

RUSSIA INITIATIVE NEWSLETTER

July 2008

Dear friends of the Russia Initiative, a program of the General Board of Global Ministries: We send warm greetings in this season of United Methodist conferencing around the world. Thank you so much for your interest and care for our brothers and sisters in Eurasia.

This newsletter contains news and information about the following:

- 1. Current developments in Eurasia and information from Bishop Växby**
- 2. Minnesota-Russian Mission Partnership**
- 3. Mission Initiatives Summit Article**
- 4. Young Russian Pastor Participates in First-ever Young People's Address to General Conference**
- 5. Teams to Eurasia, Camp Voronezh**
- 6. Disciple Bible Study II Translation Project**
- 7. Russia Initiative Consultation XIV – preliminary information**

1. Current developments in Eurasia and information from Bishop Växby

As Russia Initiative Coordinator, I travel to Eurasia at least once a year. I normally attend annual conferences so that I can fellowship and network with the pastors and lay leadership gathered in one place. During my visit in May, I attended the East Russia and Central Asia Conference in Yekaterinburg and the South Russia Conference at the camp in Voronezh. Each conference has its distinctive character and style. In Yekaterinburg, the delegation from Central Asia (a separate mission program) brought a wonderful spirit of enthusiasm and witness. The church is growing in these countries in spite of stiff challenges with the addition this year of six new Bible groups. The Ural District listed a new church at Baykal among the pastoral appointments. The superintendent of the Siberia Far East District reported that this year has been a turning point after several years of struggle.

The South Russia Annual Conference was a delight to participate in because of its group dynamics and music. One of several centers of musical creativity is there generating many new hymns and praise songs. Vyascheslav Kim has had a ministry of 14 years at the New Commandment UMC in Voronezh. He has been like a Moses in South Russia and has led 8 people into the ministry. He has now been appointed as the new Central Asia District Superintendent.

A new congregation, Hope UMC, in Volgograd was received into the Central Black District of the South Russia Conference. Altogether in Eurasia, I count 4 new ministries in the list of appointments, in addition to the six new groups in Central Asia. One of the new ministries is in Georgia and is included within the Ukraine/Moldova Conference.

This means that we need four new church partners for these new churches. We continue to need partners for a short list of other congregations that remain without partnerships in Eurasia. We would appreciate your assistance in helping us to find new partner churches in the Russia Initiative.

Six new elders were ordained and seven new persons were licensed as local pastors. District Superintendents' reports continue to provide a summary of ministries in the local churches. It is very interesting to hear of the creativity of ministry and outreach in many of the churches. It is also encouraging to hear of the growth in offerings and stewardship. We hope to have these reports translated and distributed among the partner churches over the duration of the summer.

You can find Elliot Wright's article on our website reporting highlights of the five annual conferences and Bishop Växby's feeling that the Eurasia Area is "on the right track."

<http://new.gbgbm-umc.org/work/initiatives/russia/>

You will also see a linkage there to Bishop Växby's Report and Address to the annual conferences. It is an open window into the Bishop's thinking and leadership style, and a broad view of the current issues in the Eurasia Area today.

2. Minnesota-Russian Mission Partnership

We are excited by the wonderful news of an extraordinary gift. The Minnesota Annual Conference has provided a major contribution of \$500,000 to the UMC in Eurasia for the purpose of obtaining a building to be developed as a center for ministry in St. Petersburg. This center will benefit the Northwest Annual Conference and the St. Petersburg District. Please use the linkage below to see the full story, "Minnesota-Russian Mission Partnership to Develop United Methodist Center in St. Petersburg":

http://gbgbm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=5032

3. Mission Initiatives Summit Article

The Mission Initiatives Summit of April 17-18 in Plano, Texas was an inspiring event that brought together participants and leaders representing the many countries of the initiatives. We welcomed a good number of Russia Initiative friends at this event, together with the General Conference delegation from Eurasia. See the story about this event, "Global Evangelism and Church Growth Celebrated at Mission Initiatives Summit:"

http://gbgbm-umc.org/global_news/pr.cfm?articleid=4909

4. Young Eurasian Pastor Participates in First-ever Young People's Address to General Conference

Kira Volkova, pastor of the Kirov UMC in Eurasia inspired the pride in all who know her for her participation in the Young People's Address at the General Conference. See her photo and story:

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=2072523&ct=5291719>

5. Teams to Eurasia, Camp Voronezh

At this writing, 34 teams have been scheduled to travel to Eurasia during the 2008 calendar year. In spite of our economic challenges, the interest is still high in maintaining and developing relationships with partner ministries in Eurasia. We encourage you to visit with your partners. Four of the teams are working at Camp Voronezh. We need more teams. Tom Clark, UMVIM Coordinator for the Voronezh Camp, made an assessment of renovation projects with an engineer in May. Please contact Tom for more information:

tomclark@oakhillumcgroup.com

Contributions designated for "Camp Voronezh" both for renovation projects and camp operations, may be sent specifying Advance number 15179A.

6. Disciple Bible Study II Translation Project

Elena Stepanova, pastor in Yekaterinburg, will be directing the final phases of translation and publication of Disciple Bible Study II. She would like to begin the work this fall if sufficient start-up funds are on hand. Advance number 14275A, "Bibles and Christian Literature," has been established to receive contributions designated for this project. Please find the full description of this Advance project at:

http://secure.gbgm-umc.org/donations/advance/donate_details.cfm?ID=3016384

7. Russia Initiative Consultation XIV – preliminary information

The next Russia Initiative Consultation will be held in San Diego, California, March 5-7, 2009. The CAL-PAC Annual Conference is looking forward to hosting us in the area that is known for its Pacific Rim partnerships. The Consultation will be housed in the San Diego Marriott Mission Valley Hotel, 8757 Rio San Diego Drive, San Diego, CA 92108.

While the theme and program of the consultation are still in preparation, we expect to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the first Methodist missionary appearance in Russia. We would also like to invite a delegation of emerging youth leaders of the UMC in Eurasia to attend and participate in the Consultation. We welcome the interest of partner churches in sponsoring these youth to come, as well as a delegation of pastors and other laity. Please consider how your church may participate in these sponsorships.

The Eurasia UMC and GBGM are very grateful for the generous support that Russia Initiative partner churches continue to give for the ministries of our brothers and sisters in Eurasia. Every gift is priceless. In some partnerships there have been contributions to assist with the construction or purchase and renovation of church buildings. We also receive undesignated gifts for the Bishop's office to use where needed. Now partner churches are also beginning to contribute \$100 to \$200 annually for the administrative and travel expenses of the District Superintendents. Your generosity is very helpful and most encouraging.

Grace and peace,

Jim Athearn

Dr. W. James Athearn
Coordinator, Russia Initiative
116 Frasher Drive, Clear Brook, VA 22624
Tel: 540-662-2066 Fax: 540-662-6998
jimathearn@gmail.com
<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/work/initiatives/russia/>