the ladies, and their children at the

Hope Center. May God abundantly bless the Hope Center and those who stay there.

Kristin Pierce
Bridge Church, Omaha, NE
myronandkristin@gmail.com

"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. Jeremiah 29:11

The journey to Latvia was one of many unexpected blessings that required trusting in the plans that the Lord had laid out before us. The idea of Latvia came as a passing thought in a time of prayer and turned into a wonderful encounter of people that we never would have met halfway around the world had we not trusted that God had something there for us.

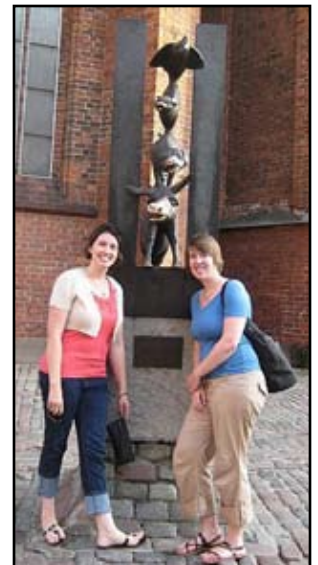
Kristin and I started to connect with ministries in Latvia shortly after we felt that there was something pulling on our heartstrings to go there. One connection seemed to lead to another and we were blessed to be connected with Dainis and Liene Panders and their church, Ogre Trinity Baptist. Dainis and his wife Liene so selflessly drove us four hours from the airport in Tallin to their home near Ogre. The fellowship that we shared with them throughout our trip and their example of servanthood was one of the great blessings of our experience.

We had an opportunity to meet with various ministries including the Sparrow's Nest Orphanage in Jalgava, Latvia. Meeting the director, Alissa Stemple, and other staff members as well as some of the children was so uplifting. The orphanage is a beautiful place that words cannot even describe, where the children are loved and cared for regardless of the circumstances that brought them there. We had an opportunity to bring some supplies we had collected in the states including school supplies, backpacks, socks and underwear for the children. Our time at the orphanage was blessed by prayer with and for the staff that their needs would continue to be met and that waiting children would find "forever families".

From there we spent some time in Riga learning about the various occupations of Latvia and what the country has overcome in their history. We connected with YWAM-Riga and some of the ministries that they are overseeing including the "Baltic Bread Project" and Freedom-61, a ministry connected to human trafficking.

We were able to meet with Gita, the director of the Hope Center and learned more about the girls that are there as well as how the center is run. We spent some time getting to know the young women and hearing their stories. The Hope Center is just that, a place where women who are hurting, who are scared and who are without support, can find the hope to move forward and get back on their feet.

We are not entirely sure how this short trip will play out within the scope of our lives; however, we were blessed to experience the love of God through everyone we encountered and all of the connections we made while we were there. Our hearts have turned to wanting to know more about social justice issues both within Latvia and at home as we plan to start a small group within our church family to continue to pray for the people and places we encountered there as well as the issues going on in our own backyards. We are hopeful to be able to bring a group of women back in the future to connect with these ministries again. Thank you to everyone who had a hand in pointing us toward resources and connections; Charles Kelley, Gita Mednis and everyone who hosted, encouraged and prayed for our experience. You have blessed us far more than you realize.



Blessings,
Lauren Sheehan
Bridge Church, Omaha, NE
lauren.sivula@gmail.com

I went to Cesis in June with the group from Smithfield UMC. It was my pleasure to be the storyteller for the young people during the children's Bible study. I had not done anything like this and had no idea what to expect. During the first story time, I just read the Bible passages to them along with the interpreter. They seemed to enjoy it very much. We took costumes with us so they could dress up as the Bible characters in the stories.

I discovered that they were mostly older children who could read well and many even knew English. We had taken 160 Latvian New Testaments with Psalms to the church. So, for the second story, I gave the children Bibles and had them read along with me in Latvian while I read the English translation. This seemed extra meaningful to them and I was so pleased to be able to encourage them to read the Bible for themselves. It is so important for people to form a habit of reading the Bible early in life when possible.

It is a beautiful thing to watch children open up to the Gospel of Christ. I felt so humble to be a part of this. The

children spent several hours each day at the church and were so enthusiastic about being there and taking part in the activities and Bible studies. My prayer is that they will continue to read their Bibles and grow in Grace. And, that the Methodist Church will continue to work with the congregation in Cesis.

Tommie Wells
Smithfield UMC,
N Richland Hills TX
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The Cesis cast of the skit, Man through the Roof.



Three amigos with a newly-build airplane to fly.

*Blessed
to be a
Blessing*



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The summer has flown by in a flurry of activities. This has been an extremely busy summer for our church. The summer began for us with a very inspiring trip to Tennessee. There we attended the Friends of Latvia, visited connecting churches and spent a very special

week at Camp Wesley Woods together with many Maryville pastors and lay leaders.

The summer was filled with charge conferences and camps. Wesley Days was a wonderful time of fellowship and working to get the facility ready for the camping season. Joe Acker's VIM group constructed the first cabin/tent platform as well as help to erect the Swedish scout donated tent.

Our shepherd, Sunday School and youth camps were very special this year. Many children and youth accepted Christ into their lives. It will be remembered by many of them as the place and time that Christ first spoke to them and they answered. Now the challenge for the church is to continue to nurture these new believers. To make Sunday school and church a meaningful continuation of that process that has begun in their hearts and lives.

We had our first Lay weekend or Lay Days. It was a wonderful success. It was a fairly small group that came but for a first time, we were more than pleased and hope that each year we will grow in number.

Riga 1st had an exciting weekend of intense labor. Jim and Dana Nance put us to work renovating the Bambi Room. We painted, cleaned and put in a new floor so that the children in the day care room would have a clean and appealing home. Thanks to Meadowbrook congregation for the donation to make this possible.

The summer will also be remembered for our 90th Anniversary Celebration. The celebration was held on the last Saturday in August, immediately following our Annual District Conference at Camp Wesley. On Saturday, congregation members from all of our congregations were present to celebrate. Each congregation presented a skit that represented their church and life together. We sang together, laughed together, worshipped together, ate together and then ended the day on the beach send-

ing our prayers into heaven with hot air balloons.

Sunday, we gathered in Liepaja church, the first congregation to officially become Methodist 90 years ago. We had a wonderful worship service with our Bishop Christian Alsted preaching. We were greeted by the Bishop of the Lutheran Church, pastors from the Baptist, Pentecostal and 7th day Adventist Churches.

Of course the summer would not have been as rich without the presence of our sisters and brothers from the US and Denmark.

God truly is good!

We have been praying for you. The summer was not an easy one for you.

The weather has caused extensive hardships along with stress from the inability of politicians to agree on vital issues regarding your financial as well as social well-being.

Here too, we live in an uncertain time. Saturday we all go to vote. Over 50% of the population are undecided. Please pray for us. This is a very crucial election for us.

May our Gracious Lord continue to pour out His blessings and His grace on each of you. May your thirst for the Lord never cease and your passion continue to grow.

Gita Mednis
DS & Riga 1st Pastor
GitaMednis@aol.com

Support for Kristine

From Chuck Gildrie on facebook....

Would you please alert the supporters of Kristine that we need to help her for the 2012 year which begins in August. Samaritan Hands has been asked for an update and I will send it when I get it.

Samaritan Hands
 c/o Fairview UMC
 2508 Old Niles Ferry Road
 Maryville, TN 37803

In the memo section put Kristine's name.

Questions? E-mail Chuck gildriec@gmail.com

The Annual Wesley Camp Board of Directors meeting was held at Wesley Camp on August 24-25. This was an important meeting for the Board as it presented the first real opportunity to formulate long-range plans for the camp. Previous meetings had mostly dealt with the organization and establishing the Board. Seven members of the Board were present in person and two others joined by teleconference. Unfortunately, the teleconference link was very poor and non on-site participation somewhat limited.

The meeting was begun by a tour of the camp with the Board members expressing delight at the new ceiling in the dining hall and the two "tent platforms" which were recently completed. Concerns were expressed over the condition of the trees in the orchard and certain electrical and safety issues which members of the Board pointed out.

The first major issue addressed was the official registration of the camp, a process which is very complicated under Latvian law. Members of the board from Denmark had proposed that they raise money to hire a consultant, preferably a camp director in Latvia who has led a camp through the registration process. Since the Danes have already raised the money, the Board voted to proceed with identifying an appropriate consultant and budgeted 5000 Ls to bring the camp up to code in all respects.

A second issue is the local camp leadership. The camp director, Romans Budnika, is a seaman who is home on alternate 10-week periods. His present schedule will prevent him from being present during the 2012 camping season. He has asked that we formally arrange for

an assistant to care for the camp when he is away since his wife, Inese who has been standing in for him, will be on maternity leave following the Apple Festival in September. The Board discussed several alternatives to be explored, with priority being placed on finding a local couple who could stay at the camp during camping season. If this cannot be worked out, the Board will solicit a retired couple from a supporting country to come to Camp in the early spring and stay until closing of camp in late August.

The problem of the aging orchard was addressed along with the placement of future "tent platforms." A consultant for the orchard was brought in after the meeting and offered several suggestions which will be presented to the Board executive committee. Other matters, such as parking and leveling of the ball field, were tabled pending the result of the consultation about registration of the camp and other long range-plans.

The financial report for the camp was presented with the Board expressing approval of the improved financial condition of the camp. This was a result of continued support of the camp by individuals and churches in the USA and by clearing up of a delay in transferring funds from GBGM.

Finally, the Board specifically expressed its deep appreciation to Hannah UMC of Gordo, AL, Christ Harbor UMC of Northport, AL, First UMC of Huntsville, AL and first UMC of Fayette, AL for their support of special projects at the camp.



Dining Hall ceiling in Alabama Building.

Platform preparation.



This summer there were two VIM teams from the USA at Wesley Camp. Team one was led by Joe Acker and consisted of eight members. (See article on page 3). This team was at the camp for Wesley Days. In addition to helping prepare the camp for the upcoming camping season the team erected the first "tent platform." The platforms will eventually be converted into bunkhouses. (see pictures,)

The second team was led by Holt Cason from Tullahoma, TN. This team had five members and was sponsored by the FUMC of Tullahoma. Team members were Ali Helms, Jim McClure, and Holt Cason from Tullahoma and Ronnie Cason and Tommy Shirah from Cordeal, Ga. Joe Acker met this team in Riga and worked with them during their stay at Wesley Camp. This team accomplished two very important tasks. The first was to install the ceiling in the dining hall in the Alabama Building. The drop-in ceiling is similar to the one this team installed at Liepa Church last year but not quite as high. The new ceiling made a significant difference in how the room looked and created a sound barrier between the dining

hall and the auditorium just above it. The team was also successful in erecting the second tent platform. This platform will also become a bunkhouse in the future.

Each of the tent platforms cost approximately \$3,000 and funds for each were given by special mission offerings. The first was donated by Christ Harbor UMC in Northport, AL and the second was donated by Huntsville, AL FUMC. Any church wishing to donate money for additional platforms (we hope to eventually complete 10 bunkhouses) or to send a construction team should contact Joe Acker at jdacker@centurytel.net.



Platform completion.



Holt Cason's Team from Tullahoma, TN.



Dearest Dana, Gita wrote, "You came to mind when I looked at Vizma's new baby daughter. Vizma had an emergency c-section on Thanksgiving. Anna Gita arrived 2 months early and will have to live in an incubator for some time.... I am happy to say, the baby seems to be doing well. When you see a baby so small in an incubator, you are reminded what a miracle God has accomplished and what joy He has brought to these 2 parents who never expected to be parents. You will soon have the incredible joy of holding and loving your new grandchild. Enjoy and cherish each moment!"

While Jim led Bible study at Riga 1st one evening, I reached out to hold the baby (I am a grandmother, you know) one of the mothers brought with her. I'm not sure when I realized the baby I was holding was little Anna Gita, for whom I had prayed that God would strengthen her little body. We don't always get to hold the answers to our prayers. This was one of many sweet memories I have from our trip to Latvia this year.

Does God have blessings He wants to pour out on you? Many times we have to step out of our comfort zone to realize those blessings. Maybe you've never been to Latvia. Is God calling you to go in 2012? Ask Him for guidance and send Kristine and me your plans!

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Reminders

When you send pictures, please send them as jpg attachments, if possible and include the names of those in the picture, whether from your church group or one of the congregations in Latvia.

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

Ways to give.....

<http://new.gbmg-umc.org/advance/>

Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447

Latvia Mission Initiative

Project Number: 00235A

Pastors' Salary Fund

Advance project: 14706A

Wesley Camp

Project Number: 15160N

"the world is our parish."

-- John Wesley



Who's Going to Latvia in 2012??!

Send your 2012 plans to

Dana Nance

djnance@sbcglobal.net

as well as

Kristine Vainovska

metodistu.birojs@gmail.com.

When You Return Home

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