

# Friends of Latvia News!

Friends of Latvia in Covenant Relationship since 1991

To advance to every resident of Latvia the joyful witness of Jesus Christ as the risen Savior...

Volume 6 | Issue 1

May 2014

## Friends of Latvia 2014 Gathering

Friends of Latvia held their annual meeting April 3-5, 2014 at Fairview United Methodist Church in Maryville, Tennessee. We were joined by churches in Texas and Latvia via ooVoo simulcast. People from all over the country - Alabama, New Jersey, Arizona, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Texas and Tennessee - came together to share their passion for the church's ministry in Latvia. Pastors and lay persons from the churches in Latvia joined us by ooVoo as well, telling of their dreams for partnership, most important ministries and greatest challenges.

### Fairview Hospitality

Fairview UMC demonstrated the meaning of Christian hospitality as hosts of the 2014 Friends of Latvia Meeting. Every member of the Friends of Latvia would like to thank Rev. Jerry Russell for his gracious invitation. Because of the loving leadership of Wesley Rouse, Marguarite Wardlaw, Dan Cooper, Tonya Bushnell, and Steve Wegner, we were made to feel like family. The Spirit was clearly in every room they prepared for us and in their smiles and servant hearts.

The meeting space was perfect, the technology was seamless, the meals were amazing, and the music was awe-inspiring from the Faithful Men, Stephanie Deville, and Jill & Abigail Pair. These folks planned to entertain angels and we were the beneficiaries. Thank you to all of our brothers and sisters at Fairview UMC for the grace and love they showed us.

And if you haven't heard them yet... be sure you check out Jill and Abigail Pair on YouTube (links at right).



[http://youtu.be/oZOyot0\\_FV0](http://youtu.be/oZOyot0_FV0)

<http://youtu.be/6N2F2qWrcMg>

<http://youtu.be/Dkkdl4p48dE>

<http://youtu.be/jv1k04fgPxA>



Friends of Latvia Meeting - April 2014

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[friendsoflatvia.weebly.com](http://friendsoflatvia.weebly.com) | [www.metodisti.lv](http://www.metodisti.lv)

# Greeting From Gita Mednis

## Senior Pastor 1st Riga / District Superintendent

Greetings to all of you from your friends and prayer partners in Latvia. What a wonderful gift God has given us, this opportunity to pray for one another. Each thought and each prayer, sending thankfulness and blessings across the great Atlantic. These prayers carry the power to strengthen and build the ties that bind our hearts to each other and to God!

It was wonderful to be with those of you who gathered in Maryville for the Friends of Latvia Gathering. It was great to have most of our pastors also present via internet and video. It was wonderful to meet new coworkers in Christ's mission! God has given us an opportunity to not only grow in faith but in community and Christian love toward each other by sharing our gifts, talents and ourselves. There is nothing stronger than face-to-face relationships in conveying the meaning of being a connectional church as well as the email contacts that help us grow in relationship while we are apart.

We look forward to seeing many of you this summer and continue to uphold in prayer all of you who will not be able to join us.

As you will see in this newsletter, we have a new faithful servant who has accepted the role of secretary for our Friends of Latvia. As I say thank you to Melissa, I also want to say a heartfelt thanks to our former trusty and gifted secretary, Dana Nance! She carried the banner for many years and gifted us with her awesome talent. Thank you, Dana!

We welcome the Grapevine UMC to our fellowship. Rev. John Mollet was at our last Friends of Latvia Gathering to see what the mission was all about. Since then Grapevine has voted to "adopt" Latvia UMC as one of its villages and this time, a whole team from the church actively participated in our Gathering. We look forward to many years of mutual blessings and cooperation.

I also want to welcome Jenny Fung who works with Üllas Tankler from GBGM as well as Rev. Mel Munchinsky who works with Patrick Friday. We look forward to greater communication and cooperation with them as we move into a new era of no longer being a "new" GBGM initiative.

We missed and prayed for Joe and Linda Acker. We wish Linda renewed strength and are thankful for God's healing grace.

I also want to thank Rev. Jerry Russell, Wesley Rouse, Marguerite Wardlaw, Dan Cooper and all the caring helpers who graciously made possible and enriched the Friends of Latvia Gathering at Fairview UMC.

I am absolutely sure that God has many, many wonderful, grace-filled moments planned for us as we, together, work toward making more disciples for the transformation of the world!

May each of your days be filled with a thankful and joyous heart for all the blessings that God has and continues to bestow on you!



## Officers

Although 2014 was not the "right" year for officer elections, since we didn't meet in 2013, we went ahead and held elections for officers. Here are your new officers for 2014-2015:

### Randy Tolleson, Chair

[rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)  
Smithfield UMC  
North Richland Hills, TX

### Wayne Richards, Vice-Chair

[WCR4040@gmail.com](mailto:WCR4040@gmail.com)  
Medford UMC  
Medford, NJ

### Jim Hayes, Treasurer/Projects

[jrhayes46@bellsouth.net](mailto:jrhayes46@bellsouth.net)  
Norris UMC  
Norris, TN

### Melissia Mason, Secretary

[secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com)  
FUMC Grapevine, FUMC Colleyville  
Euless, TX



## Recommended Reading

During the Friends of Latvia Meeting, we were blessed with insight from Rev. Mel Munchinsky on behalf of In Mission Together. Mel recommended the following books for further reading...



*Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How to Reverse It*  
by Robert D. Lupton



*When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor... and Yourself*  
by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert





## Changes to Our By-Laws

A couple of changes were discussed, voted upon and approved at the last Friends of Latvia meeting. Please note these changes:

### Election of Officers

This section was amended to include the following statement: "If an election is not held in an odd-numbered year, officer terms shall be extended until the next possible election."

### Duties of Officers

Under the job description of Vice-Chair, the following addition was made: "If the Chair is unable or unwilling to call a meeting, the Vice-Chair will do so."

Under the job description of Treasurer, the following addition was made: "The Treasurer shall also serve as project manager, tracking needs, progress and costs. In addition, the Treasurer shall facilitate rapid responses to needs as they arise."

The full version of our By-Laws can be found on our [website](#) (PDF) or by contacting the Friends of Latvia Secretary, Melissa Mason, at [secretary.foL@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.foL@gmail.com)

## Notes From the Chair

### "And It's Real!!"

At the April FOL meeting while discussing the experience of traveling to Latvia, making wonderful friends there and praying for hope-filled effort to discern God's purpose there, a comment was made by Judy Brown (FUMC Grapevine, TX) about how these trips differ from vacation tours: "...and it's real." While it wasn't her intent, this is another example of how Judy can easily toss in an observation with as much truth and precision as Paul himself.



The experiences that bless us as we connect with our friends in Latvia – as we see the faces of new friends halfway around the world light up at the mention of "Jesus" or "Christ" - are real.

Also real are the lives and loves and traditions we are blessed to glimpse as love lifts barriers to reveal a kind and caring people we know as Latvians. The taste of the sweat of brows and tears of joy are real as they pass our lips. The progress is real. The simple needs, the desperate needs, and the threats are all very real and laid before us and God.

Most importantly, the eternal faithfulness of God and the guidance of our Holy Spirit are more real than the words on this page and your eyes that read them; they are that river of living water into which we have been blessed to step, and to which, we pray that we might contribute.

I'm honored to be with you and with our friends in Latvia as we advance this work.

Randy Tolleson, Chair  
[rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)  
Smithfield UMC  
North Richland Hills, TX

# Notes From the Vice-Chair

## A Prayerful Reflection Since the Maryville Meeting Mother's Day 2014

By Rev. Wayne Richards  
[WCR4040@gmail.com](mailto:WCR4040@gmail.com)  
Medford UMC | Medford, NJ

Since the beginning of Lent, I have been led to immerse myself in the challenging waters of 250 years of Isaiah's prophecy. As I finally begin to reach some solid ground in that historic pilgrimage, I am finally being given a word to share with all whose hearts are dedicated to God's work in Latvia. Together, we encounter who we are in God's larger loving purpose, and learn to faithfully trust God's guidance in the midst of impacted stresses and historic challenges to God's word.



Let the coastlands fear not.  
Let the land of Latvia take heart.  
Let Methodists, so long underground  
Form boldly into communities of faith,  
To live the liberty of God in the face of worldly tyrannies,  
Becoming God's harvest now growing strong  
To proclaim the love of God for all God's children  
In the face of divisive politics and propaganda,  
To feed the poor and the powerful  
With the humbling gift of created life itself.

Lord, you have raised up passionate prayer warriors  
From many nations, near and far, around the world  
To uphold your people in being God's remnant.  
Empowered, each is called to speak God's story  
- even in the midst of tragic national histories.

The Lord has blessed you with a messenger  
Who has proclaimed God's message of love,  
Free from fear and induced mistrust.  
In some ways like Moses ejected from Egyptian tyranny,  
she was saved from the onslaught of imperial powers.  
In some ways through the story of Moses' call  
From herding sheep to leading captive Israel,  
She was called to become a shepherd,  
Having learned the dances of human freedom abroad.  
She, too, was sent by God to the country of her birth  
To lead God's people from lives of isolating mistrust  
To sharing the abundance of faith (trust)  
by living the promise of God's love.

God's preparations of those God calls are thorough -  
and God's call, surprising -  
"Shepherds of Israel": "Suffering Servants,"  
"Fishers of men" (humankind).  
You raised up some to restore Immanuel ground.  
With freedom and boldness to plant God's living word,  
To cultivate and to harvest its crops  
To nurture the hungry and to heal the lost.

Lord, from Riga to Liepa and Liepāja,  
From Cesis to Kuldīga and Sarkani  
Indeed, across all Latvia,  
You have raised up a remnant long hidden.



Even now You are raising up Latvian leaders,  
Called to speak the good news of your abiding love  
In the midst of, and far beyond, the poverty and threat  
Inflicted so cruelly upon two, even three  
Generations of your people in Latvia.

Lord, these Latvian leaders you have called,  
Impossibly serve you, the One true God,  
(For whom all things are possible!),  
Despite the poverty of their present pay,  
And the renewed threat of foreign oppression.  
Lord, clearly, you enrich their lives by your spirit  
And through them enliven the lives of persons  
From many nations in the challenge  
You are inspiring through their service.

Lord, let their efforts in the fields of your purpose  
Yield abundant harvests of justice and righteousness.  
You have touched their mouths and hearts with cleansing fire  
So that they may speak and act powerfully for your chosen  
-the poor and the called who have suffered  
Within your spirit, stirred by their witness of a living faith.

Lord, In the midst of the poor and generations of the lost  
You have established a center of hope  
For the motherless and fatherless

*Continued on page 5...*

Who, in pressing need of your mother/father love,  
 Are about to give birth, themselves,  
 To face being mothers themselves.  
 You have raised up ministering mothers  
 For these children having children  
 Without ever knowing a mother's love.

Lord, you are breaking the grip of poverty and despair  
 For two generations, even more  
 By your saving grace  
 As all experience  
 together  
 miracle  
 new  
 birth  
 midwived  
 by your steadfast  
 faith, love and faithfulness  
 Through hope incarnate, living  
 In an earth-wide community of faith

Lord, in the vast horizon of your love  
 You have shown us the way to freedom-  
 A liberation from ancient tyrannies,  
 Both personal, and historic in scope.  
 Each one's ministry to your people in Latvia  
 Invites all the nations of the earth  
 To know with assurance the comfort of your promise  
 "Peace on earth, goodwill to all humankind."  
 Through your call you create  
 Friends in a community of caring.  
 Through your call we meet you in unmet needs  
 By caring for the least of these, your children.



Manifest your very presence-  
 Administer your justice,  
 Make real your redeeming mercy,  
 Enfold us in your larger, loving purpose,  
 For yours is the way in faith,  
 Yours is the truth in love  
 Yours is the life in grace.  
 Yours is the glory  
 In creation  
 In Israel  
 In Jesus the Christ  
 Crucified, died, buried and raised up.  
 In his spirit God dwells with us  
 No matter what!

Lord, bring abiding peace to the nations,  
 And to all living in your service-joy!

Amen.  
 WCR (5/14)



The last Sunday of each month is "Noisy Offering" Sunday at Meadowbrook UMC in Fort Worth, Texas. The children pass around the buckets during the children's sermon and collect change from those in the congregation. This particular Sunday the offering was for the children in Latvia. Pictured here is Pastor Marilyn Jones as she prays with the children at Meadowbrook for the children in Latvia. This is one small way we are able to help our Friends in Latvia.

- Dana Nance

**"Noisy Offering"**



# Top Three

## Updates from the Churches in Latvia

For the Friends of Latvia gathering, the Latvian churches were asked to prepare their top three most important ministries and their top three concerns. During the simulcast, each church shared their list and gave updates on what had been happening in their congregations since their last reports (those were given at the annual conference last August). Here are each church's top 3, along with a link to each one's video update that was posted on YouTube (where available).

### Cēsis

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Sunday Methodist church service.
- Caring for people in difficulties.
- Ministries to kids and youngsters.

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Having a pastor who lives in Cēsis
- More comfortable (heating) Church house
- Growing lay activity

### Jelgava

#### Most Important Ministries:

- If in the previous years the word "Methodist" was hardly known in Jelgava and its surrounding areas, now we can say that our congregation and even the Methodist logo has earned some recognition in our city. We have been included in a common list of active churches of Jelgava city municipality, the worship service times are printed in the local city newspaper. The newspaper even published an interview with our pastor. Our worship services are often attended by people from other denominations.
- We have been organizing distribution of humanitarian aid goods – clothes and shoes – in our church.
- Our intention is to continue serving in Jelgava hospital.

#### Greatest Concern:

- Currently the greatest challenge of our congregation is lack of finances, because each month the expenses tend to be 20% higher than our income. Therefore we often have to postpone some ministry opportunities that we could realize to reach a larger number of listeners with the Gospel.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

### Kuldīga

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Bible studies – growing in faith and relationships
- Teenager club – 5 girls who are in worship and teaching Sunday School for the younger children.
- Mission project to gather things people don't need any more and open the church for people to get what they need.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Heating system
- Looking for a flat to generate income
- Prayer requests for a teen girl who was raped and for two teens who are in the orphanage because their father was beating them.

### Liepa Latvian and Sarkani

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Prayers
- Worship service
- Children and youth ministry

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Need for a new Sunday school teacher in Liepa
- A new youth leader in Liepa because the current one leaves to Norway in Fall for a mission trip
- New evangelists for ministry on streets



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

### Liepa Russian

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Worship services
- Bible studies
- Afterschool program

#### 3 Greatest Needs/Concerns:

- A bigger car (7-12 seat van) to drive people to camps and events
- A projector
- Musical instruments



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

### Liepāja

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Children & Youth ministries
- Diaconical work—Outreach to the elderly, needy, ill and homeless
- Alfa – ecumenical class led each Thursday by pastors from various denominations.

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Overload of church members
- Older population in the church
- Utility issues of the building... electricity system needs to be upgraded, windows replaced, heating made more efficient.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

### Matras

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Worship. It's a praise that they have a congregation with their own building.
- Sunday School & Teen Club
- Bible Studies and Prayers

Continued on page 7...

### (Matras) 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Need youth and teen leader as well as a music leader.
- Building utility issues—need the whole electrical system repaired.
- Need additional spiritual leaders—many members are busy in their own work, others are passive.

### Paplaka

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Children and Youth Ministry—Prayers for the leadership of this ministry are needed. There is a prospect who may begin leading in September.
- All-Age Service—A new ministry with new people coming. Prayers that the newcomers would stay and the life of the congregation would be revitalized.
- Reaching out to the community—monthly fellowship events on weekdays to invite people in the community.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Finances as people adjust to the conversion from Lats to Euros
- Still pray and hope to have a connecting sister congregation in the USA.
- How to reach the adults in the local community who are not comfortable attending church.

### Riga 1st

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- 4 New Small Groups
- Fundraising and charity concerts that are initiated by our lay people. The plan is to hold them twice a year – on Christmas and on Easter and invite people from socially challenged families and offer them support, love and fellowship.
- A one time event on June 6 – Night of Churches which is going to be a wonderful opportunity to evangelize. Many churches will open their doors one night from 6 PM to midnight and offer a cultural program for anyone interested. There are lots of things to plan and prepare for that.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Social outreach is struggling now – we need people to join in this ministry to attend the old and sick people. We need a vision and build the need for our church to join in.
- There is not much to offer to young adults aged 25-40. Youth have their meetings, elder people have a prayer group and Bible study, but this particular group needs something else to get involved in. There is no available leader to work with this group... All are busy in their areas.
- Youth don't believe in themselves AND hyperactive teenagers – we have not found the right way to work with them, to talk to them, offer opportunities for service, involve.

### Riga 2nd

#### Most Important Ministries:

- In-depth baptism and consecration courses, also pre-marital courses. – because it changes how people think about Christianity as such.
- Sunday school and teen group – God has entrusted us with children from ill-affected families. We feed them, clothe them, take care of them and teach them the most important – that they are not alone, that God loves them. This Sunday school changes our hearts and the congregation changes thanks to them.
- Praise music – music is very important in our active ministry – whether it be the worship service, Sunday school or men's ensemble – we have to grow with the time and develop ourselves, even in the music ministry. As the Sunday service is more like traditional, we plan to begin holding weeknight's services that would not be as traditional. It would provide our congregation with an opportunity to reach varied groups of people.
- Visiting of other congregations – being in fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ helps as become more united. It strengthens our faith and helps us to return to our churches and ministries with a new strength.

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Making Disciples – improving existing members and forming new leaders. We really need small groups but they will form only when we will have had input in our potential leaders.
- Roof repair and windows – very painful issue. We are awaiting financial support from European Funds. We are a small church and can do small repairs, not such big ones. However the small repairs are becoming useless because of the leaking roof and a great need of new windows and gutter system. The buildings of Riga 2 and Matras are the only ones that were built by the early Methodists here. That is why it is sad that we as a UMC in Latvia have not been able to jointly find a solution how not to lose our heritage and to take care of it.

### Tasi

#### 3 Most Important Ministries:

- Visiting all the elderly in the region at Christmas and Easter
- Children & teens – growing a new generation. Teen club meets weekly and serves in the church
- Women's ensemble that sings in worship and visits other congregations.



[Watch Update on YouTube...](#)

#### 3 Greatest Concerns:

- Reaching new people; they are in a small rural area with no city center... there are many unemployed and addicted to alcohol. Prayers for a ministry to alcoholics to build a bridge.
- Small congregation, small incomes... therefore not financially independent
- Location of the church on the second floor leaves them heavily influenced by the neighbors and discourages visitors because it is in a residence.

# Needs & Dreams

We all know that there is no shortage of needs for finances to further the work of the Kingdom. We also know that some needs tug at a given person's heart, while others don't. We want to make you aware of some needs and dreams that were brought up at the Friends of Latvia gathering. If something tugs on your heart, we invite you to make a financial gift and/or offer ideas to make it happen!

## Pastor Travel Expenses

Gita Mednis mentioned that the pastors in Latvia love being able to meet together at least once each month. These monthly meetings provide for fellowship, training, mutual accountability and spiritual nurture. Sometimes, however, the expense of traveling to and from Riga (the most central meeting location) can be cost prohibitive. Gita estimates that it costs around US\$150 each month for the pastors to travel to this important meeting. If you would like to give toward this effort, just indicate "Pastor Travel Expenses" in the memo of your wire or e-mail.

### What About a Prius or Two?

Gita was trying to think of a way to help reduce the expenses related to travel. Fuel costs are only rising, and the cars they are driving are old and sometimes unreliable. But... what if the church were able to obtain two Prius cars, one for each side of the country? Then the pastors could travel together to meetings and reduce their fuel expenses. What a big dream! Mary Garber (Pittsburgh, PA) has offered to research the possibilities while she is in Germany later in May. We hope to soon have more details about the finances needed to achieve this dream!

## Pastor's Salary Fund

Each year, the Pastor's Salary Fund has been a topic of conversation at the Friends of Latvia meeting. This year, we discussed once again how critical it is that we once again focus our efforts to increase pastor's salaries. We want to be able to pay a decent wage so that we can retain our current pastors and encourage others to commit to this vital ministry. However, our current wages are not enough to satisfy this need. Gita reported that last year, two young local pastors took a one-year leave of absence. One gifted pastor moved to England in order to earn enough money to be able to afford working as a full-time pastor in Latvia. Pastors who do not have a working spouse cannot survive on the present income.

In order to accomplish an increase in wages, we need a renewed focus on long-term commitments to the Pastor's Salary Fund. One-time gifts are wonderful, but in order to raise salaries and keep them steady (not raise them one year and lower them again the next), long-term commitments are needed. Consider what little bit you might be able to commit to... working together we can make a difference.

If you would like to serve on the Pastor's Salary Fund Standing Committee, please contact Randy Tolleson ([rstolleson@att.net](mailto:rstolleson@att.net)).

## Vitamins, Hymnals and Buildings, Oh My!

There are several on-going projects we have discussed in the past that are still in need of designated giving. These include the winter vitamins project, the production of the new Latvian Hymnal, and needed repairs for the buildings that the church owns and/or maintains. Of course, the Hope Center and Wesley Camp are also in need of your support. Your gifts to these areas are always appreciated!

## Giving to the Advance

Your gifts make a huge difference! Below are the Advance numbers related to giving to Latvia, along with last year's total given and 2014 Year-to-Date giving (according to the Advance tracking feature on the GBGM website). To give online through the Advance, go to... [www.umcmision.org/advance](http://www.umcmision.org/advance)

### Hope Center

Project Number: 3020447  
2013: \$24,410.43  
2014 YTD: \$4,185.00

### Latvia Mission Initiative \*

Project Number: 00235A  
2013: \$50,375.58  
2014 YTD: \$6,071.00

### Pastors' Salary Fund

Advance project: 14706A  
2013: \$11,942.00  
2014 YTD: \$860.00

### Wesley Camp

Project Number: 15160N  
2013: \$9,574.00  
2014 YTD: \$1,498.00

**\* Special Note:** You may or not be aware, but when you give a gift to the "Latvia Mission Initiative" via the Advance website, the memo you include does not get transmitted to the Latvia District office along with your gift (this is glitch in the system that they are hopefully working on). So... if you give a donation through the Advance website that you would like to be designated for something specific, please send an extra e-mail to Gita ([gitamednis@gmail.com](mailto:gitamednis@gmail.com)) to let her know how you would like your gift to be designated. You may also wish to wire your funds directly to the Latvia District Office. Please contact Gita or Rihards ([metodistu.birojs@gmail.com](mailto:metodistu.birojs@gmail.com)) for wiring instructions.



## Upcoming Trips

Here are some of the upcoming trips to Latvia. If you are interested in going on one of these trips, please contact the person listed.

**June 12-22, 2014**

### Mission to Kuldiga and Wesley Camp Clean-up

Norris UMC, Norris, TN

Contact: Jim Hayes (865-494-7502, [jrhayes46@bellsouth.net](mailto:jrhayes46@bellsouth.net))

**July 24-August 2, 2014**

### Wesley Camp and Latvia Tour for first-time visitors

FUMC Grapevine, Grapevine, TX

Contact: Richard Payne (817-235-8000, [paynerr@live.com](mailto:paynerr@live.com))

**August 14-29, 2014**

### Hope Center Work Trip

First UMC Tullahoma, Tullahoma, TN

Contact: Holt Cason (934-455-3139, [lno67@hotmail.com](mailto:lno67@hotmail.com))

**August 21-24, 2014**

### Wesley Camp Board Meeting Latvia Annual Conference in Riga

Contact: Richard Payne (817-235-8000, [paynerr@live.com](mailto:paynerr@live.com))

**October 13-21, 2014**

### Faithful Men Choir Tour

Fairview UMC, Maryville, TN

Contact: Wesley Rouse (865-983-2080, [wrouse@fairview-umc.org](mailto:wrouse@fairview-umc.org))

*If you have additions or corrections for any of this information, please contact FOL Secretary Melissa Mason at ([secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com)).*

## A Dream & A Vision

### Spiritual Formation Retreat for Latvian Pastors

By Rev. Annette Sowell (FUMC Grapevine, TX)

Jesse and I made our first trip to Latvia as part of a tour group, on our way to Russia in 2012. The sight of the cross and flame logo outside a building on the side of the road in Riga embedded itself in our spirits and we waited for the dream to take shape.

Jesse returned to Latvia with a group from Grapevine UMC in the fall of 2013. Upon his return then, and now, he cannot talk about what he saw without tears. The dream began to take shape in the form of a desire and call to use his teaching and mentoring skills in some way.

He was terribly eager for me to go the FOL meeting in Tennessee this year. I went because it was important to him and to our church – and, obviously, to our God.

I was at the coffee table one day when Gita came up to pour herself a cup. And I heard myself say, “I know what I am to do. Jesse and I will provide an opportunity for all of the Latvian pastors to come to Grapevine UMC in April 2015 for a week of Spiritual Formation and mentoring.”

The dream became a vision.

We are actively making plans for the vision to become a reality. Our hope is to schedule the retreat to coincide with the 2015 FOL meeting which Grapevine UMC has offered to host.

God has already put the leadership in place – they simply await their time to offer their gifts and graces to a people we want them to know and love as God knows and loves them.

We are confident that the funding will also be as God-directed. Our experience is that God always equips those who are called and God always finds a way for his purposes to become real.

We covet your prayers.

We will keep you posted.



## Friends of Latvia 2015

### Save the Date... April 16-18, 2015

Plans are underway for our next Friends of Latvia gathering in 2015. The proposed dates are Thursday, April 16-18, at First United Methodist Church in Grapevine, Texas. DFW Airport lies within Grapevine's city limits, so it will be very convenient for those who are flying in. The Spiritual Retreat for the Latvian Pastors (see above) is tentatively set for the following week. Details for the meeting and retreat have not yet been finalized, but go ahead and save the dates!

# News from Kuldiga Partners

## Ervins Fund Update

By Jim Hayes



The Ervins Fund is a year old in May, 2014 and continues to grow while the Kuldiga United Methodist Church waits for an apartment to become available to purchase. The Fund was created by the four Tennessee churches who partner with the Kuldiga UMC through the In Mission Together Program of UMCOR to help the Kuldiga church achieve its goal to be more self-sufficient. Funds collected have been placed in the Holston Conference of UMC Foundation, Inc. to be held until they are needed. If you would like more information about the Ervins Fund, contact Jim Hayes at [jrhayes46@bellsouth.net](mailto:jrhayes46@bellsouth.net).



# News from Liepa Partners

By Holt Cason

## VIM Teams from Tullahoma, Tennessee

In 2006 a VIM Team from FUMC Tullahoma, TN embarked upon a mission to renovate a deserted and condemned former communist office building in Liepa, Latvia. Initially, the task appeared daunting in magnitude as well as the initial appearance with dust and black mold throughout the building. Not wanting to disappoint the Latvian and Russian speaking congregations our team accepted the challenge! The first year, our team spent most of our time scrubbing floors, washing walls and installing a perimeter fence to help protect the property.

In 2007 our team picked up where we left off by ripping out old boards, rotted timbers, knocking down and removing a concrete block wall to make room for a sanctuary in the building. Needless to say, this was by far the dirtiest task we had taken, but fortunately we were successful in "clearing the way" for the sanctuary. In addition to the construction work we conducted a Bible School for the children of Liepa. While the work progressed nicely and we were able to see significant improvement as the building began to come alive again, the biggest rewards were with the children and interacting with them over a two week period.

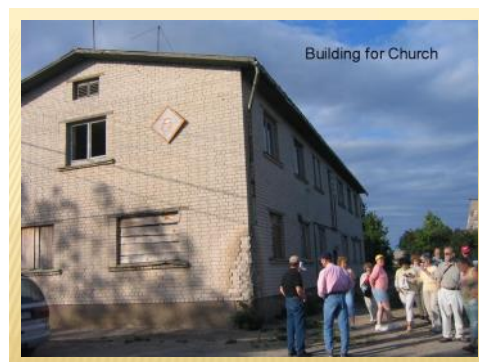
In 2008 the team continued with the renovation of what was to become a new and larger sanctuary. We were able to construct a wall for an office, add an additional restroom as well as bricking in a previous window opening. When the team departed, the sanctuary was ready for new sheetrock walls to be installed. This part of the project was completed by our teams in the following years of 2009 and 2010 with the new sanctuary being dedicated in June 2010.

In addition to FUMC Tullahoma sending VIM teams the church has become a Connecting Congregation with the Latvian speaking congregation in Liepa. By having a connection to this congregation FUMC Tullahoma has been able to provide monies to pay for utilities and salaries for the pastor.

In Matthew 13, Jesus talked about planting seeds. Our church sowed seeds with our Connecting Congregation in Liepa that have taken root and are beginning to show results.

Presently FUMC Tullahoma will support another VIM Team that will return to Liepa in August 2014 to work on the HOPE Center facility located on the second floor of the former condemned communist office building in Liepa.

Dievs, svētī Latviju!

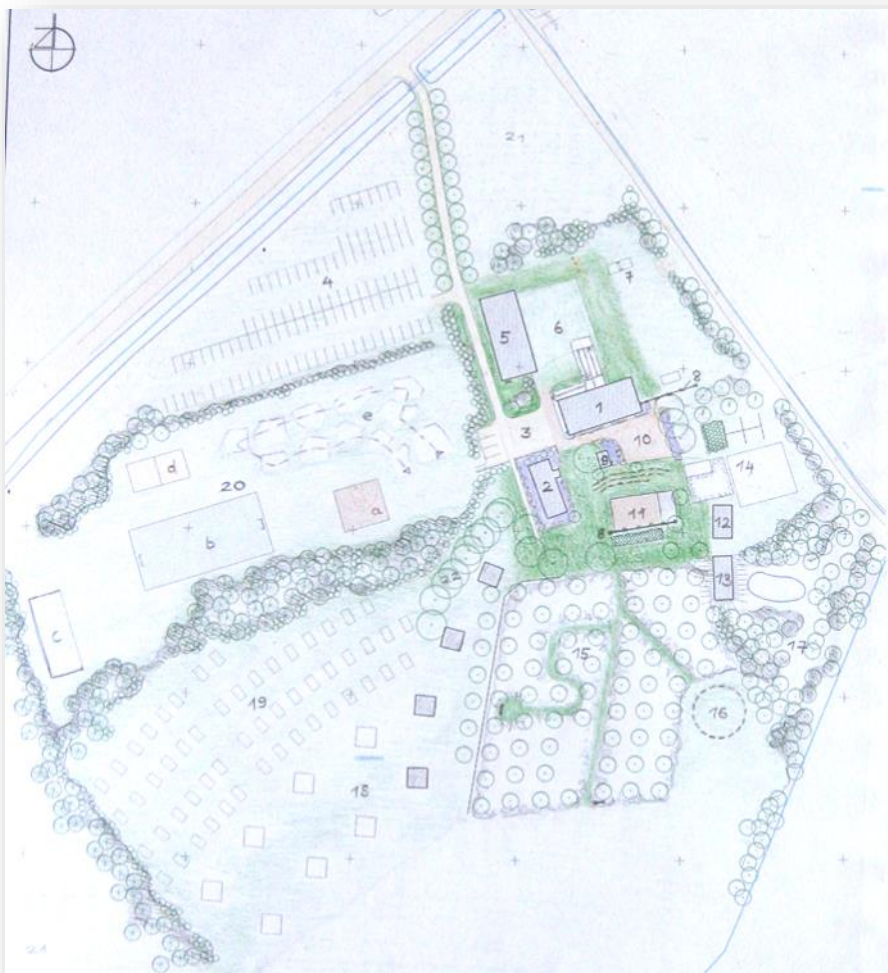




# Wesley Camp Update

## Master Plan

During the Friends of Latvia meeting, Richard Payne presented a master plan that was drawn up by an architect in Latvia.



## 2014 Camp Dates

Please keep the workers and potential campers in your prayers! Here are this summer's Wesley Camp dates:

Wesley Days - June 30-July 6

Youth Camp - July 9-14

Shepherd Retreat - July 19-22

Evangelism Camp - July 22-26

Sunday School Camp - July 28-  
August 2

+

Keep connected with  
Wesley Camp on our  
website at  
[www.wesleycamp.org](http://www.wesleycamp.org)

Questions? Contact Richard  
Payne at [paynerr@live.com](mailto:paynerr@live.com) or  
Inese Budņika at  
[b\\_inese@hotmail.com](mailto:b_inese@hotmail.com).

## Holsten House Renovations

The upstairs room in the Holsten House has been renovated to provide a nicer place for camp workers to stay.



Before



After!



# Connect

During the April Friends of Latvia gathering, we had a conversation about what is most important in church partnerships. As the Latvian pastors shared their thoughts, over and over again we heard, "Prayer. Relationships. Connection." Don't forget to be in communication with our friends in Latvia... to nurture and grow your relationships.



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## Jelgava

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## Kuldīga

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## Rīga 2nd

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## Sarkani

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## Tasi

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## Latvia District Superintendent

Gita Mednis | [gitamednis@gmail.com](mailto:gitamednis@gmail.com)

## The Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference

Bishop of the Nordic and Baltic Area: Christian Alsted  
[bishop@umc-ne.org](mailto:bishop@umc-ne.org)

## Connecting Online

One of the first things to come out of the Friends of Latvia gathering this past April was the creation of a web presence independent of Facebook. Many Friends of Latvia prefer not to use Facebook, and we wanted to provide a way for everyone to keep up with the latest news. The website contains contact information for each of the churches in Latvia, the latest news, upcoming mission trip dates and events and links to Advance giving. If you have information you'd like to share on the website, please email it to FOL Secretary, Melissia Mason, at [secretary.fol@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.fol@gmail.com).

