

## Friends of Latvia 2015

*Notes from Melissia Mason*

### Day 1 – Thursday, April 16

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Harvey Ozmer delivered a devotion on fear vs. courage.

Joshua inherited leadership from Moses... Moses' helper

Who do you have the courage to be? Trust in God's definition of you. Sometimes we let our past or others define us.

Romans 12:1-2

Live as God's champion

**Bishop Allstead greeting** video link: [https://youtu.be/G7Zw\\_t-6Q2E](https://youtu.be/G7Zw_t-6Q2E)

*Introductions*

**Gita's report...** transition. Mission. Fellowship... walking hand in hand for mutual benefit

Mission is from God – we need help in discerning the timetable. Be in prayer for what God is calling you to do.

Inese and Gita, or Inese, Edgars and Gita will be co-DS's

Kristine is back and is sole pastor of Cesis

Gundars is going back to the Moravian Church

Vivita will be back from maternity leave

Janis G. is back in country, taking care of grandmother

Sneidze and Zinta have heard the call to ministry

Admin Board is setting church policy.

Cars: What happens when the car needs repairs and there's no public transportation. Working on a policy. When do we reach out to FOL for help? If there's a need that can't be met by LAMB, the DS will reach out to FOL for help, with approval of Admin Board.

Lay preacher course, global leadership videos, school of congregational development, seminar on addiction with the German Methodist Church.

Alpha in Matras in the community center.

Concerts raise money for outreach

Open Church night... mainline denominations opened their churches. 20,000 people

Hymnal: The hymnal is being printed now, and a dedication this year. First hymnal of any denomination that will be copyrighted.

Camp Wesley – 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary

Hope Center – 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year

Worldwide connection is growing... Rome, Ireland support Tasi, Finland friendship congregations (not financial), Germany youth camp at Riga First (worked on basement)

Ecumenical connections broadening... Jewish connection strong... represented at the holocaust remembrance. Anglican. Lutheran World Federation. Methodist church is getting recognized as a traditional congregation and getting invitations at a higher level.

Riga First has int'l Baptist, reformed, and evangelical Lutheran all worship in the Methodist church

Lay people are feeling empowered.

Studying Bishop Schnase's book, 7 Levers. They are realizing they have freedom within their conference.

#### Challenges:

Building issues...

- Riga 2<sup>nd</sup> needs roof, plumbing
- Liepaja – fire
- Riga 1<sup>st</sup> – basement, heating pipes need to be redone, wooden building
- Liepa – mold problems, needs drainage ditch, needs insulation

We need volunteer youth pastors.

Need modern teaching materials and programs for young adults

#### Ministry Opportunities:

- Basement of Riga 1<sup>st</sup>
- Hospice Care
- Center for addiction – Janis B is working on a house
- Ministering to Latvians trapped in other countries... already had 3-4 cases
- Wooden building ... time has come

GBGM – Global Ministries - gathering... courageous pastors from Laos, Korea... Russia and Ukraine holding hands together

## Financials...

No longer as of 2016 have Global Ministries support... \$7000 for 2015. At first it was \$20k per year which went to programming.

Good News: offerings have gone up in all the churches

Latvia is coming out of the deep financial crisis

District has no money “built up” – it came into existence in 2007

District Income sources:

- Each congregation gives 10% of offerings
- Discretionary fund (money given to use wherever you see fit)
- Advance Special – Latvia Initiative and undesignated funds (only source of income as of 2016)

Expenses:

- Upkeep of office
- Apportionments
- Travel expenses – 2 delegates +fee
- Lay delegate participation in lay conference
- BOM & Admin council
- Leadership training

Churches Source of income:

- Offerings
- 2/3 of partnership support

Expenses

- Utilities
- Maintenance
- SS/youth
- 10% to pastors salary
- 2% pastor’s pension
- Travel
- Music
- Maintenance
- Camp

Pastors’ Income: solely from salary

Expenses:

- Housing
- Car
- Tithing
- Serving
- Pastor's retreat
- Seminars
- Pension
- Health insurance
- Food costs at meetings

Euro 3306.40 per month (for all of them)

### **Wesley Camp Report...**

180 kids and adults at camp

Michael Barr (VIM volunteer) – made a big difference

Camp is certified

Sneidze is camping certified

Inese will have to step down as director of Wesley Camp for the DS position

Needs: Cabins need to be built (Lithuanians don't want to travel that far and sleep in a tent)...  
permitting/compliance issue; parking lot and ongoing maintenance needs.

Financial need... donations in 2014 dropped from a high of 30something to 6. 12,000 euro to run the camp for a year... last year's advance giving was 7500. Bank balance is trending downward since 2012. Advance fund supports the camp itself, LAMB supports the camping part. Was \$4,000. The LAMB funding goes away because GBGM support goes away. Only solution so far is to raise the camp fees... and some can't afford it. These fees are extremely low. They are raising the fees a little bit.

Holston house has been improved so the staff have a better place to sleep.

Churches could commit to so many (number) of campers. Special offerings for the Camp.

\$100/kid would be a better fundraising goal than the \$75 in the past. If we could raise funds for 200 kids at \$100 each, that would cover all of the costs for a year.

Per cabin... cost is \$8,000

Reaching out to Germans or others that have use of Wesley Camp.

Board now includes a German member.

## **Hope Center Report**

Hope Center is down to no money.

There is no accountability for construction contractors... much of it has had to be redone.

Official government recognition... certification... finally the beginning of March we were able to submit the application. The ministry said they have never seen an application that was so well done. They were in awe of the work going on there. Got the certification last week!! They are so thankful for the ministry... they overlooked the mold issue.

Last year the staff was put on the official payroll

Waiting list... getting critical. Many of the crisis centers have shut down. Now they only keep them one month (instead of 3) and no training... just shelter and food.

Certification changes everything... now they can publicize and fundraise.

God has sent us 5 people interested in utilizing the wooden building. It's an expensive project, so where is the greatest need. Decision (we think) is Hope Center. More full service... women who don't need the housing could come for counseling.

Received a grant from the Methodist church in Great Britain.

Profile has changed... it has been for any young woman that needs help. Now we are having calls from Holland and England of young women who have gone under promises broken... both have associations that will help them get home.

Gita had hoped that there would soon be no need for the Hope Center, but the opposite is true. There is more and more need. All are abused, all come with a lot of baggage.

Straupe building... challenge... needs repaired or sold.

Right now there are 8 mothers in the Hope Center.

10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary... all the mothers and babies were baptized!!

## **Day 2 - Friday, April 17**

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Jesse Sowell delivered a devotional on making Jesus, not just Savior... but Lord

Ilzite... sharing and remembering Rev. Eric Vesterlund. Psalm 116:15.... Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. There were two pastors serving in Liepa... planting seeds of God's word for 10 years. Moved to Sweden he got sick and in a nursing home... until the last moment they were talking about Jesus. Eric is now in heaven and his wife Ilzite is now back in Latvia. Her daughter said when Ilzite came back there would be revival. She will sow what she has planted.

## **In Mission Together – Lisa Nelsony**

1 Corinthians 12:12-31... the parts of the body

See Partnership Covenant – resource in the Google drive

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B8iv-bgYuS6sWXRWQi05T051YUIONEpFTW8wOVBxZFpfcWdV&authuser=0>

Swapping pulpits... sharing prayer concerns... having Christmas eve services...

Laying aside our own agendas, coming together and seeking God's agenda.

Told the story of the German evangelism bus... way outside of comfort zone. Not building, evangelizing

Janis planned the trip because he knows the country and the people better than Lisa did.

They visited a home for teen addiction... more testimonies

From Gita Re: Jeanie Reimer (in an accident)... she had been a partnership in Lithuania. So much has changed since IMT. They have Bible Study together. They take turns with the Bible study each week.

(Videos for the church reports are on the Latvia YouTube page [youtube.com/user/metodistilv](https://www.youtube.com/user/metodistilv))

## **Liepaja report**

133 people in the church... 9 new members... 4 new members will be baptized when they get back

Monthly living room in a youth home... where unchurched feel comfortable to come and spend time with us and play games and see that Christians are real people. And opportunity to speak with parents

After school program led by Sneidze. The church is taking more leadership... the elderly see that they have gifts to offer.

Prayer breakfast each week, youth week, mom's club, new small groups, men's group, study Bible or watch films

Lay preacher seminar in the region for Liepaja, Kuldiga, Paplaka, Tasi, Matras... have had 3 and 4<sup>th</sup> in May. For Lay leader training

Alpha course for the first time last year. Good attendance – avg 30 every Thursday evening. We see the fruit because inactive members became active, two were saved.

Special worship services throughout the year... service for children

Diaconal work... packets to deliver to people who are not able to come to the church. Made gifts for Syrian refugee kids for Christmas. Collected gifts for Ukrainian refugees. Have a link to a Bishop Gerald in Uganda.... Donations to the orphanage. Visit a palliative care hospital they take a service, songs and message to bring hope to them. Pray with them sometimes for the first time, sometimes for the last time.

Repairs to the church. The church in Denmark helped to put new windows in the church. New electrical in SS class, new doors, new signs. Fire a few weeks ago... Jesus makes all things new, so now new chimneys, new heating system, new walls.

Ecumenical religious committee... plan with the community. Lighting of Advent candle... first Saturday walk to the city center with candles. Church night June 5 – please pray – church will be open 6 pm to midnight for a concert, workshops, prayer walks, etc. Be creative to show people what the church is. People who have never been in the church feel more comfortable to come in. Ecumenical Taize service at different churches each month. Prayer breakfast for leaders in the city, organized other pastors to lead and teach.

### **Matras Report**

3 big service – November 11, Christmas and Easter.

Family days and Good Friday together with Tasi

SS and teen club. Not a big congregation, but trying to help people who have problems. Gifts for children in Syria and money for Ukraine.

Light festival, ecumenical services.

Alpha course

Methodist conference in their church

### **Tasi Report**

95% of the families that came to the family event are unchurched

Workshops with children and parents who haven't heard about God

Habit of visiting seniors and disabled... whether or not you are part of the church. 20 people twice per year are visited, sing songs, offer prayers, and spend times... all day.

Empty flat has been given to the church for 5 year contract. How will it be used? Tasi is a forgotten place from the government perspective, but it is not forgotten by God. Shower, washing machine and dryer, a place for social activities. Praying to see what God will do with this.

Poet and singer... developed an ensemble White Roses for all generations to sing together and share faith. Have been invited to sing in a culture center. Need a good keyboard (synthesizer)... prayer has been answered!

### **Daina Zamberga – Metode**

Daina shared about Metode's art exhibitions and the growth in sharing this method of raising funds through art and handcrafts.

## **Plans to go to Latvia**

2015

Smithfield – July 9-21 – in Cesis – doing some construction/restoration in the building, Bible studies. Others welcome, but tickets are already purchased.

Tour each church for sound equipment needs – then try to get funds. Roger Schmidt / Fairview

Michael Barr – Camp Wesley in July

Holt Cason – Hope Center 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> week of August.

Grapevine – August 20-24 – Annual Conference

*Sidenote: Wesley Camp – in the winter, someone broke in to Holston house, got keys, stole large brush-cutter machine. Arrangements have been made for a new machine from a distributor in Germany, but the issues is VAT tax of 19% in each country... unless we can find a certified importer who can make the arrangements. Pray for these arrangements in order to get ready for the 10<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Wesley Camp.*

2016

Possibility of having Friends of Latvia in Latvia next year. Jim Hayes will head up an exploratory team. Possibly in June? Mary Garber would like to be on the committee.

## **Sarkani Report (Ilzite)**

Not an easy place to do ministry... big problem there is alcoholism. We need to focus not on what people are doing but what God is doing there. Therefore I'm grateful to be serving Sarkani for 10 years now. In terms of membership... it may seem there hasn't been a lot of growth, but I am looking at ways of reaching out, not just inside the church. There is need for a lot of practical things... small children's needs. We are meeting a lot of practical needs... food packages. This year it's a miracle that we are able to help Ukrainians as well. We may think they are too small to help others, but they still can... and raised 100 euros to help the Ukrainians.

Since the renovation and new heater this is the first time in 10 years they have been warm in their worship room

## **Liepa Russian (Vera)**

Our village is not big. Many have left, but those who remain there... it's not an easy life because of the lack of work there. In our church, most of the people who attend are elderly and those who don't have work, but we are happy that kids do attend church. Those kids speak to their parents... God will speak to the parents through the children.

We have received a lot of help for the after school program because there are a lot families with a lot of kids. Many one-parent families. The kids are running around in the village with nothing to do without this program.

Two families have joined... one who has six children.



We're also getting used to going out with the kids to share the word of God. They make greeting cards to take out, so they take them everywhere... on the street, in shops, to houses.

Grateful for people who are doing volunteer jobs to run the program smoothly.

2<sup>nd</sup> time to celebrate Independence Day 18 of nov. Gather inside the church and then go out into the town. Make the Latvian flag out of red and white candles, sing Latvian anthem, etc.

Before Easter, on Thursday they had a special worship service in the evening for washing of feet. The first year we did this, she was afraid because there were a lot of kids coming. After we washed feet, we had holy communion, then changed the altar setting to black and remained silent as they left. There were two girls that came to the foot washing who came to her office to tell her that something began to change within them in their lives. Then she said, "Okay God, I'll do it"

On Friday, they walk out with the cross beginning at the church property and go all around and then return. The kids ask if they are having the cross walk again because God has put something in their hearts. Something they have missed in their own families.

God hears our prayers. We don't have any music leaders. We sing according to our abilities. We were in prayer regarding this... and God answered our prayer and gave us a projector and they can now search for songs and put the lyrics on the screens.

Then they prayed regarding the after school program... they prayed for a computer. For the first hour they would spend their time getting ready for the next day. Sometime the homework they had would involve internet. During Christmas we had a large gift... blessed by 3 computers! And now the kids can use those for educational purposes. The kids were amazed. Because they were praying together with the adults. They were deeply touched by that. They are convinced – yes, God is listening!

### **Liepa Latvian (Ilzite)**

Sunday School testimony... little boy Alex with ear pain... they prayed for his healing and he ended up not having to have surgery. God is God and his timing is perfect.

They would hope to have no orphans in Latvia. The Bishop says... When you're on your couch in your house and there is an empty spot... remember that there is a child who needs a mother. When they finished the course for foster parents, she prayed that God would give her the kids she should have. It is so important that children are placed into Christian family. Because then when things are sorted out in their biological family they will have a Christian influence.

### **Why did you go to Latvia? (several shared testimonies)**

#### **Kuldiga (Vivita)**

Charlotte's birthday is May 3 – she'll be 1

Second-hand day for citizens and church members (some from Denmark) – everyone comes and taking what they need

(see video)

Right now they are sheep without a shepherd, but the members are good and one of them takes turns leading the service.

The girls (youth) are really growing and inviting their friends. One of them has a dream of being a pastor.

Seeing new faces in the places where someone passed away.

Their partner churches were able to purchase a flat so that they can rent it out for income.

The Bible studies during her maternity leave have suffered and she has prayed that they would come together without her.

### **Jelgava (Janis)**

Romans 15:17-18

Jelgava church in a town of 70,000 with 23 churches and many different religions. Started the church with 2 people, one has passed and one doesn't come anymore. They average 10 in worship (a 500% increase).

They have tried different ways of reaching out to people. Advertising had no response.

Despite this, God is still at work. On two occasions, people have been healed when they would have had to have surgery. Another man who said he would never leave a cup of beer... is now sober. His wife was praying for him.

The only way to speak to people about God is heart to heart... beyond the physical location of the church. God is present and at work in homes and workplaces. Each one of them is a light sharing about God.

They are having prayer meetings, committing to pray for people who are not believers. Prayer is what can transform people. Not us.

How should we talk to people? Mission bus from Germany helped to share on the streets. Four families visited the church, two remain.

Jelgava is a city of students. There are several educational institutions. Of the 23 churches, no one has a specific program for reaching out to students. They have very good ecumenical relations, so pastors from different denominations come together once a month. Janis would like to together come up with a place where students can come together. The Methodist church can't do it alone, but together they could. A café could give a place to get cheaper food or drink and have music, with a Christian emphasis. This ministry could be a small seed that could grow to a big tree.

Gita asked if he would start a ministry to alcoholics, and he didn't want to... but now he feels called to it. They have a property where they are planning to make a rehab center. In an area called Madona ... a place where there are no Methodist churches. Prayers for the finances to make this dream a reality.

(German bus – any country in Europe can get the bus for free – sometimes it's not free... comes with sound system, video equipment, table and chairs, activities for children.)

### **Cesis (Kristine)**

Prayer request... Cesis and Kuldiga both are without a full time pastor. She was supposed to be part time, but now without Gundars she is having to travel far and be in school too.

Cesis has experienced a lot of pastoral change. Each different... they need some stability.

2 main priorities: Further education and Outreach/Ministry | Searching for identity.

Education:

- Confirmation
- Baptism
- Pre-marriage
- Bible studies
- Topical seminars
- Alfa

Outreach...

- Within the church
- Outside the church

Core group of 4 people who feel a need for evangelical work within the church... to go from need need need to helping others. Regardless of what we think we don't have, we all have something.

Prayer request: two Bible study groups per week ... learning about small groups concept... Kristine would like to be able to be there to help guide the content

40 Days of Community (Rick Warren – Kristine has translated into Latvian)

Love is not feelings. It's works.

Outreach to Hope Center girls. Hope to give the girls some time away from their babies.

Working with children with disabilities in Raiskums boarding school

Visiting elders on birthdays and holidays

On paper, we are 30. No idea who those people are.

Collected 100 euros for Ukrainian refugees... and donated 300 euros. Collecting for Riga 2 and Wesley camp. The refugees are in the Ukrainian Methodist Church with a specific need to help support them. Also collected money

for Liepaja church 91 euros and Oskars chipped in to make a round 100 ☺ - and other 50 euros from Bible study group

5<sup>th</sup> Sundays – fellowship with Liepa Latvia and Liepa Russian

Don't have Sunday School yet, but have 2 children.

Raising funds for construction work to happen with Smithfield this summer.

### **Riga 1<sup>st</sup> (Astra)**

Prison ministry, music ministries, concerts to help others... like wood for heating

Collecting humanitarian aid from Denmark and congregation to give to social services

Supporting those who come into the church with consultations for young mothers... legal, spiritual, psychological, practical. Providing an environment of hope without judgment.

Courses and seminars for alpha, bible lessons, guest speakers, counseling.

AA.

People are working their community service hours there in the church. Sometimes they even stay after and join the church.

Night of the churches again this year. Over the entire country this year.

Metode

Smaller ministries that aren't as visible... artists use our space because it's cold and dark in his space.

Keeping open doors so that people can come in for a rest or for tea at any time... even stay overnight.

Excited about hosting groups of visitors... a youth camp from Germany

Four denominations worship in the Riga church... Riga Reformed, Evangelical, International. We are open to women in ministry, so we are the only church that would allow a woman pastor.

They are working together in partnership, not fighting.

Praying about spiritual growth and development in the church members. Some people come into the church and think they are Christian, but daily life doesn't reflect that. It's not so easy to be a Christian in a family of non-Christians.

In prayer about leaders for children and youth ministries

Planning and ministry in the basement

There is talent that can help people... just need the program in place

God has given you gifts... what you do with them is your gift to God

## **Riga 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Three families have started attending from the tours on church night

Andris is passionate about churches visiting together... so once a month they put money into a pot and when they have enough Riga 2<sup>nd</sup> goes and visits a church.

Report from Faithful Men... 2<sup>nd</sup> church is very healthy. There's a new spirit... multi-generations... spirit of evangelism... boldness.

Issue is the roof... roof itself is in good condition, needs patching and gutter work.

Got to eat Sunday meal in the church members' homes

Pastor Milda is on her death bed (passed away after Friends of Latvia)

## **Feedback on Pastor Income video...**

Number of pastors / number of population

Adopt a pastor... makes it more general

## **Asset mapping**

Instead of focusing on what we need or what we don't have... what do we have? What are our assets? Mark Croft shared for a brief time about the principal... make a list of all of your assets and go from there. Everyone is encouraged to do this in their own churches. Finances are only one of many, many assets we have to work with.

## **Saturday, April 18, 2015**

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Devotional thoughts from Rev. Wayne Richards

## **Hospice – presentation by Jay Analovitch**

Spiritual, emotional, psychological, and comfort care (palliative) in the last 6 months of life.

If we can provide the place for training, Dr. Sozar and Jay will be willing to train people... who then train other people... volunteers to sit with patients, be with them at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, give them visitors.

Palliative care is offered in facilities, but not in homes.

No one should die alone. No one should die in pain. No one should die without God.

## **Brainstorm and Discussion**

Partner churches...

- More than one church can partner with each church
- Liepa Russian doesn't have a partner church. Right now Liepa Russian is funding from money left over from (?)
- Paplaka is with Williamsburg, VA now
- Metropolitan in Detroit is hoping to get more involved with Liepaja
- Matras partner church is a SS class, which is funding only – no relationship
- Tasi is Ireland
- Jelgava – partner church has had a new pastor, funding continues – no relationship

## **Perspective on Russia...**

Depends on who you talk to... two different media give two different stories. Russian out of Moscow; Latvian out of Latvia.

NATO is very alert

Putin is a powder keg

The Latvians don't feel totally safe...

They feel "wait and see"

Good news is, now the EU and the world understand the reality of the threat.

Right now it is safe to go to Latvia and they would never allow us to come if there was something imminent.

Of the Baltics, Latvia would be the first invaded because they have the most Russian speakers and they are in the center – divide and conquer.

The threat now is cyber attack. Propaganda.

There is not hatred. It's politics. Media propaganda is very strong.

The young people (Russian) are integrated... it's the older Russian population that do not want to be Latvian citizens. Each year the Latvians go to their freedom monument, and the Russians go to their "freedom" monument.

Brainstorming (see sticky note pics)

Nominations and Elections...

- Chair: Mark Croft
- Co-Chair: Randy Tolleson
- Treasurer/Project: Jim Hayes

- Secretary: Melissia Mason

Nominations closed and accepted by acclamation Harvey Ozmer so moved.

Wesley Camp Standing Committee: Richard Payne, Joe Acker, Vivita & Edgars Kalnina

Hope Center SC: Jim Nance, Holt Cason, Dana McCarty, Kristine Rozefelde, Gita Mednis

Pastor's Income SC: Randy Tolleson, Mark & Julie Croft, Wayne Richards, Edgars

Relationship SC: Lisa Nelsony, Jim Hayes, Daina Zamberga, Dana Nance

Jeanie Reimer is the new GBGM connection with Latvia.

Bud Vann – thanked everyone for the live feed, prayers for his health