



Mātras United Methodist Church
September 2016 – March 2017

Based on appointment of the Bishop of Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference Christian Alsted during the District Conference of UMC in Latvia in August last year, I, Jānis Grunte, started serving Mātras church as a part-time local pastor with a net salary of 245 EUR.

Main events of the half-year ministry period

Regarding ministry programs and ecumenical cooperation:

1. We have been blessed by God with a new addition to the ministry team who will be in charge of music ministry at church and in the local community.
2. We have a stable Sunday School work with more than ten children every Sunday, led by two adult Sunday School teachers.
3. If pastor is available, we try to hold worship services in the sanctuary every Sunday, but Bible studies every Wednesday at the parish's Cultural Center.
4. On Latvia's Independence Day children from the local elementary school walked to church holding torches and then participated in the holiday worship. I also participated at an ecumenical worship service at Grobiņa Lutheran church on the Independence day with a small sermon.
5. Once a year we organize a special service with presents for families with multiple children.
6. We also visit those at their home who have not been attending for a longer time or are not able to come to church due to health reasons.
7. Once a year, in September, we participate in an ecumenical worship service at Vainode town to strengthen ecumenical cooperation.
8. In collaboration with the local elementary school and pre-school the congregation participates in two charity projects – The Greatest Gift (Samaritan's Purse) and Oriental Star (preparing gifts for children suffering from consequences of war).
9. In 2016 I participated in a work group for developing of a curriculum “Theology”. The curriculum is intended for 10th to 12th grade students of Schools of General Education.
10. There is ongoing ecumenical cooperation with Grobiņa regional council to talk about novelties and possible projects for cooperation between denominations and the council.
11. Mātras church is collaborating also with international Christian association Gideons to foster spreading of the Good News in society.

Regarding maintenance of the church premises:
Nothing has been done due to lack of financial funds.

Future intentions

Regarding ministry programs and ecumenical cooperation:

1. I will look for full time ministry opportunities to ensure full social provision for myself. It is abnormal to serve two lords – God and a boss of a worldly job. Congregation and its development are suffering from that.
2. Starting the moment when I will acquire a car, I plan to start becoming actively aware of the local community – visit and form friendly relationships with the local residents. Currently there are very few adults attending church.
3. Form closer collaboration with the local elementary school and look for ways to start youth ministry – youth meetings, forming a worship group etc.
4. We are looking for an active and mission-work oriented partner church in USA and Europe to foster development of mission work of churches and start maintenance work of Mātras church' building.
5. To further improve ecumenical cooperation and to be fully aware of what is current in society and churches, we plan to meet with varied representatives from Christian denominations and local municipality once a month or once in two months, on regular basis.

Regarding the physical options to reach the local society and maintenance of the church' building:

1. Although it might seem unreal, I plan to find funds in year's time to buy a used car (3,500 to 5,000 EUR), because it is practically impossible to get to church with public transportation. If I don't find finances until the Annual District Conference in August, 2017, I will be forced to go and work abroad to save myself money for my own and ministry needs.
2. Based on current sanitary and hygiene norms for public premises in Latvia (Rules of the Cabinet No 567), the church building is not suitable for public activities. The WC is outside, water not installed inside, heating system is dated and ineffective. During cold weather it is cumbersome to lead worship. Electric system is losing power. The premises are also not suitable for people with reduced mobility. The building is not insulated and its windows need to be replaced. The building has only received cosmetic improvements before. As there are no funds available now or in a foreseeable future, we can only pray to God and hope that the inspection will not visit us and won't put a ban on the ministry work. Maybe these difficulties in maintenance of the building for so many years are like a sign from God that we need to modify or redirect its ministry in some different form.

Pastor Jānis Grunte