

FRIENDS OF LATVIA

Volume 5; Issue 1

March 2013

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.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Page 2

Words from the Chair

Page 3

UMC Hymnal for Latvia

Page 4-5

Sigrid Luderitz Gift

Page 6-7

Greetings from Gita

Page 9

Vitamin Update

Page 10-11

Kuldiga UMC

Page 12

Liepja & Sarkani

Page 13-14

Liepaja & Tashi

Page 16

The Last Page

Friends of Latvia 2011-2013 Officers

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rstolleson@att.net

Co-Chair:

Pam Eisert
PSeisert@yahoo.com

Secretary:

Dana Nance
djnance@sbcglobal.net

Treasurer:

Jim Hayes
jrhayes46@bellsouth.net

Thank you Alcoa Tennessee UMC for Hosting 2012 Friends of Latvia Meeting



Can you help identify those who attended? Back row: Chuck Gildrie, Dudley Tipps, Joe Acker, Bishop Christian Alsted, Richard Payne, Randy Tolleson, Rev. Dr. Jerry Russell, Rev. John Mollett, Stan Melton, ??, Middle row: Jim Hayes, Charlie Clark, Bud Vann, Holt Cason, Jim Nance, Skip Pennington, Rev. Gita Mednis, Oskars Rozefelde. First row: Dana Nance, ??, Linda Acker, Lynn Cason, Allison Pennington, Ann Tipps?, Kristine Rozefelde. not pictured but in attendance: Chris Greene, Rev. Dwight Kilbourne, Rev. Josh Kilbourne, Rev. Charles Maynard, Donna Melton, Wesley Rouse, Rev. Carol Wilson



Dear Friends of Latvia,

The results of our poll of the FOL revealed that an April 2013 meeting will be sparsely attended. For that reason I am postponing the April FOL meeting and will advise on plans for the next meeting in the coming weeks.

My thinking is that I will check with Gita and the Bishop for fall dates that may be suitable and, if none can be identified, we will plan the next FOL meeting in April 2014. Please respond to rstolleson@att.net if you have ideas or venues that work with this timing.

Randy Tolleson
rstolleson@att.net
Smithfield UMC
N. Richland Hills TX



Faithful Men performance at 2013 FOL meeting

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENeHEKRxDpk>

FOR THE RECORD: Please send the following information to djnance@sbcglobal.net. Thank you!

Name
Home Church
Connection to Latvia
E-mail
Phone – optional
Address – optional

Latvia United Methodist Hymnal to be Published in 2014

Carlton R. Young and I continue to work with the Latvia United Methodist Hymnal Committee preparing the new United Methodist Hymnal for Latvia. We are approaching completion of the manuscript of over 300 hymns and songs. The hymnal will include also all of the regular and occasional worship services of the UMC. There is still a lot of work to be done. All of the copyrighted hymns and songs must be licensed, which is being processed and funded by the General Board of Global Ministries. Thereafter the hymnal must be formatted and designed and then be processed and published in Latvia.

The schedule for finalization and publication is as follows:

- 1) completion of the manuscript and all copyright licenses by June 1, 2013;
- 2) completion of page design and formatting of the entire book by November 15, 2013;
- 3) December 1 manuscript sent to printer for processing and production;
- 3) publication of the hymnal by March 1, 2014;
- 4) presentation and dedication of the hymnal at Easter, April 20, 2014.

The General Board of Discipleship, The Fred Pratt Green Trust, and a number of individuals made very significant contributions to begin and sustain the editorial process ca. four years ago. However, we will need to raise an additional \$10,000 for the publication of the hymnal in Latvia. Contributions to the fund for the hymnal made be made as follows:

Bank of New York Mellon
One Wall Street
New York, NY 10286
Swift No.: IRVTUS3N
ABA No.: 021000018
Account Name: General Board of Global Ministries - UMC
Account No.: 1096086020
475 Riverside Drive, Room 1417
New York, NY 10115
Attn.: Xenon Antone

Details: Please designate the use of the funds in a wire transfer or on a check or money order as follows:

LATVIA UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL.

Thank you for including this information in the next newsletter.

Cordially,
S T Kimbrough, Jr. & Carlton R. Young
Editorial Consultants to the Latvia United Methodist Hymnal Committee

Chosen to Serve

Nehemiah demonstrated the wisdom of quietly and prayerfully planning work and then dividing the effort into manageable projects. At the November 2012 Friends of Latvia Gathering, we prayerfully evaluated the challenges faced by the people of Latvia as we planned the paths to the cross that make disciples of Jesus Christ. It is in His name that we prayerfully consider the priorities of our work.

Bishop Alsted Priorities

- Worship service design
- Church planting
 - Birthing churches
- Home church / small groups
- Awareness that excessive physical plant slows growth
- Financial decision to local churches

DS Mednis Priorities

- Bambi ministry adoption \$250/mo
- Paplaka connecting congregation
- Tashi connecting congregation located
- Tasi transportation for pastor
- Hope center director funding
- Vitamin program before winter
- Disciples now - then lay leaders

FOL Continue the Emphasis

- Wesley camp (see **Proceed With Caution**)
 - Youth (incl leadership development)
 - Young life
 - Involvement of US youth workers and participants
- Unchurched camp
- Sarkani – camp scholarships
- Hope center
 - Bambi ministry esp adoption
 - Training for lay leadership / small groups (m4)
 - Worship / music
- Clergy leadership training
 - Lay Leader supervision
- Outreach programs / local community missions
 - Vitamin program (pressing for this winter)
- Pastor salary support - awareness advance and connecting congregations
 - 80% from Connecting Congregations and
- Connectedness support - in mission together awareness and recruiting
 - Use of technology (see **proceed with caution**)
 - Press releases
 - FOL member resource access
- VIM and mission team projects (see **Proceed With Caution**, and **Should Consider**)
- VBS/ children’s ministry
 - Sarkani special emphasis
 - Bible studies

FOL Should Consider

- VIM Project Planner / Manager training and engagement
 - Use of collaboration technology for team planning (google docs)
 - Habitat for humanity participation/training in US
 - Goal is vim/mission team materials on hand upon arrival
 - Govt permitting expert on retainer
- Involvement of new us congregations on VIM trips
- Emphasis on church planting program (see training -related topics)
- Use of technology (see Proceed with Caution)
 - Streaming video, facebook, websites
 - Skype worship / Bible study
- AV attendant / praise musician training
- Youth exchange - both ways
- Sponsor National Youth Worker training (Youth Specialties)
- Sarkani childrens camp
- Hired professional fundraiser outside UMC
- Formalization of Admin Board/Finance/job descriptions
- Employment prospects - job skills/order hand goods
- Completion of bunk houses and extending Wesley Camp season
- Liepa building insulation and wiring
- Wesley Camp land purchase for wind turbine revenue
- Cesis property opens to back
- Funding for apartment Kuldiga- Revenue stream

FOL Proceed With Caution or Stop

- Connected congregation over burden (see New Connectedness)
- Technology intrusion into sacredness
- Technology substitute for face to face
- Halt additional Wesley Camp platform construction (until first Cabins complete)
- VIM autonomous projects (include Latvians in work)
 - Balance “when in Rome” with Christian example
 - Balance “when in Rome” with new skills unknown to Latvians

February 2012 -- the Friends of Latvia Secretary received an e-mail from a Solicitor from the UK. The e-mail was shared with the FOL Chair and the DS in Latvia. Following is the correspondence between the Solicitor, Nicholas Toovey, Randy Tolleson and Gita Mednis.

Dear Mr Tolleson

I am so sorry that I did not manage to get together more info for you about Sigrid Luderitz for your meeting. No excuses other than pressure from other things! Anyway, I am please now to tell you that, if all goes well, I shall be making another payment to the Friends of Latvia before Christmas.

The payment will be about £8.800 sterling and will be sent as soon as my lawyers have a final tax clearance certificate from the UK Tax Office. This is just to make sure that I have no more tax to pay for the estate here.

I have assembled a little more information about the connection with Latvia, and Liepaja in particular, and have asked other friends of Sigrid, scattered across Eastern Europe, for a bit more.

I will put this together when I next e-mail you.

Best regards,
Nick Toovey



Photo taken at Kuldiga UMC, courtesy of Dr. Üllas Tankler.

Dear Mr Tolleson,

Your bank should have received from my old firm Tees solicitors, around New Year, the sum of £9,102.50 sterling (less bank charges of course) to add to the £10,000 sterling we sent to you earlier last year. I shall be glad to know that you have been able to identify the payment in your accounts.

That completes the distribution of the estate of Sigrid Luderitz and I hope that you - and Gita, to whom I am also sending this e-mail, will make good use of it.

I said I would try to pull together all that I know about Sigrid and her friend Maria Paegle who seems to have been the link with Latvia.

Sigrid was from East Germany originally and, having coped with the Nazis (she was born in 1926) she and her parents fled from the Russians when they took over East Germany. She had many friends in Eastern Europe and travelled widely there, taking small gifts with her to ease the hardships she found amongst her friends.

She was a teacher of English, mainly running evening classes for adults rather than daytime teaching to children, in West Berlin for, I believe, most of her adult life. She was an Anglophile and came to Cambridge in the Summer holidays for many years to attend courses at the University here, ie "summer schools." She managed to buy a small house here which was rented out for most of each year but where she usually stayed during her visits (although she stayed with me and my wife on several occasions.)

Friends of hers also came over to Cambridge to use the house. I believe that she taught English to Maria Paegle - and Maria taught Sigrid the Russian language so that she became fluent in that language too.

Maria came from Latvia and in particular Liepaja. I think Maria may have moved to Berlin at some point and that she too was a teacher of English - they both used to attend the Cambridge Summer schools and I met Maria at least once. She was older than Sigrid and her health was failing - Sigrid made huge efforts to get Maria to Cambridge with her even when she could not walk.

Maria, known as Musya to her friends, died some years ago, probably in the 1990s but Sigrid still visited Liepaja - I have a postcard from there dated 2005.

One of Sigrid's other friends understood that Maria at

her death still owned a house in Liepaja - it may be that I am wrong in thinking that she had moved to Berlin and that in fact she still lived in Liepaja. But I have not been able to find the address or how Sigrid became aware of Friends of Latvia.

Perhaps Gita's contacts in Liepaja will be able now to identify Maria, aided by the photographs which I am sending. Maria is the elderly lady in the wheelchair, Sigrid is the lady with white hair and the third lady with dark hair is a mutual friend from Krynica in Poland.

Although it is not necessary for you to account to me for how the money is being spent, I hope that Gita and others will take into account the guidance I was able to give in previous e-mails - and will perhaps let me know what is being done.

Warm regards to you both

Nick Toovey



Photo taken Kuldiga, courtesy of Dr. Üllas Tankler.

Dear Nicholas,

Greetings and blessings for 2013. May our Gracious Lord fill each day with health, fulfillment, friendship and sunshine! Thank you for all your care and devotion to fulfill Sigrid's wishes. It is very helpful to have this information about her and Maria. I have forwarded your e-mail to our Liepaja pastors and asked them to try and find more information about Maria. The pictures will help. Many of the Liepaja congregation are elderly and might remember her. I will let you know if we are able to learn more.

As to the gift distribution. We have dedicated a large portion of the money for English classes. Each interested congregation was invited to submit budgets for the courses. Three have already begun while others are working on the budgets and necessary preliminaries.

Requirements are high, the teacher must be certified to teach English and must be experienced. The teacher must submit progress reports and overall lesson goals. Each month progress reports must be submitted. Our District Treasurer is in charge of paying the teacher and checking the documentation as well as the progress.

These courses are meant for those who can not afford to pay for English classes. Its purpose is to give the "students" enough of a base that they can continue to work on their own without so much oversight. The budgets are based on a six month program with 2 lessons weekly.

English has become such a universal language and being equipped with some knowledge of it will help these people to achieve more. Of course, a language can not be learned entirely in 6 months, but a base can be laid on which to continue to build upon. This is a great gift that will impact lives. Thank you and thanks to Sigrid for this wonderful gift.

The remainder of the money will be used for humanitarian aid such as the Hope Center or after school program for underprivileged children.

We will send you an accounting. At present, the only money that has been used is the first month's payment for the language programs which have begun.

Continued best wishes,
Gita

Dearest Friends,

Your brothers and sisters in Latvia wish you a 2013 filled with many "God moments," where His leadership and love is evidenced in you and the life of your congregations. May the year be filled with many "ahaaaa " moments and may your hearts and spirits soar!

Time truly seems to be flying or melting or just shorter. However we phrase it, this phenomena is being experienced by many. My hours just seem to fly by and my daily intentioned "to do" list is often hardly dented. The good news is that many exciting things are happening and it is quite evident that God, continues to be at work in our Methodist family in Latvia! I want to share some of these things with you:

1. The nervousness and anxiety surrounding the pastoral changes in Liepaja, Matras and Paplaka have disappeared.

a. Pastor Edgars and Gunta are leading the Liepaja Church. New initiatives have been started to reach out to the middle-aged and young adults. English language courses have started.

b. Pastor Inese Budnika has begun several initiatives in Paplaka and spends Mondays leading Bible study and several other groups. She is hoping to start a youth group. English classes are also offered.

c. Pastor Gunta now leads the Taši congregation. She is brimming over with new initiatives and programs. English classes have just begun and Bible studies are held together with nearby Matras congregation.

2. The property and heating issues of the Liepaja building are slowly being resolved. The congregation has a new administrative board, which is very "hands-on" led by Inese Birzniece.

3. A new outreach program in Liepaja is in developmental stage. This "family after school" outreach ministry has received funding from the European Mission Fund.

4. Kuldiga congregation is pastored by Vivita. This is her first year to be in ministry by herself. It is a learning experience in which she has felt a strong connection to, strength and leading from God. Kuldiga's youth are experiencing a mini-revival.

5. We have divided up our congregations into 2 regions- Liepaja and Riga area. Regional meetings are held each month. The main focus is to identify ways to strengthen the church through joint co-operation. Presently much focus and time is being spent on writing and translating liturgies for the church.

6. Jelgava church is growing. It has been able to secure a separate room for its Sunday School. Members are becoming actively involved in leading the church. Bible studies are held weekly.

7. Riga 2 is still struggling with the high cost of heating their church. The addition of Kristine to the pastoral team has broadened the leadership's horizon and experience pool. Kristine has been instrumental in working to start a praise group and plan more spiritual instructional courses.

8. Riga 1st has embarked on their first Alfa course. Approximately 40 people are taking part. Most of them are middle age or younger and 98% attend worship fairly regularly. The Tuesday night praise worship evenings are attracting more people and weekly worship attendance continues to grow. Quite a number of new people have begun to attend regularly. Some have begun new member instruction courses so there is good potential to continue to grow. All the new people attending are young adults to early middle age. The Alfa courses have brought new excitement to the congregation. Pastor Astra who is the new associate pastor brings another new element to worship and the life of the church. She is co-ordinating Sunday school and youth work. Our Sunday School is again thriving and the largest in years. Last season our Sunday school almost died out.

9. Cesis congregation is growing. Pastor Janis is also working with the youth at Liepa. There is very good co-operation with the Liepa congregations. The congregation is truly becoming.

10. Liepa Russian and Latvian congregations have benefitted from the addition of Pastor Gundars as an associate. His work with the Latvian Moravian movement has brought new contacts, co-operation and more opportunities to serve. English courses are also being taught.

11. Pastor Ilzite continues to serve at Sarkani. The living conditions have not improved much but Ilzite continues to share God's word and bounty with the community. She continues to hand out bread to those attending worship and helps as much as she is able. The children of Sarkani are much on her heart.

12. The Hope Center continues to be a lifeline for young single mothers and their babies. This week, another teen, a 14-year old, will join our family. She is 5 months pregnant and comes from an orphanage. Hard to imagine what her pre-delivery and post-delivery would be like, all alone, in an institutional setting. It truly is a privilege to serve God by providing His child love and care and ensuring the safety and well being of the mother and child. This winter has been especially difficult for all of Latvia, due to the increase in heating costs. The Hope Center is also struggling. Means must be found to better insulate the building given that the building is surrounded by open space on all sides with no other buildings or trees acting as a buffer from the cold winds.

Also exciting news that Gita B., the Director of the Hope Center was invited to be on a national news show as an expert on teenage pregnancy issues.

We are very grateful for a bequest that was received last year. A portion of this money is being used to fund English classes in our congregations. Strict rules have been established for these courses to ensure that we are being good stewards of this bequest. The teachers employed must be certified to teach English. A lesson plan and budget are required to be submitted for approval. Every month each congregation must give a progress report. This bequest was left by a German lady who taught English and LAMB felt it appropriate to use part of the money to honor her passion for teaching. These English courses will enable our congregation members to better communicate with their partners as well as help them in their daily life.

Ecumenical connections remain strong and our members often serve on planning boards of major events as well as volunteer to serve during the event.

We are working on our new Methodist Hymnal as well as literature in Latvian about Methodism.

I guess from my perspective, I have saved the best and most exciting news for last. For many years you have been our great supporters, both spiritually and financially. Sometimes, it might have seemed that we had grown complacent about our need to achieve financial self-sustainability and have only paid it lip service. That is not the case. The last 5 years have been spent on trying to lay down a firm organizational foundation for the District as well as investigating possible means to achieve, self-dependency in our circumstances. We have thought and prayed, searching for wisdom and answers. God has heard our prayers and the first, concrete steps have been taken.

We have identified and put in charge, a very gifted lady whose responsibility is to lead, co-ordinate and organize a business run by the church. This business will start by setting up an internet store as well as several permanent displays in our larger churches. Hopefully, demand for more display space will eventually lead to expand into a store in several locations. The by-laws of the business are already done and it will be incorporated next month. The idea behind this business is to help congregations and members of their communities to make some money. Many of our congregation members and rural folks have the ability to make quality products but have no access to markets. Their hand-made products will be sold on the internet with a concentration on Scandinavian and the US markets. The handcrafted items will not only be knit and crocheted items but good quality souvenirs. The lady leading the project is experienced and highly creative. She has her own internet store and creates her own designs. She will be traveling to all of the congregations to discover the gifts and skills of those interested in participating in this project. She also plans to train those who wish to make simple creative things but do not know how.

She is a member of Riga 1st and highly devoted to this project. Those making the products will of course be paid.

The profits will be distributed to the congregations to help them fund outreach programs or special needs. This is just the beginning and the ideas and possibilities for expansion are many. The first concrete step is the hardest and it has been taken. You will hear much more about this later.

We are on our way because of your love, faith and support. For some of our congregations, financial self-sustainability will be a longer road and for others perhaps somewhere in the not so far future. God's timing is always the right time. With His help and wisdom, your continued love, prayers and support, we will succeed.

Thank you. You have been and continue to be God's crucial instruments in helping to lay a strong foundation for the resurrected Methodist Church in Latvia. We continue to need you, your friendship, prayers and support.

May our gracious and Loving God continue to bless you all!

Your co-worker in His work,

Gita



Photos taken at Kuldiga UMC, courtesy of Dr. Üllas Tankler.

Greetings!

I wanted to let you know about our FUMC Trussville (Alabama) Latvia plans for 2013.

Unfortunately, we aren't going to be able to go to Latvia this year.

At a recent 2013 missions committee planning meeting, we decided to focus our efforts on our already planned 2013 FUMC Trussville mission trips to Uganda and to (East) Germany (I will be joining this team in August).

However, this does not mean we are giving up on the work that is being done in Latvia and Sarkani. We will continue our financial support as we have done. And it's possible someone from our area or even our church may join a team that comes to Latvia in 2013.

But we also want to do something extra for the church at Sarkani. Perhaps sponsor some of the Sarkani children to Wesley Camp. Or help the congregation make repairs at the church.

I sent an e-mail to Kristine and Gita letting them know our plans. I also asked them to send me details on how we can do more for the church at Sarkani. If you have any suggestions, please let me know.

Let's keep in touch. I will hold on to the research I collected on Latvia. I still would like to go there.

Richard,
I have attached a modified version of the brochure you sent me. I used it to try to promote a 2013 Latvia trip. I hope you can use it. If there are any updates, send them to me and I will update the brochure and send you a new version.

God bless you and yours,

Skip (and Allison) Pennington
First United Methodist Church Trussville
Trussville, Alabama 35173
www.fumctrussville.com

CESIS CHURCH BUILDING FUND

Amounts taken from statement provided by the North Alabama United Methodist Conference Treasurer's office as of 01/10/2013.

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	\$20,222.58
Current amount in account	\$22,848.58

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

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

Dear Friends,

You may remember that the original amount of the loan was \$35,000. \$15,000 of that amount has been paid leaving a balance of \$20,000 to be paid to the lender. From this amount \$2,500 will be paid by the lender to the North Alabama Conference for their services and expenses incurred during this process. The remaining amount of \$2,848.58 will be dispersed at your direction. It is my suggestion that the wonderful people who provided the matching grant be consulted as to the disposition of these funds. I await your instructions and will do the follow-up required to satisfy the loan and to close out the account.

Praise be to God for His marvelous grace in this matter,

Joe D.



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

We hope your Christmas time and New Year time was great and full with God's love and joy! We want to say BIG THANKS for the vitamins! That is such a big support for us, specially for older people because vitamins are very expensive and they cannot buy them. That was a wonderful Christmas gift from you to us! There are no words to express how to say thanks but only thing what we can do is still praying for you! You are in our prayers and in our hearts!

Our God is amazing and you are His servants, you are His children and His angels on earth.

with love Kuldigas church and pastor Vivita

ps. so so sorry that we do not have pictures, we always forget to take them :(but I found one :) but there are only kids and the vitamins is behind them :)



Planning ahead for Christmas 2013

The text below is designed to be read aloud during a Mission Moment, to a group, or printed in a newsletter after designating where the gifts will be collected and the gift slips will be distributed.

To send your collected gift funds via The Advance, use the attached Gift Transmittal mailed to arrive at GBGM by December 15, 2013.

To: Missions Coordinator, Senior Pastor, Body of Christ
From: Friends of Latvia

Harsh economic conditions in post-soviet Latvia (on the Baltic Sea) result in many citizens there surviving the difficult winters on a diet of only potatoes. Many nutrition-related illnesses emerge in late winter as a result with the young and the elderly particularly at risk.

In recent years generous Methodists have provided a winter regimen of vitamins to people in need in Latvia. Health officials there are singing the praises of the improved health of the people fortunate enough to receive such a gift and of a connected body of people so willing to help.

Have you ever had trouble purchasing a gift for that person who has everything? This Christmas for \$25 you may purchase a gift on behalf of someone you know to provide this winter vitamin regimen for a person needing them in Latvia this winter.

You may purchase the gift at _____ and you will receive a printed gift plate to be included in a Christmas card for the person honored.

You may have just completed your Christmas shopping.

Christmas 2013

On your behalf a

Winter Regimen of

Vitamins

has been given to
a resident of Latvia.

Difficult economic conditions result in many Latvians surviving on potatoes during the winter months. Your gift is a contribution to the river of living water spreading the good news of a risen Savior helping the citizens of Latvia.

Viņš Dzīvo!
(He Lives !)



United Methodist Church
Friends of Latvia

Christmas time at Kuldiga UMC

The long awaited Christmas time has passed by. The month of December in our congregation has been special and beautiful. Each member had a chance to “become a dwarf: every Sunday at the fellowship table, because we prepared hand-made greeting cards, baked gingerbread cookies, and even made a soup to have for lunch together. We had a wonderful Christ’s birthday celebration at a nearby guest house “Polishi.” We solved puzzles, baked cookies and even held a competition between the kids and adults about who would know more Christmas songs. The winner is a secret. :) Together with the children we waded through a snow field to an open air sanctuary which is owned by the guest house. And, of course, the little dwarfs had prepared gifts for everyone. A special guest – a little dog named Remo - joined our group and became the favorite of the night and the biggest mandarin eater.



The Christmas Eve at church was so quiet and white and beautiful, we had not experienced it this way for a long time. We baptized our Sunday School teacher Daina. The theme of the sermon was “Who are you in the nativity story?” It is a little sad that so few hearts are seeking God on the Christmas Eve, however we are pleased and happy for everyone who attended the service.

The Sunday School children and parents’ event that included games, handicraft and songs gave joy to kids, teachers and one of the mothers. God prepared this evening best as it could be. It was a good start, however we have room for growth, we have things to pray for and answers to look for – for example, why the parents are not supporting their children?



The church in Kuldiga is covered in white heaps of snow, the trees are white and the weather is cooling, but we ask you to pray about our elder generation – they are in great need of health, God’s healing and strength!

May the year 2013 be blessed for you! Together we are still capable to move mountains!

We have some news!

We have a new accompanying pianist from January 1st – Zane Lase. She is 32, a mother of twins and a wonderful wife to her husband Arturs. She is teaching English in high school and a pianist in some hobby groups. With her joining we have a new wave in worshipping!



Redecoration of the fellowship room

In the Spring of 2012 we applied for Kuldiga municipality project “Let’s do ourselves!” It was approved and provided financial assistance to redecorate the fellowship room. The previously grey colors now were replaced with violet, pink and beige. The old ceiling was replaced by a suspended one and the floor received a new cover also – linoleum. We did all the work ourselves and with patience. We are particularly happy for the teens who did the



painting jobs and also the clean-up after all the work was done. The redecoration went pretty well and successfully. The result is exceptional, however the initial plan to redecorate the fellowship room of Kuldiga church got “redecorated” itself, because the room changed its function to Sunday School room. Now children and teenagers use the room not only on Sundays, but also on weekdays. We are happy that the congregation and children are satisfied with the work accomplished, and also because there is just a little left for the premises to be fully redecorated.



Our Sunday School!

It has increased in number – God has blessed us with 15 children on average each Sunday! For Kuldiga UMC it is a large number. We have a wonderful new teacher Daina (sister of Lauma) who has become very close to the kids. The children are very responsive and diligent in attending every Sunday. We have decided to divide the kids by age groups starting with the next curriculum. Now we think that there is shortage of teachers, but we will continue to pray for and trust God’s guidance. The children



s o m e t i m e s like to go for a walk and to bake cookies together. It is a great joy to see their little hearts that are actively seeking God. He has answered our prayers for new children and here they are now – little



princes and princesses of the Lord.



Teenager Club

We meet every Wednesday, there are just 5 of us, however we accomplish a lot. We visit old people, on Christmas we decorated the church and baked gingerbread cookies. Of course, we learn about God and become stronger in our faith. We try to read the



Bible and pray at home. We want to grow older and lead the Sunday School! In December we organized a movie night, walked the streets and invited our peers to the church. In March we plan to visit Tashi UMC and to be in fellowship with their teenagers. We like to gather and do good things



Social Outreach

We are diligent in knitting socks and mittens, the reserves of yarn are decreasing, but we still have some left! Also the teens manage to knit and crochet something at home. We do the best we can, as long as the health permits and eyes see the yarn!

We distribute food staples not only to church members in need, but also to those people in Kuldiga who are in financial struggles. We are active and try to help and give joy to others.

Our next plans

- ✦ to start English classes
- ✦ to develop activities for teenagers and youth
- ✦ continue work to increase the number of churchgoers
- ✦ to await Easter in a special way (we have a special fellowship every Sunday)
- ✦ attend the old people’s home on regular basis
- ✦ to redecorate the fellowship room applying for financial support from Kuldiga town project “Let’s do ourselves!”
- ✦ organize a common trip for the congregation in Spring.

Above all – we want to grow strong in faith and bring His light to the world!

I am thankful to God for each one of your prayers, for your support and love! It is marvelous to serve our Lord together, it is wonderful to fall and feel His strength in my weakness. Our congregation has endured the cold winter, flu and other illnesses and now we come each Sunday together for a celebration. We have not increased in number lately, but we have in spirit! We have become more united and tolerant toward each other. God lifts us up and answers our prayers in His time. The Spring is approaching with new goals, new plans and willingness to continue growth!



Dear Friends of UMC in Latvia!

On behalf of the UMC congregations of Liepa and Sarkani I send warm hearted greetings. I'm glad and grateful to God that I am where He has chosen me to be and serve! Nothing would be possible without guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, just as He Himself has promised in John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Amen.

I'm very thankful to the Lord for that and also for: I Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen and Hallelujah!

Thanks be to God for His work in the congregations, Sunday school and in the youth ministry! My prayers of thanks to God continue for your support, your prayers, your love for Latvia and especially for cities of Liepa and Sarkani! It can only be done by God - that your hearts are open to love, good thoughts and the desire to help, and that all is a blessing to us – in our churches, with our children and young people. Our appreciation goes to God and to you!

Thank you so much for your desire to continue to support financially our congregations in Liepa. We will be very thankful if there would be a possibility for you to help with our greatest need, which is help our children from Liepa and Sarkani next summer to get to the Wesley Camp. Unfortunately the expenses of transportation are too high for us to help children to get from Liepa across Latvia to Liepaja. In 2012 we were paying LVL430/\$860 for the transportation. This year it would be very close to that amount. Unfortunately children from Sarkani are not even able to pay the participation fee, because their parents live in indigent status. So far every year we were able to pay for their expenses out of our sister congregation financial support money. In 2012 from Sarkani we helped to get to camp 4 children, from Liepa Sunday school 13 children and from the Russian congregation 6 children. We will be very thankful for any kind of support.

Another problem that I am facing now in my ministry is the congregation's car. We went to the diagnostic center, the mechanic told me that my machine is at the end, and in order to be able to continue to drive it, we have to spend large funds, which we already have done. For now we still can use it, but we never know for how long. We need a younger car – because the need is truly great – there is no other way how to travel between Liepa and Sarkani and Cesis as a pastor accept by car. Our request/prayer is – please, help us if you can to purchase a car for the needs of congregations!

Children from Sarkani were very happy for the shoes, which was a gift from the "Faithful Men" choir from Fairview UMC,

while they were visiting Latvia. These shoes were also for the children from two large and poor families in Liepa. Thank you to the "Faithful Men" and other supporters! May God bless their ministries and may God's will come true wherever He desires to send them in ministry!

Huge blessing from the Lord through the hearts of our supporters were the vitamins for the children and adults in Liepa and Sarkani. We were able to help children in Sarkani for 3 months. And great support that was also for the older generation! Praise be to God! I once saw the real price in our drug store for the vitamins, which was over \$6! It truly was a surprise for me. I can only be thankful to God and pray – may He open His heavenly windows and pour out His blessings upon all who participate in His merciful, loving and blessed work! Praise be to God!

Both of our congregations are very thankful to God for we are so richly blessed with the gifts for the Sunday school children, also with the food packages, but especially for your love and prayers! Truly thank you all very much!

I am also very thankful for the opportunity to join Russian congregation in their English language lesson. It was difficult to find a good teacher in Liepa. Therefore, after communication with this teacher who is actually from Valmiera we came to an agreement that she will provide English language classes also for the Liepa Latvian congregation. We will be starting our classes on March 6 with the help of our Lord.

In the Liepa congregation since the Annual Conference of 2012 Pastor Janis Grunte is working with the youth from Cesis congregation. Nick Fletcher from Josiah Venture is working together with Janis Quote from JV website: "Nick Fletcher has been serving as a Model Maker with Josiah Venture in Latvia since November, 2007. In this role, he is involved with a contacting ministry, Fusion, that uses music, drama and dance as tools for reaching the youth of Latvia for Christ. He is also involved in discipling relationships and helps in a local church with the youth group. Nick lives in Riga near his team mates and is able to gather together for weekly prayer, encouragement in the Word, and where they are all involved in building up a local church."

Also, since the fall in our church is serving Pastor Gundar Ceipe, who was assigned right after the Annual Conference. For the First Sunday in Advent he organized in Liepa a "Celebration of Light," where 150 Sunday school children participated together from the congregations nearby. During this celebration we were walking through the town with the light of candles in our hands and prayed for the school, kindergarten, town hall, and other important places in Liepa. Thanks be to God!

In the fall we had one baptism with immersing and now we are preparing for another baptism at Easter – this holy sacrament

(continued on page 14)

When we look back to September then it is hard to believe that it has been just 6 months since I, Rev. Gunta Grina-Sologuba, and Rev. Edgars Sneiders have served together in Liepaja UMC.

One of the greatest things we have experienced during this time period is that we have formed an effective Administrative Board of the church, there are people from all generations and both genders which gives a wonderful opportunity to see both sides of the coin each time when we talk.

In the beginning we had a lot of trouble with our building's tenants and heating, it was very stressful, but God has guided us through it and we are very joyful for the things we have now.

During Christmas and Advent time we had many activities for each believer group. On Christmas Eve we had Christmas evening for the homeless, that was organized by Sniedze Vise and the youth. There were 22 men and 1 lady. It was a blessing for the ones who served and also for the whole congregation.

Another special time was decorating of the church and Christmas tree, a lot of joy, it gives unbelievable fellowship when we make things together.

One of the things we have started again is Tea afternoons for all generations and ages, where people come together



for fellowship, to get to know each other and to think about different things.

In the near future we will start women and men Saturdays, those events would happen at the same time and then we would have lunch together. As we have new people who are young adults and middle aged then these afternoons would be great possibilities for them and also for married couples.

Our Sunday School has grown comparing to last year, it is a great joy for the church. We have a lot of children from



“unhealthy” families, so mostly we have discipline problems. We would be very thankful, if you would pray for them. Our plan for summer is to have VBS.

Since February we have started Prayer mornings on Tuesdays. It is a great opportunity for people to come together and spend time in God's presence, only the attendance could be larger. But it will take time until people will recognize the need for it.



We are very thankful for your prayers and support, especially Metropolitan UMC. We are eager to build some close links with you and also you are very welcome to visit Latvia and Liepaja.

With love,
Liepaja UMC, Rev. Edgars Sneiders and Rev. Gunta Grina-Sologuba

I have started to serve UMC in Tasi [ta: shi] since September, so far I have enjoyed the church and getting to know each of the members.

We have started Sunday school almost from zero and with God's guidance and many blessings on average we have 12 children every Sunday. Our goal is to stabilize children's Sunday school and through them reach their parents, because just 3 of the mothers come to the church sometimes. We have wonderful Sunday School teachers who come from Liepaja.

We started to organize singing rehearsal for the Christmas service, so the children could sing, but naturally it has become as an activity of congregation's daily life. Children come to singing rehearsal 6 times a month.

We had special Flag Blessing devotion in Tasi, where people were invited to come together for the Blessing devotion for the Latvian flag, which was first time hoisted on the mast. We also had hot soup and fellowship outside. It was good to get to know people who live around us. May God give us wisdom how to reach them.

Also adults together with me have started to sing, we aren't a lot, but still wonderful to sing together and after Christmas we visited Matras UMC and sang in the service. Our musician artist is Mirdza Grauduze and we are very thankful that she spends time with us and also plays for the worship service.

(Liepa, continued from page 12)

with the Lord will be for Anna, a girl from the Hope Center. She wants her son Lauris also to be baptized. We invite you to keep Anna and her son Lauris in your prayers!

Many of you already know that we, my husband and I, are a foster family. Already a second year is going by since we have accepted in our house 3 children from one family. Since May 8, 2012 they were joined by a 3 week old brother. Just when he was born the orphans' court took him away from the mother and placed him into the orphanage. The thought didn't leave my mind about a newborn baby who will have to live for one year in the orphanage while his brother and sister are with us... What is an orphanage? ... There is no mother's and father's love... I was thinking about it all day long and even during the nights when I woke up. Till I realized that all of that I and my husband can give – give the most important that an infant needs – loving and tender care for him. In February 16th he turned 10 months old. He is peaceful, happy and smiley child. He crawls and is trying to stand up and wants to walk already. The orphans' court says that children might stay with us for two more years, but I believe it is

During Christmas time we had different activities, we came together to bake gingerbread and make gifts for the elderly people in Tasi region. Then one day we spent traveling from one home to other with Word of God, songs and poems from children. It is wonderful ministry which has its roots long time ago. So we are glad to keep it up. Now we are thinking about visiting these elderly people after Easter.

In the beginning of February we started English Club where people come together to study English. There are people and teens from our congregation, but also 3 of them are not. So for us it is also a "test" to show what kind of believers we are and to whom we belong. Hopefully God will make it possible that they will be willing to attend our small congregation.

Step by step we are planning our Lent events and Holy Week activities. The weekend before Holy Week we will host Teens Weekend Camp, it will be the first Teens camp in Tasi. So please pray that God would guide and teens would come and enjoy fellowship and the presence of God.

May the Lord Jesus Christ hug you from all of us in Tasi!

With love,
Tasi UMC and Rev. Gunta Grina-Sologuba

all in God's hands and time will show. I am asking God and still waiting on His answer - may He helps us to sell the apartment so that we would be able to purchase a country house property. It would help us to teach love for the work and responsibilities, because living in the apartment those kinds of opportunities are very limited for four children.

On behalf of all of our congregations members I thank God for the humanitarian aid of clothing and shoes, which we received from our supporters. It was also a great opportunity to help all 4 foster kids. I am also very thankful to the director of Hope Center Gita Binane and also Rigonda, because whenever I had a need of the support for the newborn baby, they both supported me with advice as well as with material needs. Praise and thanks be to God!

1.John 4:16 " And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." Amen.

In love of Crist,
Ilzite from Liepa

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





Are you listening?

I have never considered myself a "fundraiser" but it has been interesting to listen for God's still small voice whispering in my ear. Make the challenge, suggest something new, or be willing to step out in faith. Offer people the opportunity to give! So many of us have been blessed with

enough resources to share with others.

During the Christmas season Jim and I gave our congregation the opportunity to participate in the Vitamin Program for the first time. Meadowbrook UMC was able to send \$550 to Latvia to purchase vitamins. Recently we began collecting "Noisy Offering" on the last Sunday of the month. Once a quarter the offering is given for the children in Latvia. On February 24th our coins totaled \$164.23 – there may have been a few bills in there also. Not a lot of money, but together we CAN make a difference! Where have you heard God's still small voice today?

Do co-workers and associates give you gift cards every year that you don't know what to do with? Do you feel obligated to return the favor?



I've found myself in that position for a number of years going out and purchasing gift cards for associates that I knew they didn't really need as well as having to find ways to spend forgotten cards tossed in a drawer.

Last year I discovered a solution to the dilemma and created a benefit to various mission efforts at the same time. Prior to Thanksgiving, I sent an e-mail to those associates that I expected would purchase a gift card for me and that I would be doing the same for them. In the e-mail, I asked them not to purchase a gift for me, but to use those resources for the mission work that is nearest and dearest to their hearts assuring them I would be doing the same in their names for the ministry dearest to me.

I received overwhelming encouragement and positive responses from my associates and eventually received thank you notices from the ministries supported by those persons. I was able to gather up all that I would have spent for those gifts and made one gift to the Bambi Room Ministry in Latvia listing all the names of the associates on my list. Included below is the response from Gita about the gifting that I forwarded on to my associates.

If you find yourself in that situation, I would challenge and encourage you to do something similar by blessing a Latvian Ministry as well as those for whom you care.

Happy Gifting,

Jim Nance

Dearest Jim, Dana and Jim's co-workers,

Thank you for this gift for the Bambi Children's Care Center. This money is much appreciated and will help us take better care of the children entrusted to our care so that the mothers or caregivers can work and supplement the family's meager gov't support money. May this Christ's birthday truly be joyful and meaningful. Gita and the Bambi Center

Thank you to the Latvian pastors for your contributions to this newsletter. Special thanks to Rihards Germans for translating the reports. And Happy 1st Birthday to Valts on April 27th!

2013 Wesley Camp Days

- Wesley Days.....June 28 - July 4
- Youth Camp.....July 7 - 12
- Shepherd's Training.....July 14 - 16
- Outreach Camp.....July 17 - 20
- Children's Camp.....July 23 - 28
- Apple Festival.....September 21

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

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