

FOR THE

# LIFE OF THE WORLD

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CONCORDIA  
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The central question is, "Who is Jesus? Is He the son of Joseph the carpenter or the Messiah onto whom the Lord's spirit has been poured to proclaim release to the captives?" (Luke 4:16-22). Scribes, Pharisees and the crowds of Jesus' day and of all times are confronted with the proclamation—He is God incarnate and He brings the forgiveness of sins to earth.

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# THE RUSSIAN PROJECT

By Pam Knepper  
Managing Editor, For the Life of the World

Photo by Hans-Erik Lundin

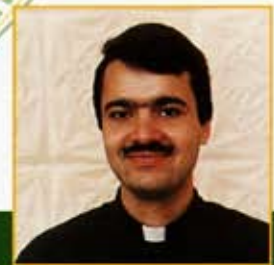
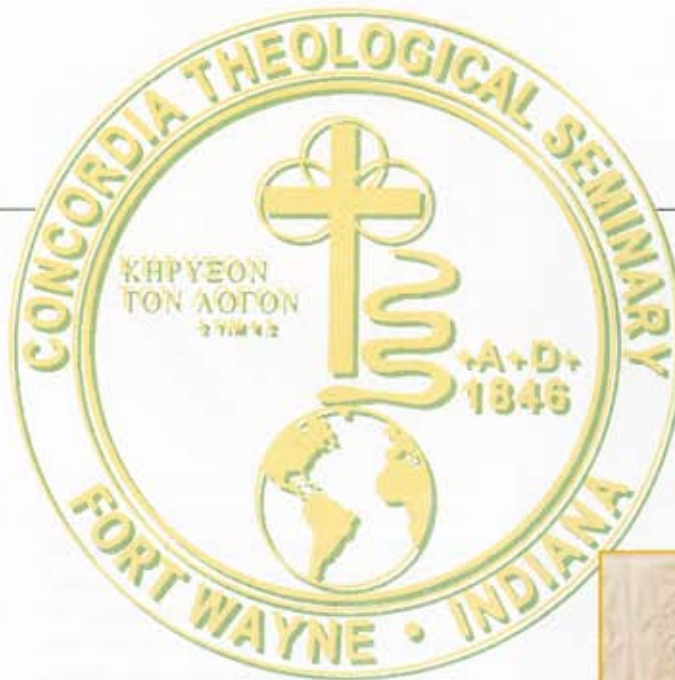
**F**or over 150 years the training of men for the pastoral office has been central to the nature and purpose of Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS). From the Rev. Wilhelm Loehe, who prepared men in their native Bavaria in the 1840s, to the establishment in 1976 of a seminary in Ontario, Canada, the mission to train pastors has never ceased.

Today, that mission continues to flourish under "The Russian Project." Established in 1995, the project developed after Dr. Dean Wenthe, President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, received a letter from the Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, pastor of Bible Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk, Russia.

The Rev. Lytkin explained how after seventy years of persecution under Soviet communism the churches in Russia had been left with few theologically trained pastors. And that given the current unsettled political situation, he felt it was crucial to train indigenous pastors as quickly as possible.

"In Siberia there is one congregation for every 100,000 people and after years of atheism the people are mostly unbelieving. Our Christians need to know how to resist the liberal theological influences that are growing in Russia," wrote Rev. Lytkin. "As Lutherans we





know that only confessional Lutheran teaching can give people the pure understanding of Christian faith so that they can find real comfort in the true Gospel.”

In response, President Wenthe assured Rev. Lytkin that the seminary would do everything possible to help.

Thanks to an unnamed donor, the seminary received one million dollars. Upon receipt of the funds, the donor requested that the money be used specifically for the theological education of students from the former Soviet Union.

“There would not have been a Russian Project without this gift,” said the Rev. Timothy Quill, staff coordinator of the Russian Project at Concordia Theological Seminary. “We feel truly blessed that this individual saw how great the need is in Russia to train men to become pastors who preach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

To address the need detailed in Rev. Lytkin’s letter, four men from the seminary traveled to Russia and Kazakstan during the summer of 1995 to lecture at theological seminars and encourage Russian men to come to the seminary and study for the ministry. The four, the Rev. Timothy Quill; Dr. William Weinrich, academic dean at CTS; Dr. Arthur Just, dean of the graduate program

at CTS; and the Rev. Kurt Marquart, CTS professor. Charles Rob Hogg, a professor at the seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada and CTS graduate, joined the group.

“Many of the Russian people have come from little or no religious background and if they have had any religious contact, it usually has been in the form of evangelical organizations,” explained Rev. Quill. “Unfortunately while many of these groups may believe in Jesus, they seldom administer the Sacraments. And if they do, they certainly don’t believe in the Real Presence.”

Rev. Quill says the belief that Christ is really present in the sacrament of Holy Communion is one of the main things that makes the Lutheran faith so attractive to many Russian people.

“For Lutherans, the Real Presence is more than just an important yet isolated doctrine,” said Rev. Quill. “This belief permeates and shapes our whole view of God and grace, our interpretation of Scripture, and our liturgical practice.”

Another part of Lutheran doctrine, according to Rev. Quill, that attracts Russian people is the fact that our beliefs are consistent with what was being preached in the Early Church.

*“In Siberia there is one congregation for every 100,000 people and after years of atheism the people are mostly unbelieving. As Lutherans we know that only confessional Lutheran teaching can give people the pure understanding of Christian faith so that they can find real comfort in the true Gospel.”*

*The Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin,  
Pastor at Bible Lutheran  
Church, Novosibirsk, Russia.*





*“For many Russian people it is important that if Scripture is the truth, then it should speak with consistency to each generation. In the Lutheran church we preach the same message that has been preached by those who have gone before us. Any group can go into Russia and claim to be a Bible church. The Lutheran church is more than just a Bible church. We are a sacramental church which values its historical and theological continuity—its catholicity.”*

The Rev. Timothy Quill,  
coordinator of the Russian  
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After spending two weeks in Novosibirsk, eight men were chosen to study at the seminary. Representing a variety of locations throughout Russia, the men arrived in Fort Wayne during the fall of 1995. Housed in a dorm of their own on campus, the men began their studies Winter Quarter 1996.

Taking basic courses required of all students in the Master's of Divinity curriculum, the Russian men attended classes with the other students. For those who did not know English, a special translation system was provided to enable them to hear lectures through simultaneous translation.

“With the language barrier came the obstacle of finding Russian language textbooks for the students,” explained Carrie O'Donnell, Russian Project assistant at Concordia Theological Seminary. “At first this was of great concern because there were very few existing Russian textbooks that we could use at the seminary. Luckily for us when the Lutheran Heritage Foundation of Sterling Heights, Michigan, heard of our dilemma, they quickly stepped in and offered to help

translate Lutheran textbooks for the men. To date, several books have been translated including the *Book of Concord*.”

After spending a year on campus, the men returned to Russia this past summer for a year of vicarage in their homeland. Once that year is complete, they will then return to the seminary to complete their final year of studies.

“Several of the men are serving at mission stations, helping to start Lutheran churches, assisting missionaries, and helping out with campus ministries,” explained Rev. Quill. “We are following the Wilhelm Loehe model. Our task is not to create new church bodies or establish mission boards, but rather to train pastors who are desperately needed in their homeland. We will send them back to serve existing and newly-emerging Lutheran churches.”

With the first class successfully out on vicarage, Rev. Quill and the Russian Project staff made plans for a second class. They held a series of lectures this past summer in Novosibirsk and



*The Rev. Dr. William Weinrich, academic dean at CTS, lecturing on the Early Church in Novosibirsk, Russia.*



*Holy Communion is celebrated during a Sunday morning worship service in Novosibirsk, Russia.*



Ekaterinburg, Russia, and Aqmola, Kazakstan, with several faculty members from the seminary participating.

Covering topics such as Early Church, Old Testament, New Testament, Law and Gospel, the Confessions, Liturgy, Church Music, Religious Sects & Cults and Apologetics, the seminars drew more than 200 participants from all around Russia and Kazakstan.

"These young Lutherans have come to the Missouri Synod because they have seen what we stand for as confessional, evangelical Lutherans," said President Wenthe, who lectured at a seminar in Novosibirsk. "They have a deep thirst for the serious and in-depth study of Holy Scripture. It is truly a great honor for us to be able to proclaim the Holy Gospel to them, to teach and answer the questions they have about Lutheran theology."

Eighteen individuals were asked to enter the second Russian Project class for

the 1997-98 academic year. Currently on the Fort Wayne campus, fifteen men are preparing for the ministry with three women studying in the seminary's master's program.

Rev. Quill says that while he is happy that the project continues to do so well, he is also very aware of the fact that Russia's future still remains uncertain.

"From the very beginning the congregations and pastors of the LCMS have been extremely supportive of this project," said Rev. Quill. "But only God knows what the future will be for this yet unstable nation. What we do know is that there is a great openness among many Russians for spiritual things. Only the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ can truly satisfy this hunger. Only Christ can bring light and immortality to a people in darkness—and at this moment, the door is open!"

**"For Lutherans, the Real Presence is more than just an important yet isolated doctrine. This belief permeates and shapes our whole view of God and grace, our interpretation of Scripture and our liturgical practice."**



The Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, pastor of Bible Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk, Russia, left, stands with Lena and Alexei Streltsov at a theological seminar provided by CTS.