

FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 4; Issue 2

October 2012

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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Alcoa Tennessee UMC to Host 2012 Friends of Latvia Meeting

Begin making your travel plans now for Knoxville, Tennessee for the 2012 Friends of Latvia Gathering commencing Friday, November 2 at 1:00 p.m. through 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 3. As always, you are encouraged to remain for worship services on Sunday. Bishop Christian Alsted will attend and will share his prayers and insights on the situation in Latvia. Our host church is the Alcoa UMC in Alcoa, Tennessee. Here is their website www.alcoafumc.com.

The national Friends of Latvia meeting is a chance to meet like-minded people from other churches interested in the reemerging UMC in Latvia. Bishop Christian Alsted and Rev Gita Mednis will be present for the meeting and eager to meet you.

Follow this link to find a registration form or download the attachment sent with the newsletter. www.gbgm-umc.org/latvia/fol/Latvia%202012%20Registration%20Form.pdf Remember to respond by October 25.

Alcoa 1st UMC
617 Gilbert Street Alcoa, TN 37701
865.982.5551



The children in Latvia are praying.
(photo by Ginny)

The 2012 Friends of Latvia Gathering is set for November 2nd and 3rd hosted by the wonderful folks at the 1st United Methodist Church in Alcoa, Tennessee, just minutes from the Knoxville airport. Bishop Christian Alsted and Rev. Gita Mednis are planning to attend and they look forward to some Spirit-led time with you.

After the reports on the Hope Center, Wesley Camp and the congregations in Latvia, we will be brainstorming how we can better align our efforts with the FOL mission. That mission, to advance to all residents of Latvia the joyful witness of Jesus Christ as risen Savior, will be brought into tight focus at our gathering this year. Time will be allocated for your ideas on materials, activities, missions, or communications that facilitate our paths to the cross alongside our brothers and sisters in Latvia.

Prayerfully consider your experience toward that purpose and gather your ideas and examples for the trip. Handouts and examples are excellent. Watch for e-mails for registration and lodging instructions in the next few days. You can also follow the planning on Facebook Friends of Latvia page. See you there.



Randy Tolleson
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Smithfield UMC
N. Richland Hills TX

Payne Family Pictures (see more pictures on page 15)



Shout to the Lord!



Praise God!



God's love and presence was with us at camp.

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

(New World Outlook)



Richard & Julie Payne: Our final night was spent in Riga with friends that we have known since our first trip in 2005.

Six team members, representing the four churches that make up the Kuldiga Partnership, traveled from Tennessee to Latvia June 15 through June 25. Those four churches include Norris UMC, First UMC Maryville, Sinking Springs UMC and Wears Valley UMC. The trip was 10 days of fantastic fellowship and God filled blessings! The team and the members of Kuldiga UMC built a platform for a bunkhouse at Wesley Camp and cleaned out flower beds.

Three Bible schools were offered in Kuldiga. One for children on the Fruits of the Spirit, one for youth on how to talk to people about God and why we need church, and one for adults on the 13 Apostles. We were also able to deliver over 200 skeins of yarn, 15 blankets, a new laptop for the Kuldiga church, 22 shirts for Wesley Camp counselors, and many Christian teaching materials for children and youth. God blessed us with the opportunity to leave financial donations to both Wesley Camp and the Kuldiga UMC. The Kuldiga congregation blessed the team with the opportunity to stay in their homes, tours of the surrounding countryside, and a magnificent Janis Day Celebration! The fellowship gained by staying together, working together, worshiping together and playing together was priceless!

Suzanne Stratton
suzanne@jondale.net
First UMC, Maryville
Maryville TN





This was a very successful summer at Wesley Camp. For the first time, all of the weekly camps were certified by the appropriate government agency for camps in Latvia. This represents a monumental amount of work on the part of the camp leadership, especially Inese Budnika. Each of the camps were well attended

with the children's camp being the largest having almost 100 campers and leaders.

VIM teams and individuals from the FOL were of great assistance. In June, **Suzanne Stratton** led a VIM team from First United Methodist Church in Maryville, TN. The team first went to their partner church in Kuldiga and did VBS work; then they and members of the Kuldiga church came to Wesley Camp. At Wesley Camp they put the wooden platform on the foundation of a tent platform which had been prepared by our local people led by Rihards Germans. In addition they assisted in preparing the camp for the summer camps.

In July, **Robert Kells** from Good Shepherd UM Church and his daughter and her friend came to Wesley Camp with his puppet ministry. The youth at camp were thrilled. Also at children's camp were **Richard and Julie Payne** from Texas along with their children, **Madeline and Conner**. They led Bible Studies and handicraft sessions.

Later in July, **Marie Andreen** from Farmingdale, NJ came to Wesley Camp. They helped where they were needed at camp. Also from July 10-16 **Dana McCarty** from Texas came

to Wesley Camp with workshops and Bible studies during our first ever camp for unchurched children.

July 10 through July 23 brought **Wannell Scott** along with 4 adults and 7 youths from Florence, AL First United Methodist Church to serve at youth camp. They spent time cleaning up the camp before the youth camp began. During the camp they led in worship and conducted workshops. In late July, **Susan Beck** and a group from Middlebrook, TN came to Wesley Camp.

Joe Acker and Holt Cason led a team from Tennessee and Louisiana to work at Wesley Camp from July 29 through August 8. They were able to prepare the foundation and masonry work for the fourth tent platform. They were not able to complete the platform because the necessary lumber was not available.



On August 7 and 8 the Youth Choir from Fairview UMC in Maryville, TN spent two nights at camp before and after their concert at Liepaja UMC. We were delighted that they could visit the camp and hope that some of them will return on VIM teams.

Kristine Rozefelde
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Riga 2nd
Riga Latvia

Wesley Camp Board of Directors Report

Joe D. Acker

The Board of Directors of Wesley Camp met for their annual meeting at Riga First UMC on August 22, 2012. The Board considered many important items and made the following decisions:

- 1) Approved the minutes from the last meeting
- 2) Approved the financial report
- 3) Re-elected officers for the next four years, (Joe Acker for one year)
- 4) Approved the report from the camp acting director
- 5) Approved the hiring of an architect to prepare a master plan and to lead in securing certification for the buildings at the camp
- 6) Approved the hiring of one half-time Camp Director
- 7) Approved offering this position to Inese Budnika (after prayerful consideration Inese accepted the offer.

The Board of Directors, at the time of the meeting, is made up of the following persons:

- * Bishop Christian Alsted
- * Gita Mednis, Latvian District Superintendent
- * William Lovelace, Lithuanian District Superintendent
- * Gunta Grina-Sologuba, Kuldiga UMC Pastor
- * Inese Budnika, on maternity leave
- * Steffen Tvilling, from Denmark
- * Lars Braestrup, from Denmark
- * Laerijana Budzinauskaite, Lithuania Youth Director
- * Rolando Piecia, Lithuania pastor
- * Mary Garber, from USA Friends of Lithuania representative
- * Joe Acker, from USA Friends of Latvia representative

(Originally published in Baltimore-Washington Conference Newsletter)

“Now Remember: arms up, hands down, don’t lean on the stage, and be sure to move your fingers in sync with the words.”

What’s this, a new way to worship? Actually—yes! These were the final directions I gave to a group of children just before their first performance as puppeteers at Wesley Camp in Latvia this summer.

From July 5-11, our three-member team from Good Shepherd UMC in Waldorf taught some Latvian children how to use puppets in worship. This was my third visit to the UMC in Latvia; the second for my daughter, Sarah; and the first for Shannon Suban, one of the senior puppeteers from the Good Shepherd puppet ministry team “The Carpenter’s Crew” who accompanied us on the trip.



Each year, the Latvian UMC runs several camps for children and youth at an old farm, now christened Wesley Camp, located in western Latvia near the coast of the Baltic Sea about 12 miles north of Liepaja. The Camp provides children, some of whom come from broken and abusive family environments, a safe place where they experience the love of Christ through the dedicated staff from the Latvian UMC. Older

teens act as “shepherds” who guide the children through the camp’s many activities. Mission teams like ours help by bringing special activities to the Camp.

Over the course of the week, our team taught puppetry to several groups of children using puppets we brought with us to the camp. The three of us imparted enough basic skills so the puppeteers could put on a show for the rest of the campers. We did a few shows ourselves in English during the evening worship services. But our greatest joy was seeing the satisfaction the children got from hearing stories about God’s love told by puppeteers who spoke their own language.

That was a God moment.

So was every worship experience during the camp. “The worship services were very emotional, even if we couldn’t understand the words,” Sarah observed. Shannon, who was on the leadership team for CCYM for several years, agreed: “Every day at the end of the services, they would have six year olds crying about Jesus and all the miracles...It was like the youth conference at Rock—the Saturday night session where everyone’s crying and hugging each

other—every night!”



This mission experience was a tremendous blessing for all of us. “It was the funnest [sic] and most spiritual thing I’ve ever done in my life,” Shannon told our home congregation after we returned. “I really liked meeting new people and seeing some of the friends we met three years ago,” added Sarah. “I would love to go back some day.” That is something we all hope and pray for.

Shannon probably summed up our experience the best: “Even though I wish I could have stayed longer, I will always remember the people I met, the songs I sang, and the lessons I learned about God and myself.” Amen.

Bob Kells
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Good Shepherd UMC
Waldorf, Maryland

Dear Friends,

Well, summer is drawing to a close. In Latvia it was very short, cool and rainy, but our spirits were lifted despite the lack of warm sunny days by visits from many of you. It was wonderful for us to not only renew our friendship, receive your help and expertise but to hear how you were blessed and fed by the Holy Spirit during your time with us. God is always faithful and always blesses both doers and receivers.

We have just ended our Annual District Conference this past weekend. It was a time to look back at our progress, joys and unfulfilled hopes as well as to look forward. In this regard, I am writing to you. You have often asked what are our specific needs and we have not been very good in verbalizing them. Now in looking ahead, I do think it important to list some of our needs that perhaps God has called you to help us with, either/both with prayer and in concrete help. It is embarrassing for me to realize just how many things continue to need funding for us to continue to grow and continue on the journey that will lead some day to self-sufficiency and an ability to reach out to others.

As you know, we have worked diligently to lay a firm spiritual and administrative foundation for our re-born church. It has been a slow process but a process that is beginning to produce visible results.

We had hoped that GBGM funding which has helped us fund some of our programming and our Office expenses would continue long enough for us to fully take over all of our financial responsibilities or be reduced gradually. However, without warning, this year our funding was unexpectedly cut almost in half and we were told that within the next 4 years all funding would cease. Last year, LAMB submitted a 5-year plan to fully take on the responsibilities of the 3 GBGM owned buildings (Liepaja, Riga 1 and Liepa) and set up a plan for each involved congregation to incrementally take on full responsibilities for the insurance and upkeep of these buildings. This year's unexpected reduction in programming funds left us scrambling. We will cope. We will not cut all of our camping and programs. We have been working since this spring to try to figure out how to further cut costs to continue.

The list that I wish to share with you now are some needs that are critical in order to continue our ministry. They are not listed in order of priority.

1. The Hope Center is almost out of funds. The Hope Center added an additional ministry which has grown. It is the daycare center Bambi. This year the number of children needing the service steadily increased and

so we had to increase our staff which is paid from the Hope Center. Most mothers can only afford a \$1.00/day which goes toward paying for the 2 hot meals and snack.

Perhaps your church is being called to adopt the Bambi ministry –\$250.00/mo. Perhaps a church or Sunday School class is being called to be part of the Hope Center ministry and dedicate a specific amount each month. We thank the individuals and churches who have been generously supporting the Hope Center. Without your support the ministry could not continue.

2. Paplaka congregation has no connecting congregation. It has just had its first ever pastoral change and is in need of a connecting congregation to be in active ministry with them.

3. Tasi congregation has also had a pastoral change. Gunta Grina-Sologuba has just been appointed to pastor this congregation. Gunta is in desperate need of transportation. This congregation is deep in the countryside. No bus service and the only road leading to the town is a dirt road with major potholes. She needs a used car with which she can travel to and from the congregation as well as transport some of the congregation members, who have no cars and who walk as many as 5 kilometers to church.

4. The building purchase debt for the Cesis congregation has not yet been repaid.

I hope to see many of you at our Friends of Latvia meeting the first week-end in November. There are many things that I wish to share with you.

Please continue to pray for us. We have 3 churches with new pastoral leadership which is very new for us. All 3 will be saying good-bye to their founding pastor which is always a difficult transition. We are all excited about our future. God has blessed us with energetic and passionate pastors and congregations who understand their need to reach out with the Good News of Christ. At present we have only one pastor serving who is close to retirement age – me. All of the rest of our pastors are much younger with many years to devote to their ministries and the growth of our church.

May God continue to bless each and every one of you,

Gita

CESIS CHURCH BUILDING FUND

Amounts taken from statement provided by the North Alabama United Methodist Conference Treasurer's office as of 08/01/2012.

Original amount of loan	\$35,000.00
Amount repaid (2010)	\$15,000.00
Amount Due after 2010 payment	\$20,000.00
Balance in account 12/30/2011	\$ 2,626.00
Amount received in 2012	\$ 100.00
Current amount in account	\$ 2,726.00
Current amount needed to pay off loan	\$17,274.00



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

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

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.

Your church name and address

Your name and address

(receipt mailed to your address)

E-MAIL RETURNED UNDELIVERABLE

The people listed below have been sent communication from the Friends of Latvia, but unfortunately it has been returned as undeliverable. If you know anyone listed

below (and they still want to be included on the Friends of Latvia distribution list), please send their current e-mail address to djnance@sbcglobal.net.

Thank you for your help.

Bill Daugherty
Chris Leach
Chris Maulden
Danny & Vickie Lindsey
David & Lynn Thomas
David Musgrave
DB Hill

Debi Partridge
Dick Titus
Don Colbath
Ginny West Case
Hughey Reynolds
James Thurmond
Jared Parker

Jeff Tallent
Jennifer Bellamy
Jeremy LaDuke
Jerry Russell
John Campbell
Josh Kilbourne
Karin Thompson

Kathy Halverson
Lou Whitmer
Marcus Kermit
Paulette West
R. Scott Robertson
Wesley Rouse

A Team of 12 members from Middlebrook Pike UMC of Knoxville, TN spent 8 days in Latvia during July 2012. It was a diverse group and ages of the team members ranged from 10 to 75! Our focus was in fellowship and worship with our sister church, Jelgava UMC so that we can continue in relationship with the pastor and congregation. We also were blessed with the opportunity to visit Camp Wesley, the Hope Center and the Hill of Crosses during our trip. Dates of the mission trip were from July 16th to July 24th. The team rented two vans to travel to various destinations within Latvia. Day 1 included a tour of the Occupation Museum in Riga with a great English speaking guide that clearly wanted to share Latvia's rich history with the team. After the Occupation Museum, it was off to purchase camping equipment for Camp Wesley, followed by the drive across country to Leipaja to stay at Camp Wesley for two nights. The team was thrilled to be at camp during youth week and participated in beautiful worship services led by Kristine and the team of camp counselors. Leaving camp was sad but we knew we had other mission fields to visit.

The team then drove to Jelgava for their first meeting with Pastor Janis Baumanis from Jelgava UMC with Pastor Janis Grunte by his side to help translate. Several



Pastor Janis, Inita and Jacobs

were there. The following day we drove to Liepa to visit the Hope Center and to take the young mothers out to lunch followed by a visit to Cesis Castle. We listened intently at lunch as Hope Center Director Gita told us of the many challenges that they face this year.

Back in Jelgava, we continued our fellowship with Jelgava UMC at the church and had a wonderful evening

spent getting to know each other better. The following morning our group and Jelgava UMC visited the Hill of Crosses. The Hill of Crosses is a very special place and we shared devotions as the youth with us planted a cross for our churches.

We spent Saturday afternoon/evening on a church member's farm and had a glorious time playing games, eating Shashlik's, doing skits, and riding horses! It was hard to call it a night because everyone was having so much fun! Sunday morning,



Pastor Josh and Pastor Janis Grunte

we rose to spend another wonderful day with Jelgava UMC and to worship together. We followed worship with a restful afternoon together at a local restaurant. It was another beautiful day but just too short for us as we had to travel back to Riga Sunday evening. It was so very hard to say goodbye to our brothers and sisters in Latvia. May God Bless you and keep you until we meet again.

Susan Beck
 becksusan@comcast.net
 Middlebrook Pike UMC
 Knoxville, Tennessee

m e m b e r s of Jelgava also came to welcome our group to Jelgava. It was one of many wonderful fellowship times that we would spend with our sister church, Jelgava UMC while we



Middlebrook Pike Team Members: Pastor Josh Kilbourne, Callie Kilbourne, Gracie Murphree, Rick Murphree, Rob Fletcher, Susan Fletcher, Kyle Fletcher, Mindy Savage, Ann Ramsey, John Ramsey, Michele Ramsey, Susan Beck.

I have had the privilege of doing God's work in Latvia on three occasions. And each time the privilege has been mine and I have come away with way more than I could have ever given. My first trip was in 1999, the second in 2005 and the latest trip the summer of 2012.

On this most recent trip I spent time at Wesley Camp. I first saw the camp in 2007 when it was just a "dream" of a camp. To see it today in full action is nothing short of drop dead hard work and the filling of the Holy Spirit coming together to create the most wonderful atmosphere for the sharing of God's word I have every experienced (that is an article all to itself). The camp I helped with was for "Un-churched Children." There is so much to share, but I would like to focus first on the leadership and then the children that attended the three-day camp.

Vivita and Gunta led this first ever "official" camp for children in Latvia that have little to no exposure to the word of God. As I watched them in greeting, singing, worship, interaction with the children, games, and meals - it was a joy to experience the energy and love God gave them for each child. They did a fantastic job with the programs and kept the kids engaged on all levels, as well as ministering to the teens and staff. The collaboration and planning was extensive and paid off!



The children were precious. I was asked to lead a Bible study with a group of children. The first day there were eleven children of all different ages. They sat, listened intently and were very quiet. The second and third day we split up the groups and I had 5 of the most precious middle school age girls. As I started the lesson I had planned I could

tell there was something wrong. Three of the five children had NEVER heard the Nativity story. The other two had only heard of the Nativity. So, I pulled out a picture of Jesus that you may have seen on the computer or through e-mail. It is one an artist has done that has the life of Jesus depicted on the face and hair of the drawing. We went through the story in our brief 2 hours -- from Nativity to the promise of Jesus' return. We were all exhausted, but questions abounded - some I could answer and some I couldn't which led to a very important discussion for these girls to take everything to the

Lord for verification of whatever anyone says, and how to go to the word and confirm what God has said. One girl said she thought it was "a fairy tale," but she believed it. That led to discussions about the Holy Spirit and how He would help them understand what they had heard and experienced at camp.

There was such a bond with these girls after this lesson. It was so sad to leave them. We all cried and even one of the girls' mom cried and told me how happy she was her daughter came to camp.



On the last day of camp Vivita explained to the children about finding a church and Sunday school class. She gave everyone a Bible to take home. The little boy that rode home with me sat for the entire 3-hour car trip back to Riga and read his Bible!

WOW, there is so much more to share...but I want you to know that your prayers, presence gifts, service and witness are coveted by the Latvian people and based on what I have experienced on my three trips, God is working mightily through you to extend His kingdom!!!

Thanks for your love and support of God's work in Latvia! I hope and pray that if you haven't had the opportunity to serve in Latvia that one day you will!

Dana McCarty
rocknm@me.com
Richland Hills Baptist Church
North Richland Hills, TX



For the second year, Holt Cason and Joe Acker led a team to Wesley Camp. The team consisted of Holt Cason, Jim McClure, Ronnie Cason, Rebekah Diller, Dr. John Morrison, Dr. Jan Hudson, and Joe Acker. The team represented First United Methodist churches in Tullahoma, TN, and Fayette, AL, and University UMC of Baton Rouge, LA. Rebecca was the only first-timer to Latvia.

The team met in the Helsinki airport and traveled together to Riga on Sunday, July 29. They attended church together at Riga First on Sunday evening and departed to Wesley camp early Monday morning. When the team arrived at Wesley Camp, Romans and two of the youth had already dug the trenches for a fourth tent platform the team intended to build. Adjustments were made to the trenches Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. Rebars were set and cement was ordered for Tuesday afternoon. The cement was poured and final troweling done to prepare for laying blocks Wednesday morning. However, immediately it started to drizzle. By Wednesday morning it was pouring rain with forecasts for rain all day. Hence we made a trip to Hill of the Crosses in Lithuania, a lovely but tiring trip.

On Thursday and Friday the laying of the blocks consumed our time. At the last minute we learned that the lumber could not be delivered in time for us to finish the platform. So putting the lumber on the platform was left for next spring. Friday afternoon the team did cleanup around the camp and winterized the first three platforms. On Saturday they traveled to Liepa where we spent three nights.

The two Liepa congregations along with the Cesis and Sarkani congregations had planned a combined worship service at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. Joe had been asked to

preach since all congregations have felt the impact of VIM teams and the FOL. This was a special occasion to also pay tribute to Ali Helms who had made several VIM trips to Liepa working on the Liepa worship center and who had been scheduled to be on the current team. (Ali passed away unexpectedly in May of this year. see page 12) The service was well attended with a fellowship lunch following. It was also turned into a birthday party for Holt.

On Monday the pastor of the Latvian-speaking congregation in Liepa and her husband took the team on a guided tour of a beautiful old battlefield site along the river that flows from Valmiera to Cesis. This was a beautiful site with great views of the river.

Tuesday saw the team traveling from Liepa back to Riga and spending time in the "Old City." On Wednesday Holt took most of the team to some very interesting historical sites near Riga. One of the locations was in Salaspils. This was on August 8. Unfortunately the van was caught by one of the many traffic cameras now installed along the roads and highways in Latvia. It is now well documented that the fine for going 81 km in a 50 km zone is 30Ls, about \$57 US. On August 9 the team left for home.

All in all, it was a great trip with a lot accomplished by a very close knit team. For our safety and accomplishments, we give thanks to God.



The 2012 Annual Conference of the Latvian United Methodist Church was called to order by Bishop Christian Alsted at 10:00 a.m. on August 24. The conference was held at Riga 2nd United Methodist church. Bishop Alsted preached the initial sermon of the conference. The rest of the day was spent giving reports beginning with the report by District Superintendent Gita Mednis. Each pastor gave reports on their church and their plans for the next year. The Wesley Camp report was given by Joe Acker and Inese Budnika..

The evening program was given in honor of Arijs Viksna who is retiring. He served as the pastor of the Liepaja UMC since it's rebirth in 1990. He also served as the initial pastor of virtually every church in the conference following the winning of freedom by the Latvian nation. During the program each church in the District gave testimony of their history with this beloved leader and the impact his leadership as pastor and District Superintendent has had on their church and lives. Each church presented presents to the honoree. There was much singing and



laughter and storytelling by both his friends and Rev. Viksna. It was a great evening for what this reporter now perceives to be a great man.

S a t u r d a y morning was taken up with the financial report, a prayer walk,

and the pastor and lay work sessions. The afternoon session included the taking of the "Conference Picture," other reports, the designation of Kuldiga as the host of the next annual conference, and the commissioning of four new lay pastors and the elevation of one pastor to provisional membership in the conference. Bishop Alsted commissioned the new lay pastors with prayer and the laying on of hands.

The new lay pastors are: Janis Baumanis, Astra Dannenfelte, Kristine Rozefelde, and Gundars Ceipe. Each of these will be assigned to a local church. Vivita Barenite

was certified to become a provisional member of the conference. (The full list of appointments is below.)

The Sunday morning worship service was a highlight of the conference. The Youth Choir sang several numbers, Rudolpho sang, and the Bishop preached a moving sermon. After the sermon the Bishop announced the appointments for the next year. These appointments are:

- Paplaka.....Inese Budnika
- Liepaja.....Edgars Sneiders
Gunta Grina-Sologuba
- Matras.....Edgars Sneiders
- Tasi.....Gunta Grina-Sologuba
- Kuldiga.....Vivita Barenite
- Jelgava.....Janis Baumanis
- Riga 1.....Gita Mednis
Astra Dannenfelte
- Riga 2.....Andris Vainovskis
Kristine Rozefelde
- Cesis.....Janis Grunte
- Liepas Latviesu (Latvian).....Ilzite Ozola
- Liepas Krievu (Russian).....Vera Titovica
Gundars Ceipe
- Sarkani.....Ilzite Ozola
- Wesley Camp.....Inese Budnika

The service ended with a prayer over the kneeling appointees and a moving parting song. This was followed by many thank you's. Among them was our thanks to Romans Budnika for his many years of service as Director of Wesley Camp.

This is the fourth annual conference this reporter has attended. It was an excellent conference. The appointment of the new lay pastors bodes very well for the future of the conference.



Aili Helms

October 6, 1971 - May 15, 2012

Aili and I became very close friends primarily due to our mission work and working with children in our community.

We served together on the Board of Directors of TN Leadership Seminars. We worshipped together in Disciple Bible Study 2, 3, and 4 classes. We did Disaster Relief work after the flood in Nashville. We served in our local Kiwanis Club.

Aili was secretary for the Highland Rim Emmaus board when I was Community Lay Director. She relished the opportunity to help the K-Kids Club at St. Paul school with candy sales, picking up trash on their adopted street, or other activities. Aili had a volunteer's heart and was always willing to help and serve when asked.

There were 4 things that Aili loved dearly... her God, her husband Kenny, her dogs, and Volunteers in Mission trips.

Aili did not mind climbing ladders and scaffolds. She demonstrated this when she hung paper on the walls of the two story sanctuary in Liepa, Latvia. Additionally, she performed many tasks on her mission trips such as:

- Helping fabricate the porch roofs over entrance doors at the Liepa church
- Installing suspended ceilings in the sanctuary
- Assisting in the installation of sheetrock panels
- Painting walls

One of the most memorable times came while watching the "poorest of the poor" children of Liepa leaving the church after Bible school with their "goodie bags." Their smiles were a story in itself. Aili coordinated much of the Bible school activities including the collection of items for gift bags that were given to the children. She lived for moments like this.

Aili was part of our VIM team to Latvia for the past 5 years and was scheduled to return again this past July. In fact, we had already purchased the airline tickets for this trip at the time she went to be with the Lord.

Travel has always been the biggest problem for mission trips, and I often accused Aili of being a bad omen when traveling some highlights:

- On our 1st trip with Aili, we arrived in Latvia 6 hours late and no one was there to meet us. We spent that night sleeping on the floor of the Methodist church in Riga.

- On another trip, we were late arriving in Amsterdam from NY; missed our connecting flight to Latvia so the airline had to re-book us. We ended up in Berlin, Germany, ate lunch and then caught another flight to Latvia.

- When returning from Latvia a few years ago, we arrived in NY, cleared customs and attempted to make our transfer to get to Nashville. Aili was missing..... I called her cell and learned that she had lost her passport and could not get thru security.



Finally, just as the airplane door was being closed, Aili called and said she had cleared security and was on her way..... we held the plane and we got home all in one day.

- This past year, there were mechanical problems with the airplane leaving Nashville so the flight was cancelled. We were re-booked to LaGuardia and ended up spending the night in NY before we could fly out the next day at 5:00 p.m.

When we arrived in Latvia, the first order of business was to find a place to buy ice cream since I am a big ice cream eater and Aili an even bigger one. We normally were the first to locate the ice cream store, stock up and then we were ready to work. If Aili had ice cream, Coca-Cola, and plenty of strong coffee, little else mattered in the way of necessities of life.

In the evenings, we would normally sit, talk, make crafts for Bible school, or discuss the work we did and the work we had to do and things that were on our minds. Invariably Aili had to talk about her dogs and relate how "crazy" they were in their actions. She would tell about one dog, when ordered to "sit" he would back up until his rear touched something and he would stand there thinking he was sitting. Each time she would tell this story, we would all laugh until we had tears in our eyes. I don't think any of us ever tired of hearing her talk about her dogs and their antics.

Aili could make you laugh over simple, silly things and that was one of the things that made her fun to be with. Aili was like an adopted daughter, a dear friend, a confidant, and in general just a fun person to be around..... Aili was loved and will be missed by so many that knew her.

On Saturday, May 19, 2012, 56 golfers met at the wonderful Riverside Golf Club in Arlington, Texas for the first Friends of Latvia Golf Tournament. With golfers from Martin United Methodist church and Meadowbrook UMC the play started promptly at 8:00 a.m.

Despite beautiful weather many golfers were still able to complain about their golf game and pray for some kind of intervention. Others marveled at the partners playing prowess and loved the companionship. Either way, all of the golfers enjoyed the day and the hamburger luncheon after golf.



Prizes were awarded and many good natured protestations were heard. After all the golf business was finished, Tournament chair, Ross Carnes, announced that almost \$3000 had been raised to support our ongoing efforts in Latvia.

Thanks to all of those who were involved in making this event a truly successful one. Richard and Julie Payne, Jack and Dana McCarty, Jim and Dana Nance, Randy and Sandy Tolleson, and Ross & Mary Carnes.

First Trip to Latvia

Jo Van Oosterhout

One day I visited the Bambi Day Care Center that meets at Riga 1st. They had 12 children between the ages of 18 months and 7 years. The room wasn't big enough for all of them, but they have no other choice. At lunchtime they brought down a huge pot of borshch. The ones who were able to feed themselves sat around a big table and waited to be served. The little ones sat in a chair and we fed them. Not one child said anything about not liking what was being served. Every child ate at least one bowlful. After lunch was nap time and each child went to sleep on a little mat. They were all so precious.

The next day I went to Straupe, where the new Hope Center will be. I helped with a Bible school near Cesis. This is a small village about 50 miles from Riga. We had 60 kids show up the first day (last year they had only 25.) We were so

excited to have so many. We fed them a snack for breakfast and lunch after Bible school. They, too, ate what was served without complaint. They are such wonderful children; some with sad faces and some with happy, bubbly faces. They all seemed to really enjoy everything, especially the goodie bags we had for them the last day.

Attending Riga 1st was also a great experience. I couldn't understand a thing Rev. Gita said, but I could feel God's presence. It was a life-changing experience.

Jo VanOosterhout
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Summer at Wesley Camp

Chris Greene

A team of 12 from Florence 1st UMC and Christ Harbor UMC helped lead summer camp at Wesley Camp July 16th-21st. The team was led by Wannell Scott of Florence 1st and Chris Greene of Christ Harbor. They took 5 adults and 7 students. The camp went great. The team helped lead worship, provide crafts, lead worship arts workshops and provide additional leadership for the camp. The camp consisted of daily worship services, morning devotions, worship arts workshops and challenging team building activities. As always, the experience was as beneficial to the team as it was to those in Latvia and they plan to make a return trip next summer or sooner.

Chris Greene
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Christ Harbor
Northport, Alabama

Hannah, Kate
and Latvian girls.



Alabama Team & Friends

Kristine
and leaders



In 2008, a group of youth from Fairview UMC in Maryville, Tennessee traveled to Riga for Holy Week. We met the youth and held worship services and experienced a taste of Latvian culture. In August 2012, a group of now college students from Fairview made another journey to Latvia. For this journey we formed a choir. We practiced many different types of songs (sadly all in English) and put together a group to do sticks ministry.

Our goal was to minister to and encourage the young people of Latvia. We visited five of the congregations in Latvia and Camp Wesley. We made friends with the young people that we met. It was encouraging to see their progress in the four years while we were gone. The youth had grown in personal confidence in their English skills and, more importantly, their faith. In all of our efforts to work with and minister to young people, God had a different plan. We did build friendships, and we did encourage the young people. However, often the people that seemed to get the most out of our experience were the older generation. They surprised us with their

enthusiasm and the way that our lively worship encouraged them to worship in less traditional ways.

After a week on air mattresses on the church floor, we came away with memories of uplifting worship services, kind people, flowers everywhere, a miraculous bus repair in the middle of nowhere, speaking a strange combination of Latvian and Tennessee English which we called Latvalachian, ice-less drinks, and delicious ice cream. But we definitely found that God is moving in Latvia. He has a purpose and a plan for the people of the church both young and old. He is doing great things in the lives of the people. We went to encourage the young people of Latvia. While there, we encouraged a generation of pastors and others in ministry. But we received the biggest gift through the experience, and we left inspired.

Mollianne Reese
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Program Director
Camp Wesley Woods





We were greeted by our friends Oskars and Evija, Kristine and Gita.



Vivita, the Camp director, did an amazing job planning daily activities for the kids and sharing God's word.



During Shepherd's training, Kristine led many fun team-building exercises. Many got wet on this activity.



The first night the shepherds introduce themselves to the kids. Conner translated his introduction in Latvian and did a great job! Everyone cheered!



Conner and Gustav, had lots of fun during carnival day building wooden cars and lanyards.



Madeline face painted.



The fashion show was a great way for the kids to express their creative side. Madeline (left) is next to her Shepherd and costume designer, Tereza.



Nauris shared his musical talents with us for a few days. It was fun getting to know him!



Fiona (Kristine) and Jack Sparrow hosted the talent show. It was fun to see individuals and groups show off their talents.



Many of the shepherds spent their free time cleaning out the hayloft in order to create a quiet Chapel area to spend time with God.



Davis shows us the leather cross he stamped in free time. He also flew a kite for the first time ever. He had the biggest smile!



The water was much colder than the water in Texas, but Conner and the other Shepherds did not seem to care.



You have done it again! Thank you to all who have sent in pictures, stories and reports for this edition of the Friends of Latvia newsletter. It's always exciting to see how God worked in and through you as you traveled to Latvia over the summer.

I hope to see many of you the first weekend in November at the Friends of Latvia meeting in Tennessee.



Pictured is Ruth Grimm, a 93 year old friend, who continues to make hats for the babies at the Hope Center. Thank you to Dana McCarty and Jo VanOosterhout for delivering the latest batch.

Reminders

When You Return Home

When you return from your time in Latvia, please provide us with a brief article/report of your trip including several pictures (jpgs) with names of those in the pictures, whether from your church group or one of the Latvia congregations. Send your follow-up report to: djnance@sbcglobal.net.

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



Remember as you plan your second-mile giving to support the Latvia Pastor Salary Advance Special. It matters.

Ways to give.....

<http://new.gbgm-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

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