

FRIENDS OF ESTONIA GATHERING – APRIL, 2010

Calvary United Methodist Church, Nashville, Tennessee served as our host site for this year's annual gathering, April 16 & 17. We were welcomed by Pastor Peter van Eys. He referenced the English painter who marveled at horizons offered by the varying sunrises and sunsets. Similarly, since 1991 the new horizons and new freedoms have made our relationship with Estonia possible. They look to the west and pray for us; we look to the east and pray for our Estonian friends. The Light of the World has opened our eyes to new life, new hope, and a new future.

Harry Turner served as the chair due to Bill Bailey's being unable to attend. Harry reminded us this is a time of reunion but also a time to establish new relationships. Estonian friends who were present – Taavi Hollman; Ullas & Meeli Tankler; Artur Pold; and Robert Tscherenkov. Thank you for your presence and insights.

Reports/Updates –

Taavi Hollman, Estonia Methodist Church –

Estonia continues to be one of the most secular countries in Europe. Taavi is grateful for the bishop who is taking the church forward and making disciples. Estonian unemployment peaked at 15% and is now 9.22 % and very slowly improving. They have had on-going youth and children's ministries leadership with retreats and events. Celebrate Recovery is now up and going in some of the churches, and they are actively using Disciple and Alpha course literature. Sillimae has a new preaching point established by Artur Pold, initially starting as a soup kitchen. Eight congregations are growing. There are on-going mission activities to several people groups in Russia, including Siberia with good success. Due to the tight economy and phased in decreases in the Bishop's support and starting to meet the apportionment responsibilities, they have had to institute some painful belt-tightening measures including the most painful, an overall 1/3 reduction in pastors' salaries. It is evident that these challenges are being addressed in a sensitive, but responsible manner.

Taavi shared some highlights of what has occurred since we last met, what's occurred in the Church, and offered a few ideas as to what we can do as lay people -

Prayer – both directions (we all pray for Estonian Church and they pray for us)

Ask the young people in the congregations to be involved

Spend time connecting

He also showed a video about the new newspaper, *The Family*.

Perhaps include greeting from Bishop Alsted – if you wish

BMTS - Meeli Tankler. Meeli, as the new BMTS Rector shared that they have 20 new students. Their students come from 7 different countries. The general air about the Seminary is more collegial, focused, and they too are trying to respond thoughtfully to the financial challenges they face. They have basically three programs: residential; modular--working on a single course or series at a time with some required educational time physically present at the BMTS; and distance (on-line) learning.

Voru Project - Kaupo Kant (via Skype). The Voru project is an addition to the existing church, which is growing, taking in new baptized members, and has a growing children's ministry.

Lighthouse Children Center - Mall Tamm (Skype audio). The Lighthouse continues to provide safe place, food and classes for many street children. Five hundred children have been served in the last nine years. Mall shared that the LH too is feeling the financial crunch but is so grateful for their many faithful friends.

Camp Gideon - Artur Pold. Artur wonderfully embraced all of us saying we are all "Family of Estonia" – not just Friends of Estonia. They anticipate 1500 participants at CG this year. All of Artur's family is involved in this family ministry. Members of the Johvi congregation are very involved in the work at CG.

Generation 2, Russian Speaking Congregations - Robert Tscherenkov. Robert shared that the Russian-speaking youth are active in youth camps, city camp, and have cut back their expenses by focusing less on entertainment and more on core service.

Connecting Congregations - Jim Thurmond. Jim commended those who are actively connected, encouraged those who need to be more involved, and reminded us of the need for all congregations to be connected.

Reports of Teams/Churches - Marilene Long; Mary Ann Smith. Several suggestions were given on how to be creative on a limited budget, how to exchange photos and information, and how to enrich the connection.

Upper Room Ministries - Joan Floyd. Joan explained the role of the Upper Room publications in Estonia as well as Russia and the type of support it receives from the Upper Room Ministries and its needs.

Q & A, Taavi Hollman

Evening Worship –

Various ones from our group shared in the service. Choir Director, Debi Tyree, did a delightful job of leading us in Global Praise. Taavi's sermon was again one of encouragement and challenge. We are to live our lives according to God's word, being mindful of the distractions in our lives that can keep us away. Let us be like John Wesley – a man of one book. If we keep God's word, it is like building our house on the rock. The word of God has power!

Saturday Morning –

Harry reported from the worship service offering of the amazing financial commitment –
Offering and pledged for pastor support - \$9115
Two Kuum scholarships - \$1500
Lighthouse - \$2000
Voru - \$1000
Another great reason for celebration! Thank you for everyone's generosity!

Taavi's comments –

Taavi expressed the tremendous gratitude for the offering and offered a detailed explanation of how the pastors are paid, how many are full-time, salary decisions made by Conference Council, pastors' pensions, etc. They have also supported widows of pastors. Some funds have been received this year in the Bishop's office for the widows.

Report from the Executive Committee –

Proposal for the Exec Board –

Chair	Dr. Harry Turner
Past Chair	Bill Bailey
Communications	George Cook/Marc Lyon
VIM Coordinator	Mary Ann Smith – PLEASE CONTACT MARY ANN WITH DATES, LOCATIONS, ETC. OF YOUR UPCOMING VIM TEAMS. THIS WILL ENHANCE PROPER COORDINATION. masmith@asburytulsa.org , 918-392-1117.
Upcoming Host	Peter van Eys
BMTS Liaison	Jack Harnish
Camp Gideon	Earl Greenough
Lighthouse	Carol White
At Large:	Mary Danforth, Ed Heydt, Rachel Hyde, Ted Reissing, Ullas Tankler
Ex Officio	
Bishop	Christian Alsted
DS	Taavi Hollman
CC	Jim Thurmond
WE	Eddie Fox

There is a significant need for a current webpage and other communications. One of the main advantages of this would be to share current information with those unable to attend the annual gathering. It would also be very helpful to increase the information from our connecting congregations – perhaps 3 to 4 times a year. Even struggling congregations have celebrations!

The Exec. Committee also shared they had spend several hours discussing if the current format is the vehicle to meet the needs of the church in Estonia. Several possibilities exist – no changes at this time.

NEXT YEAR'S MEETING – April 29 & 30, 2011 in Nashville – church to be determined later

Exec Board will meet on April 28

Bishop Alsted will attend.

20/20 Celebration – 20 years of freedom and how do we look in the next 20 years. We're all encouraged to bring more friends next year from our home church.

Chuck Killian shared a wonderful devotional reminding us to not underestimate the power of one witness.

Peter led us in a prayer circle for our Estonian brothers & sisters. This was followed by the Communion Service and Sending Forth.

We were adjourned until next April. See you then!!

NOTES FROM THE MEETING – Complete notes are available if you are interested – masmith@asburytulsa.org. This summary is offered by Marilene Long and will be distributed through George Cook.