

Report from Southeast Asia warms hearts

WINNIPEG - The bitter cold weather was a far cry from the warm humid air of Bangkok, Thailand, when volunteer missionary in Southeast Asia, Rev. Dr. Leonard Harms visited Lutheran Church-Canada's office December 17 and 18. Dr. Harms, retired LCC mission executive, met with President Robert Bugbee and Dr. Leonardo Neitzel, executive assistant to the president for Mission and Social Ministry Services.

Recently returned from Thailand, he brought first-hand information about LCC's missionary Pastor Suchat Chujit and the work of Lutheran Institute Southeast Asia (LISA) of which he is executive director. LISA provides theological education in Thailand and Cambodia taught by Canadian professors and pastors. There are 14 students in Bangkok and 41 students in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This was Dr. Harms' first opportunity to provide a face-to-face briefing for the president and mission executive.

He reported both theological classes will graduate in May, 2010 after receiving four years of preparation for the pastoral ministry in a series of 16 week-long intensive courses that go from morning into

the evening. Most recently, Pastor Nolan Astley (Holy Cross, Kitchener, Ont.), taught a course *Theology of the Cross; servanthood under the cross* in October, and Concordia Lutheran Seminary professor, Dr. Ed Kettner, will teach a course on the Lutheran Confessions in early January.

"What stands out about these men preparing to be pastors is their eagerness to learn and to put their learning into practice," said Dr. Harms. "Their thirst for God's Word is never quenched, nor is their desire to share the Gospel with unbelievers."

Dr. Harms moved to Bangkok after his retirement in 2006. LCC's Board of Directors called him as a volunteer missionary seconded to LISA.

"As I learn more and more about our mission work, it is exciting to see



President Bugbee and Dr. Neitzel learn the locations of Lutheran churches in Thailand from Dr. Leonard Harms

how God has blessed our efforts," said Dr. Neitzel. "It is especially thrilling to see what is happening in Cambodia as our friends there proclaim the Gospel in so many ways."

Although LCC has no formal connection to the Cambodian church, support for theological education comes from Concordia Lutheran Mission Society, an LCC auxiliary.

Dr. Harms returned to Thailand December 28 in time to welcome Dr. Kettner and the five CLS seminary students travelling with him.

God begins an unplanned mission station in Nicaragua

CHINANDEGA - Following a bi-weekly meeting of pastors and deaconesses of Iglesia Luterana Sínodo de Nicaragua (ILSN), Missionary Rufino Laines whom ILSN called to begin mission work in Rivas shared with me the difficulty of finding a house to rent in Rivas within the budget. He asked what I thought about renting a house in Jinotepe, a community about 30 km from Rivas.

"But that would mean you would have to commute every day to carry out your ministry in Rivas," I said.

"But I wouldn't have to commute to Jinotepe then," he responded. "I've begun mission work there too and have a small group that gathers for study."

He then told me how it happened.

Some time ago the mission centre received a request from a family in an LCC congregation on Vancouver Island. They were providing support for a young lady in Jinotepe through a children's charitable agency. Since the young lady (who is also disabled) had reached adulthood and was no longer eligible for the program, the family asked if our mission could provide a channel so they could continue their support.

We sorted out a process and arranged for Missionary Rufino to deliver the small stipend each month. After all, the community was just a short detour off his regular route from Granada to Rivas.

Missionary Rufino delivered the stipends and began visiting with the family. Then he visited with the neighbours and others in the community. It isn't long before he has a small group of people gathering with him for Bible study and worship. And so began a new mission station.

We now rent a house in Jinotepe within our budget and Missionary Rufino and his family have moved in. God's ways are wondrous to behold.

Remember Missionary Rufino and his deaconess wife, Maryanne as they begin this new chapter in their service to Christ and His church.

*by Rev. Dr. Ralph Mayan
Volunteer Missionary in Nicaragua*

Lutheran Christians busy in Ukraine; ask for prayers

DNEPROPETROVSK, UKRAINE – Lutheran Church–Canada’s missionary in Ukraine recently met with one of 17 candidates who ran in the country’s January 17 presidential election.

Aleksey Navrotsky, a pastor of the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Ukraine (SELCU), reported that he gave the candidate a Bible and a copy of Luther’s Small Catechism and talked about youth work and Christian faith.

Navrotsky said Ukrainian Christians are praying for the country’s leaders.

The meeting was just one of many activities of Pastor Navrotsky in this eastern European country, which is bordered by Russia to the east, the Black Sea to the south, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland to the west, and Belarus to the north.

Besides performing routine duties between he has hosted TV shows and conferences and have travelled throughout the country, said Navrotsky.

Regular activities

Ukrainian Orthodoxy is the majority and Protestantism remains a minority in this country of about 46.2 million people. So Navrotsky and members of the Lutheran community in Dnepropetrovsk, which is located on the Dnieper River northeast of Odessa, are hard at work.

Navrotsky said he preaches twice a month and serves communion at the Dnepropetrovsk Lutheran Church. Congregation members, called servants, preach the remaining weeks.

In September, four female members travelled to Odessa for a women’s seminar and to discuss plans for the almost completed Concordia Seminary, Odessa.

More recently, the community baptized a two-year-old girl and passed out warm clothes to needy residents of Dnepropetrovsk.

“Each of us brought [a] few clean, warm, good things from their personal wardrobe, and all these clothes were sorted out, counted up and driven to the center of...[need in]...our city,” he reported.

Community members regularly counsel individuals who are ill, are in hospital or are victims of violent

crimes.

Navrotsky wrote of one girl who returned home after she was attacked and beaten.

“In the moment of attack she began to pray out loud, and this man left her and went away and took nothing,” he said.

The girl was later taken to the hospital by her parents and Navrotsky. She suffered a broken nose and damaged sight.

“Fortunately she stayed alive,” he said.

Navrotsky also wrote about two people who were involved in a local children’s ministry but were forced to take sick leave after a “difficult situation.”

He asked for prayers so leaders can receive the Lord’s wisdom.

Music, TV shows and lectures

Navrotsky said Lutherans are also reaching out to other Christians and non-Christian Ukrainians.

The Lutheran community hosted a conference for young Christians at the Alpha and Omega Student Centre in September.

“The value of music and the role of theology in music service were talked about,” said Navrotsky. “We invited some leading Christian musicians and sound producers of Ukraine who shared their experience with all participants.”

About 60 people attended the event.

Later in the autumn, the Lutheran community produced three TV programs—Navrotsky preached during one of them—and ran a series of lectures on the topic of science and Christianity.

Sergey Nikolenko, trained as a physicist and theologian, prepared the lectures.

More than 70 people attended, including non-Christians, who asked some “strong questions.”

Travel

Travel remains an important part of missionary work.

In September, Navrotsky travelled to Yalta with a small group of German Christians and visited a Lutheran community, a children’s sanatorium and the elderly.

Yalta is located on the southern shores of the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea.

“We gave food to those who are in need, sweets to children and everywhere preached about a mercy given to us in Christ,” he said.

Navrotsky said the Lutheran community has several big projects planned for the winter and he asked for prayers.

He said the community plans to host a forum for about 100 preachers, called servants, and a conference for men called, Be Courageous. The community also hosted a big Christmas service and Children’s performance.

He concluded his report by asking everyone to “pray for many people being ill this season and who...[have H1N1]...flu in Ukraine.”



Missionary Aleksey Navrotsky