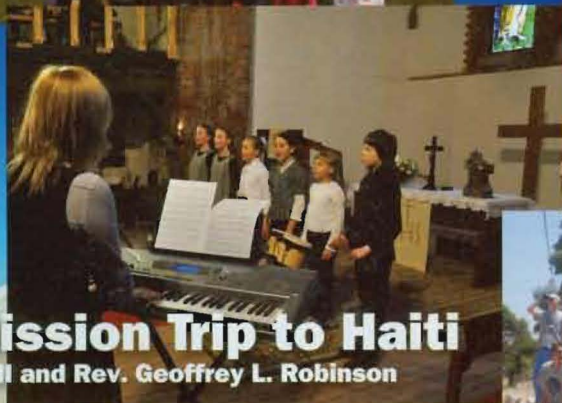
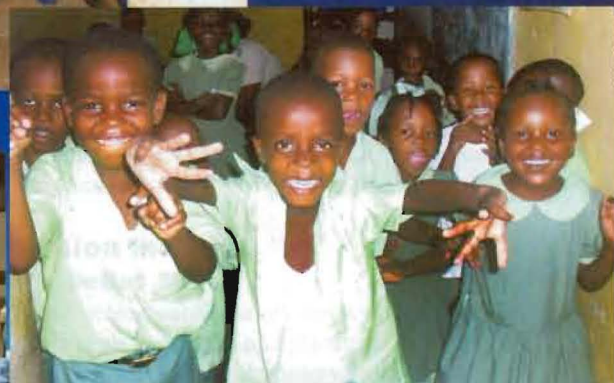
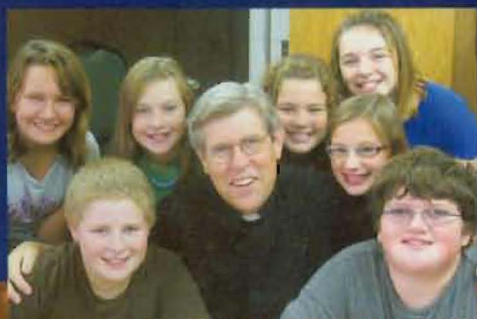


For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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Student Mission Trip to Haiti

By Dr. Timothy C. Quill and Rev. Geoffrey L. Robinson

Christ's Servants in Lithuania

By Dr. Charles J. Evanson

My Mission in Africa

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Christ's Servants in Lithuania

By Dr. Charles J. Evanson

Mission activity in Lithuania

faces unique challenges. Although Lithuania was the last European country to receive and accept the Gospel and become a Christian nation, the onslaughts of a Soviet captivity, which Lithuania endured for almost half a century, and the pressures of a highly secularized culture inimical to Christian faith and morals have not been entirely successful in their attempts to destroy the Christian church and Christian faith.

Eighty to ninety percent of the Lithuanian population openly state that they believe in God. Most of those who make this declaration are outwardly associated with the Roman Catholic Church or other so-called "traditional" churches (Russian Orthodox, Russia Old-Believers, Lutherans and Reformed). Most Lithuanian children are baptized, and almost every funeral is performed by an ordained priest, pastor or minister. However, only between five to ten percent of the population go to church with any regularity, the divorce rate is high (over 50%), abortions are regarded as normal procedures, an abnormally large percentage of the population is afflicted with alcoholism and the suicide rate is the among the highest in the world. It is evident that the years of Soviet domination and regulations which proscribed all but private one-on-one religious instruction, together with strong discouragements to church attendance and any sort of religious activity, have done much to contribute to the development of a post-Christian, secularist society.

Although Lithuanian law allows that school pupils may be permitted to receive a course of religious instruction in the public school, many parents do not take advantage of this option, and in many places the instruction is uneven in quality. In short, our Lord's mandate to His church to make disciples of all nations by Baptism and instruction in the Christian faith remains unfulfilled, for few receive adequate catechetical instruction or go to church services regularly.

Active mission work is difficult for the pastors and parishioners of Lithuanian Lutheran churches. To engage in active and concentrated mission activity among people who have been baptized and are claimed by churches as their own would open Lutherans to the charge of proselytism. Therefore the mission activities of the Lithuania Lutheran Church must be conducted delicately.

Mission activity is carried out primarily in the local congregations. Church festivals and public parish activities provide opportunities for contact with members of the community. The annual Cemetery Services held in the parish cemeteries attract families members, many of them secularized, to come to decorate the graves of their deceased family members and hear the Gospel. These services provide opportunities for contact with those who have strayed to once again hear the proclamation of the Word of God.

Groups of Lutheran parishes sponsor regional youth camps which attract not only Lutheran young people but friends and classmates who are not actively involved in other churches. In several congregations children's choirs, music classes and Bible study excite the interest of children who are unchurched or uninvolved. Many unchurched young people subsequently enroll in study courses and confirmation classes, and often whole families are brought into the fellowship of the church.

Many Lithuanians become acquainted with and eventually join the Lutheran Church after marrying Lutherans. Pastors encourage their parishioners to invite friends, neighbors and co-workers to join them in attending Divine Services and to see themselves as Christian missionaries who provide a strong and positive Christian witness to attract co-workers, friends and neighbors who have had little previous contact with any church.

In recent years the Lithuanian Lutheran Church has become actively involved in mission activity in the neighboring country of Belarus. Belarus was at one time a part of Lithuania, and in past centuries the Lutheran Church in Lithuania was instrumental in establishing congregations throughout the country. Pastor Richardas Doksas, assistant to Bishop Mindaugas Sabutis and second pastor of the Lutheran parish in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, now serves also as pastor of the Polosk Lutheran parish in north central Belarus. In addition, a pastor/theologian sent by Concordia Theological



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Seminary provides theological instruction for the clergy—both pastors and deacons—of the Belarusian Church, none of whom has been able to receive any substantial theological or mission training.

In order to prepare itself more adequately for the tasking of making disciples through Baptism and instruction, the Lithuanian Church is now involved in a program of learning more about the work of mission. The churches in the Baltic states were kept under close scrutiny during the Soviet years. All church activity was restricted to the church building itself. Mission activity was absolutely forbidden. The penalty for engaging in such activity was that the parish would be forced to forfeit its official registration, its permission to exist and hold Divine Services, administer the Sacraments and engage in other congregational activities. In addition, the pastors would lose their own personal registration certificates allowing them to minister the Word of God and administer the Sacraments. During that sad time the church was able to circumvent governmental regulations and engage in some “illegal” activities such as the youth camp at Butinge in northwestern Lithuania and other activities.

Now the door which had been closed for so many years is once again open and the church has mobilized itself to learn once again to become a mission-minded church in the highly secularized, post-Soviet, European Union environment. With the help of Concordia Theological Seminary and the strong support of the Bishop and Consistory, instructional seminars are held for the pastors of the Lithuanian Church and public school teachers who teach Christian doctrine in the public schools. In addition, the church has undertaken a program of ten special seminars in three geographical regions to provide in-depth instruction in Christian doctrine for parish officers and congregational members. The purpose of the seminars is to strengthen personal dedication, deepen congregational life, provide a renewed vision of the work and worship of the church and develop skills in sharing the Gospel with a secularized, post-Christian people. The church is concerned that, in the words of St. Peter, all may be made ready to give reason for the hope that is in them, and to do so with meekness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15). 🏠

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Dr. Charles Evanson has been serving in Lithuania since 1999. He was a member of the Department of Evangelical Theology in the Humanitarian Faculty of the University of Klaipeda, Lithuania (1999-2004), and presently serves as Theological Consultant to the Bishop and Consistory of the Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church, a sister

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