

IN MISSION TOGETHER: EURASIA

*So, we have together come
again to praise the Father's love.
Let the holy grace come down
to fill our hearts from Heaven above.*

These words, translated from a 2012 hymn by Oleg Pozharsky, a deacon, musician and composer with Resurrection UMC in Voronezh, illustrate beautifully not only the overflowing heart of praise to God that we encounter so often with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Russia, but it shows as well the growing maturity and fresh contributions being made by Eurasian believers.

This year's partnership work with the Central Black Soil and South districts of the South Russia Conference has principally focused on three areas.

First, in late 2016, we were asked, on fairly short notice, to host the XIX Eurasia and Central Asia Consultation in May 2017. Originally scheduled for Florida, the venue move came as a result of worries about zika virus-bearing mosquitoes. The past sixth months have seen feverish work as we have sought to accommodate the needs of this biennial gathering from Eurasia, Europe, and America of United Methodists who are part of the ongoing ministry in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere. Special thanks to Conference staff, especially the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga and Deb Trowbridge, for their support and assistance, and a giant vote of thanks to Mrs. Ann Dudley, a member of Liberty Grove UMC, for heading up this effort on our behalf. At this writing, we look forward to a meaningful and exciting consultation, which we will report on in 2018.

Second, we have continued this year to encourage leadership development through our support of the studies of Mrs. Elena Melnikova, Women's Ministry Coordinator for Eurasia, as she pursues advanced schooling through Wesley Seminary's partnership with Cambridge University in Britain. Elena, who lives and is based in Volgograd in the South Conference, is the third leader whose training we have helped to underwrite in part as a Conference. Her deep spirituality, endless fount of ideas, and prodigious work ethic combine to make her a tremendous resource for United Methodism in Russia now, and one of the most talented of the next generation of leaders.

Last year, thirdly, we reported that two persons made the first-ever visit from our Conference to the South District, which spans a long east-west corridor running from Stavropol in the Caucasus to the east, over to Sevastopol on the Crimean coast of the Black Sea to the west. Part of the outflow of these rich new contacts was a determination to aid the church in Kerch (eastern Crimea) with its critical building projects, including the sending of a team. Unfortunately, the international political landscape makes it unwise to send volunteers to Kerch this year; however, we plan to aid in other ways with their church refurbishment and to send a team when practical.

Two small groups are planned for this summer. In July, two persons (one from BWC and one from Virginia) will join an Ohio team to work at our United Methodist Camp "Kristall" near Voronezh. In August, the original Kerch team (four from BWC, one from Virginia) will also travel to Voronezh to continue the effort, laboring alongside a youth team from Russia.

Meanwhile, to follow the news is to be aware that in the Russian Federation, the landscape has been changing for non-Russian Orthodox Christians. New regulations and restrictions on availability for faith groups of facilities which are not specifically designated for religious use, and limits on the kinds of activities foreign visitors can participate in, have become part of the working environment. Our task, of course, is always to encourage and to assist and never to create difficulties for Eurasian United Methodists and those whom they serve. We continue to find our counterparts there enthusiastically devoted, endlessly optimistic and forward-looking, and above all, on fire for the Lord. Please hold them, and the work of In Mission Together - Eurasia in our conference, in your prayers.

We close this report as we opened it, with lyrics from Rev. Pozharsky's hymn:

*Let's ascend with all our soul,
so we may God's truth perceive;
That with praising joyfully,
our Savior glory will receive!*

Mir vam! (Peace to you!)
Charles L. Harrell, Chair, IMT-Eurasia Committee