

For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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Work and Reality in Latvia

Rev. Dr. William C. Weinrich

Where Is the Lutheran Cathedral?

Rev. Gottfried Martens

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The Church Is Alive and

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania, a sister church of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is one of the smallest Lutheran churches. In its fifty-four parishes, there are little more than 20,000 communicant members. Serving these parishes are less than two dozen pastors, each one of which serves two or three or even more parishes spread across a country half the size of the state of Indiana with some three-and-a-half million inhabitants. Before World War II, there were about 250,000 Lutherans in the country, most of them of German ancestry. The vast majority of them were repatriated to Germany at the beginning of the war or later, others fled, and still others were sent to resettlement and punishment camps deep in the heart of the Soviet Union. Few Lutherans were left behind, and those who remained were served by fewer pastors than could be numbered on one's fingers!

Today, little less than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Lithuanians' declaration of their independence, the church is alive and active. Most of its pastors are under the age of thirty-five. They serve without salary, receiving from their parish congregations little more than enough to cover the cost of fuel for autos, which in many cases were donated by Christian people in western nations. The Lord of the Church has seen to it that friends in more prosperous churches have been ready and willing to help Lithuanian and other Baltic Lutherans who have had to labor hard to regain property taken from them by the communists, and who continue to struggle to renovate and refurnish their church buildings so that they can be used again.

I have been serving in Lithuania since 1999 as a part of the effort of Concordia Theological Seminary and its Russian project to assist struggling churches and younger churches that desire to teach and confess our Holy Christian faith as it is set




Active

By Rev. Dr. Charles J. Evanson

down clearly and correctly in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*. I

came for three months to help the Department of Evangelical Theology of the University of Klaipeda Humanities Faculty in Klaipeda, Lithuania, on the coast of the Baltic Sea. The three month stay was soon followed by three months more in Klaipeda and an additional teaching assignment at the new Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia. In December 1999, I was called to the seminary to continue my work here and elsewhere under the direction of the president of the seminary. This has entailed five years as a faculty member at the University of Klaipeda, numerous trips to the seminary in Novosibirsk, as well as lectures at the seminary of the Ingrian Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, Russia. For the last four years, I have served as theological consultant to the Bishop and Consistory of the Lithuanian Church. Every

month I teach Lutheran Theology to Lithuania public school teachers who are assigned the responsibility to teach religion in public schools, and I hold a monthly seminar with Lithuanian pastors to continue their theological training. I speak regularly in the deaneries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia, our neighbor to the north, and hold a monthly seminar for Latvian pastors in Riga, Latvia. In addition, I occasionally teach theological courses at the Luther Academy in Riga. I have also taught in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden.

When I first arrived in Klaipeda in April 1999, I sat down in my room, bowed my head, and asked our Lord: "What on earth am I doing here so far from home in this foreign land?" Nine years later, I must say that the answer is still unfolding! 

Rev. Dr. Charles J. Evanson is Pastor Emeritus of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and is currently serving in Klaipeda, Lithuania.



The Hill of Crosses in Šiauliai, Lithuania, is one of the most mysterious, beautiful, and spiritual places in the country. Decorated with thousands of crucifixes, the Hill of Crosses is a long-standing Lithuanian tradition of individual devotion at a single, sacred place.

