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Every pastor is what he is because of the influence of seminary professors in forming theological understanding and pastoral character.

NOVOSIBIRSK: A LUTHERAN SEMINARY MODEL FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN RUSSIA

by Timothy C. J. Quill

Brief Historical Origins

IN 1993 I WAS ASKED by the newly formed Concordia Mission Society to participate in a three-week exploratory trip to Kazakhstan to assess the possibility of initiating mission work in Central Asia. I traveled via Moscow to what was at that time the capital city of Almaty located in southeast Kazakhstan at the base of the snow covered Tian Shan Mountains. We then traveled west across the vast country to a remote Kazakh village, and finally to the formerly closed military city of Aktau (“white mountain”) on the Caspian Sea. Much time and effort was spent simply getting around on foot or in city buses. I chose to wear my clerical collar. It was a good choice. Everywhere I went, people wanted to talk to me. I quickly lost count of the number of people, mostly young people, who were eager to try out their English and more eager to discuss openly Christianity with someone from the West. Those were exciting and heady times to be about the missionary task. There was a tremendous interest in all things American, including American Christianity.

In April 1996, Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, the newly elected president of Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) and academic dean Dr. William Weinrich were invited to a meeting in St. Louis with Rev. Larry Burgdorf and Dr. Wallace Schulz. They were asked if CTS would be interested in accepting a significant donation from the Marvin M. Schwann Charitable Foundation in order to develop what would come to be called the “Russian Project.”¹ Significant support for the work in Siberia came

from the CTS from 1996–2010. After 2010, the work in Siberia was supported by the Global Seminary Initiative that was begun by Missouri Synod President Matthew C. Harrison. The original project charter included three goals: (1) Preparation of men for the pastoral ministry on the Fort Wayne campus to replace the hundreds of pastors killed by the communists; (2) Assist Lutherans in

suggested that a discussion group be formed with representatives from Concordia Theological Seminary, the Synod president’s office, the Board for World Mission and the Board for Higher Education. President Barry stressed that written contracts were not needed and the discussion should not be rushed. A few months later, on Oct. 20, 1997, Rev. Dr. Glenn O’Shoney sent a memo to President Barry to inform him of a resolution passed by the Board for Mission Services (BFMS) regarding Concordia Theological Seminary’s activity in Russia. The BFMS wrote, “Fort Wayne Seminary — Involved in independent mission work in Russia; Involved in competitive mission activity in Russia; Involved in church relations activities counter to those of the LCMS; Has refused to discuss their activities or to partner program with LCMS. Recommendation: That the Board for Mission Services bring this concern to the attention of the President of the Synod; the Board of Regents of Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne; and the LCMS Board Higher Education. That the Board respectfully ask the President of the Synod to intervene and to seek, mission, church relations, and by-law clarification – with resolution (written) – to this situation.” On Feb. 19, 1998, President Barry directed the parties involved to meet to resolve issues of mission in Russia. The meeting held on March 18, 1998, concluded in terms of the Russian Project that, “A seminary has the freedom to send faculty anywhere upon invitation; A seminary has the freedom to receive students from anywhere for any degree program; A seminary has the freedom to give advice and consent to anyone who seeks help; A seminary has the freedom to invite faculty from elsewhere to teach on seminary campus.” The meeting outlined that these parties would meet twice a year to discuss the Russian Project. All parties were agreed that the matter was settled and no further action was required; this was in response to the resolution submitted the previous year from the BFMS. The document on “Agreement Regarding Russian Mission Activities” concluded, “The six representatives reported to Dr. Barry that this meeting has resolved several issues and has established an adequate procedural basis for future cooperative activities. They consider these issues to be resolved and recommend that no further resolution be sought.” Because these memos and meetings were not public, the rumor persisted for many years that Concordia Theological Seminary did not have approval to operate the Russian Project when, in fact, the Synod president, the BFMS and the BHE agreed that the program could continue to operate in both Fort Wayne and Siberia.

¹ EDITORS’ NOTE: On March 25, 1997, President A.v.L. Barry issued a six-point letter. Point 1: “We are not saying that our two seminaries should stop their activities in bringing overseas students to their campuses for theological study, or that our seminary faculties should not be involved in overseas teaching roles.” Point 2: “We are not saying that the work which Concordia Seminary, St. Louis or Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, is doing in various parts of the world must be stopped. Specifically, we agreed that Fort Wayne’s work in Novosibirsk should not be stopped.” In Point 6, President Barry

Siberia to establish a seminary in Russia for the training of pastors and lay leaders; (3) Work with Russian speakers in the former Soviet Union to organize evangelism/catechetical summer seminars.

As this meeting was taking place, I was living a quiet and contented life on the Drew University campus located in the forested hill country of northern New Jersey. The call from CTS to serve as director of the “Russian Project” came as a complete surprise. Within weeks I found myself on planes, trains, buses and automobiles, traveling on a recruitment trip through the Baltics, Ukraine and from one end of Russia to the other — from St. Petersburg and Moscow to Ekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk on the Pacific coast.

In July 1996, I was back in Russia organizing theological seminars with the young Siberian Lutherans. These amazing Lutherans were able to attract over a hundred people, mostly university students, to theological seminars to sit all day long for two weeks in hot and humid classrooms listening to lectures by Missouri Synod professors on the Bible, the catechism, the Lutheran Confessions, Early Church fathers and on the theology and conduct of the Lutheran liturgy. The seminars served as evangelism to non-Christians, catechesis for new Lutherans and as a means to recruit men for seminary study. By September, the first group of Russian-speaking students arrived on the Fort Wayne campus to begin studying for the pastoral ministry.

On Sept. 19, 1996, President Wenthe received a letter from Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, written on behalf of the west Siberian Christian Mission:

For many years we think and dream about the foundation of a Confessional Training Center (Seminary) in Siberia. After years of official atheism the people are mostly unbelieving... As Lutherans we know that only Confessional Lutheran teaching can give people the pure understanding of the Christian faith so that they could find real comfort in the true Gospel ... Also, our Christians need to know

These amazing [Siberian] Lutherans were able to attract over a hundred people, mostly university students, to theological seminars to sit all day long for two weeks in hot and humid classrooms listening to lectures by Missouri Synod professors on the Bible, the catechism, the Lutheran Confessions, Early Church fathers and on the theology and conduct of the Lutheran liturgy.

how to resist the liberal theological influence that is growing in Russia at present time. According to our experience of studying on the Fort Wayne campus in the summer of 1995, and after our experience this past summer of having professors in Novosibirsk, I can say that only the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can help us in Siberia to fulfill our dream and only your Seminary can help Russian Lutherans to establish a training center in Siberia ... So we ask you to assist us in setting up this training center in

Siberia. We don't know how long this religious freedom will last in our country. So we need to start education project here as soon as possible.

In September 1996, Dr. Dean Wenthe and Dr. William Weinrich met with Synod president Al Barry during a Joint Faculties-Council of Presidents meeting in Chicago and received his approval and enthusiastic encouragement to press forward with the project.

In retrospect, it is amazing how quickly Pastor Lytkin's dream came to fruition. Alexey Streltsov was appointed by the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) to work with CTS to establish a new seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia. Novosibirsk

is located near the geographical center of Russia in Siberia and is the country's third largest city. The creation of a seminary involved recruiting students and locating facilities to house them and their families, designing the curriculum, building a library, identifying and scheduling short term visiting professors from the Missouri Synod and a multitude of other tasks. A building to house the seminary was purchased, remodeled and dedicated in July 1997. Classes began in October with short-term visiting professors from the Missouri Synod. The first two classes were ten week courses (Biblical Hebrew and Old Testament Isagogics) taught by Dr. Horace Hummel. This was followed by Fort Wayne professors Kurt Marquart, Arthur Just, David Scaer, William Weinrich and Tim Quill, Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and several qualified parish pastors. In 1998,

Rev. Alan Ludwig was deployed to serve as a full-time professor. On Feb. 14, 2000, the seminary was given the unexpected opportunity to move to a more adequate building in the center of Akademgorodok (Academic City), located near Novosibirsk State University and leading scientific institutes. The building had been a bank, which went bankrupt during a recent economic crisis, but provided adequate facilities for a church and seminary.

In August 2000, Rector Alexey Streltsov articulated the foundational principles and goals of the seminary in an open letter that appeared online in Russian and English. Streltsov quoted 2 Tim. 2:2: “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also,” and then explained:

We in Novosibirsk are convinced that in our day serious seminary training comes closest to the meaning of Paul’s words in this passage. It is neither lay discipleship training or short term leadership preparation, but a serious effort that makes demands upon both teacher and student. After all,

the Apostles themselves spent no fewer than three years in the ‘seminary’ of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After 70 years of devastating atheism and 10 years of infiltration of all kinds of sects and cults into Russia, people will not be satisfied with the shallow talker who is no different from the pop psychologist. People long for deep theology and for the real sacraments. By ‘deep theology’ I do not mean scholastic construction, but a truly Trinitarian and incarnational hermeneutic that alone is able to offer hope to people amidst this world of despair and chaos.

It is no secret that, humanly speaking, the state of modern Lutheranism as well as that of virtually all other Christian confessions is lamentable. Many people no longer recognize Holy Scripture as the authentic Word of God. Various churches practice the ordination of women into ecclesiastical ministry. There are even homosexual pastors and bishops in certain places. And so-called conservatives among Lutherans, in their attempt to protect the Bible, all too often unite with the conservative Protestant camp, thus making their worship and practically the

whole of their theology barely distinguishable from that of the Methodists or Baptists.

We do not know the future of the Lutheran Church in the West — in Europe and in America, nor do we know the future of the Lutheran Church in Russia and in Siberia. But in view of the decay of Christianity in the West, it is not entirely impossible that the Lutheran Church in Russia will have something to offer to the Western world in the future, regardless of what exigencies it may experience itself.²

In recent years many churches have been experimenting with new models of pastoral formation in place of the traditional residential seminary. A variety of distance learning and extension models have been introduced alongside or in place of the residential pastoral program.

From the beginning, it was the desire of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church to establish a seminary that would follow a traditional, full-time residential model for theological education. This took place when many other models were being attempted in both North America and around the world. In North America,

seminaries from many denominations are struggling to survive. Funding and student recruitment are decreasing while the number of alternative non-residential routes to ministry and ordination are increasing. In view of this reality, the question is increasingly being asked, “Why have theological schools?”

Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, breaks the question down to two key questions. Is the value of the scholarly work of the faculty or the theological education required for the students worth the time and money it takes to operate a seminary? Aleshire answers:

At this time, in this culture, for the church in North America, I think seminaries are not only needed, they are needed more than ever. When they do their work well, they enrich the life of the church, the fabric of social community, and the well-being of individuals. If all the ATS schools were closed this year, I think religious communities would be busy reopening them because they are central to the mission of religious communities.

‘The church needs leaders who have sat with scholars, asked them questions, and been challenged by their answers.’ — Daniel Aleshire

² Alexey Streltsov, “Letter from the Rector,” Aug. 31, 2000.

Communities of faith need scholarly inquiry ... the solutions that faith seeks are not easy and will not be derived from a weekend conference or cursory investigation. They require sustained attention over time.

The church needs scholarship to guide it through the tendency to assume that only the practical counts and that personal perceptions are sacred truth. The scholarship the church needs, requires intellectual talent, books in libraries, and time to read them. The church needs theological schools that are houses of faithful scholarship.

Communities of faith need leaders who have spent time studying. Not a single task in ministry has become easier in the modern era ... *The church needs leaders who have sat with scholars* (italics added), asked them questions, and been challenged by their answers. It needs leaders who have developed capacities related to the cure of souls and the care of congregational communities the church needs leaders who have been to school, learned their stuff, and who love the sacred texts they have learned.”³

“*The church needs leaders who have sat with scholars.*” Every pastor is what he is because of the influence of seminary professors in forming theological understanding and pastoral character. It was true at the time of the Reformation and remains true today. Lutheran historian Ernest Schwiebert points out that:

The key to [Luther’s] great success, where others before him had tried and failed, lay in the training of the clergymen *who sat at his feet and those of his fellow professors* and were taught how to interpret the Scriptures in the light of the Bible and the Apostolic Age.⁴

This was also recognized by Wilhelm Loehe who knew more than a thing or two about preparing men for the holy ministry amid emergency situations. In his book *Pastoral Theology*, Loehe begins by addressing theological

education: “There is no shame attached to learning and true scholarship ... It would be foolish to criticize learning and scholarship indiscriminately, since truly they are found seldom enough. Only, one ought to study the right things, and those things [he should study] quite seriously. One should pay attention only to faithful academic teachers. More is to be learned from them and better than from any book. There is a more lively and blessed way from mouth to ear than from book to eye.”⁵

The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church places a high priority on the necessity of pastoral formation, which takes place in a residential seminary where students engage in face to face contact with their teachers as well as with other students. This does not diminish their commitment to “book learning,” as is evident from the impressive seminary library. Pastoral formation also requires a chapel and Lutheran worship at the center of seminary life. The daily liturgical worship plays an important part in seminary life. The curriculum also includes classes on theological Russian and theological English.

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Recently, the use of modern technology and distance learning models have received a great deal of attention and investment of resources around the world. The leadership of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk has also given serious attention to distance education and modern technology to supplement, but not replace, residential pedagogy.

Modern Technologies and Distance Learning

The post-Soviet generation Russians are very proficient and at home with modern technology. The same is true of the Russian clergy and seminary professors, staff and students. The role of technology and distance learning has received considerable attention at Novosibirsk. In a presentation at an International Lutheran Council (ILC) Conference in Prague (October 2011) about “Lutheranism in the 21st Century,” Rev. Alexey Streltsov, rector of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, presented on “Lutheran Education in the 21st Century in View of

³ *Colloquy* (Association of Theological Schools, November/December, 2004), 2.

⁴ Ernest G Schwiebert. “The Reformation and Theological Education at Wittenberg.” *The Springfielder* 28:3 (1964): 21.

⁵ Wilhelm Loehe, *The Pastor: The Pastoral Theology of Wilhelm Loehe*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 9.

the Modern Communication Technologies.” Streltsov observed that “opportunities of the integration of modern communication technologies into the educational process are enormous.”⁶ These communication technologies, used to supplement theological education, include internet accessed resources, library supplementation and digitization of books and articles, podcasts, video conferencing (such as Skype) for live, distance instruction, social networking and so forth. However, when it comes to off-site instruction through technology, Streltsov believes that the “core of the problem is not the form of the distance education itself or the possibility of partial usage... but rather the model that views exclusively or heavily accentuated extramural pastoral training as plausible and even desirable. We must resist this understanding primarily for theological reasons.”⁷ He explains:

“Any educational model in the context of Lutheranism ... should be viewed against the Christological background of the ministry. Christ as the One who has called disciples, personally instructed them over a period of three years, and then sent them to make disciples of all nations — that must be the true starting point of any genuine model of professional Lutheran education.”⁸

“The internal character of the preparation of a priest has to do with the character of the Incarnation of our Lord. God chose not to function in a remote mode, but rather the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. A fundamental disconnect with the theology of the incarnation is inherent in the exclusively extramural approach to pastoral education, where or not it is accomplished with the means of modern communication technologies. Relations of Christ and His Bride the Church presuppose a certain intimacy, including personal interaction in the matter of education. Any attempt to organize preparation of a pastor through off-site training is equivalent to an attempt to conceive a child through the internet,

⁶ Alexey Streltsov, “Lutheran Education in the 21st Century in View of the Modern Communication Technologies.” Unpublished paper delivered at the International Lutheran Council Conference in Prague held October 2011.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

though with usage of some extra-corporal fertility means.”⁹

“A pastor is trained to publicly proclaim the Gospel and administer Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper. A priest also conducts weddings and burials, consecrates houses and other places, and does other things that require his personal presence and do not happen at a distance, in a remote mode ...the ministry the priest carries out for his parishioners is inherently ‘internal’ ... [an] on-site activity that the priest must consider his priority in the course of his ministry.”¹⁰

In conclusion, “Overemphasis on distance education would come into conflict with the basic theology of the Incarnation as it is expressed in the liturgy and pastoral care.”¹¹ In the end it is not an either-or but a both-and dilemma. Usage of new educational technologies is not

something to be feared but “may well begin before the official seminary course starts. Then it continues alongside the seminary classroom and does not stop after graduation.”¹²

In order to give a more concrete picture of the Novosibirsk model for theological education, I will share a few aspects that I have loosely organized according

to key issues addressed in the eight General Institutional Standards for assessment used by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and approved by the ATS Commission on Accrediting.

Purpose, Planning and Evaluation

The theological commitment and purpose of Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Novosibirsk is clearly articulated by Rector Streltsov on the Seminary webpage: “We believe that a confessional Lutheran seminary that trains indigenous pastors is the best way to carry out mission work in Russia. It is the pastor who gathers the people of God around the means of grace that Christ has instituted. And the pastor has to be orthodox in doctrine (1 Tim. 1:13), because on his teaching depends not only his own salvation, but also the salvation of the people

The curriculum for theological education of pastors must be shaped by and include the Office of the Holy Ministry, Word and Sacrament and liturgy.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Ibid., 14.

to whom he preaches (1 Tim. 4:16). And this is why the seminary has to be very careful that the teaching done within its walls is nothing else than what is taught in Holy Scripture, in the teachings of three ecumenical creeds of the church, and in the Lutheran Book of Concord.”¹³

Institutional Integrity

The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) has demonstrated its institutional integrity according to the requirements for official registration by the Russian Ministry of Justice. It has also obtained a license for higher theological education from the Russian Ministry of Education and Science. This was a lengthy process in order to fulfill many requirements concerning the campus facilities, student housing, library, level of teaching, demonstration of credentials for professors and so forth. The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) administration oversees and audits the employed bookkeeper. According to the seminary charter, a Board of Trustees consisting of eight people appoint the rector and serve as the ruling body of the Seminary. A Scholarly Council is responsible for the organization and quality of the educational process.

The Theological Curriculum: Learning, Teaching and Research

According to the ATS, Standard Three, “In a theological school, the overarching goal is the development of theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to a responsible life in faith. Comprehended in this overarching goal are others such as deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of faith community, and acquirement the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in the community.”¹⁴

Classes are based on the core curriculum from the M.Div. program at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Ind., but with significant adaptations for the local context. For convenience of scheduling the classes are laid out according to the four traditional disciplines (exegetical, dogmatic, historical and practical), however, with significant integration so that no class stands in isolation from the others. This is why instructors are intentionally assigned to teach in at least two or three departments.

The program requires four years on campus and one practicum (vicarage) following the fourth year. During the first four years, the students are expected to assist the local church in the liturgy, Sunday school, youth work, etc., and during the summer recess assist at their home congregation.

The global awareness and engagement is remarkable for such a young seminary. From its inception, it has had many visiting professors from America. Rector Streltsov also has been successful in including confessional Lutheran, visiting professors from Germany, Lithuania, England and Australia. All but one of the faculty members studied at Fort Wayne. Global awareness also is heightened by the presence of students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. A short-term study abroad program in 2007 brought six students from CTS to take a two-week intensive class with the Novosibirsk seminarians.

Library and Information Resources

The library holding includes approximately 15,000 volumes. Until 2009 the seminary subscribed to roughly 50 theological journals when acquisitions ended due to budget cuts. The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) plans to work with the Chemnitz Library Initiative in an effort to restore journal acquisition via electronic delivery systems. The seminary employs a part time, theologically educated librarian who is also an expert in computer systems. Library holdings have been intentionally selected to support both student course needs as well as and faculty needs for course development and other research. It also serves as a theological resource for the SELC.

Full Time Faculty

- Seminary Rector Rev. Alexey Streltsov has an undergraduate degree in geophysics from Novosibirsk State University (NSU) and also an M.A. and S.T.M. from CTS.
- Rev. Pavel Khramov has a Master's Degree in Mathematics from NDU. He also has an M.A. and is nearing completion of an S.T.M. from CTS.
- Rev. Alan Ludwig has an M.Div., S.T.M. and CSSL.
- Rev. Andrey Lipnitsky has a Pedagogical Degree from Novosibirsk State Pedagogical Institute and a diploma from the Novosibirsk Seminary and certificate from CTS.

¹³ Alexey Streltsov, “Letter from the Rector,” Aug. 31, 2000.

¹⁴ The Commission on Accrediting. *General Institutional Standards* (Pittsburg: The Association of Theological Schools, 2015), 5.

Adjunct Faculty

- Dr. Pavel Butakov has a M.A. from CTS and a doctorate from the Institute of Philosophy, Novosibirsk.
- Additional Adjunct PhDs from the University of Novosibirsk and academic institutes in Akademgorodok are regularly scheduled to teach courses on Logics, World History, Russian Language, etc.

Student Recruitment, Admission, Services and Placement

Since 1997, four classes have graduated. Current Enrollment: Five students graduated on Nov. 1, 2015. Four additional students are in the first year with a new class of six students expected to matriculate next year. Most graduates go on to ordination and service in the SELC and other Lutheran Churches (LCMS and German Lutheran Churches in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). Graduates have also included a church musician (kantore) and seminary librarian.

Institutional Resources

Human Resources: The seminary is very strong in the area of human resources with an excellent indigenous faculty, staff, translators and an administrator/rector. Most students come with personal computers and are able access a number of books, papers and class recourses over the seminary WiFi. The Internet is very reliable and contains many useful resources in Russian. The main building and student housing are excellent. Married and single students are housed in off campus apartments that are owned by the seminary.

Activities beyond the Seminary Classroom

Annual Theological Symposia. The seminary sponsors an annual theological symposia which usually attracts fifty plus participants: Pastors from the SELC and other Lutheran Churches in Russia (Ingria, ELKRAS) and CIS (Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Moldova, Belarus) Baltics, Germany and the United States.

Bible Schools. The seminary also operates an off campus Bible School that meets in other cities and serves as both a pre-seminary for future seminarians and offers theological education for the laity (church leaders, musicians, youth workers, Sunday school teachers, etc.). The course takes two years and is then moved to another location.

Summer Seminars. The seminary faculty play a major role as lecturers at the Summer Seminars conducted by the SELC throughout Russia. Over the past 19 years, the seminars have attracted hundreds of people from Ural Mountain regions to Kamchatka and serve as evangelism among the unchurched and non-Christians, as catechesis for new Lutherans and ongoing Biblical and doctrinal study for long time members. The seminarians all assist with the programs, especially with the children and youth.

Faculty Research. Faculty and staff produce many original theological articles as well as translate significant theological works into Russian.

International Impact. Faculty, especially Streltsov, Ludwig and Butakov have taught courses and served as conference speakers. Professors (Ludwig and Streltsov) taught courses at Lutheran seminaries in Ukraine, Baltics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ethiopia (Mekane Yesu Seminary) and at CTS. They have served as speakers at international conferences, such as the “Klaipeda Conferences” in Lithuania, Latvia and Germany and International Lutheran Council conferences in Prague, Lithuania and the United States.

Recent Developments

Requests for assistance and cooperation include:

- + Distance learning and visiting professors from Lutheran Theological Seminary to teach courses in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kazakhstan (German).
- + Distance learning and visiting professors from Lutheran Theological Seminary to the Missouri Synod’s mission in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Ingria Seminary in Koltushe, Russia

On March 22–23, 1999, a meeting of Lutheran seminaries in Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine took place at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia (ELKRAS) Seminary in Novosaratovka (a suburb of St. Petersburg). The idea for the consultation originated with Dr. Hans Spalteholz, interim principal of the Missouri Synod’s People of God Seminary in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The meeting was held on the campus of the ELKRAS Seminary in Novosaratovka near St. Petersburg, Russia and included representatives from Lutheran seminaries in Almaty, Ukraine, Novosaratovka, Koltushe and Novosibirsk. When reporting on the work in Almaty, Missouri Synod missionary

Spalteholz thanked all for coming and then added with some embarrassment that while the idea for a joint seminary consultation had originated with the People of God seminary, they were sad to announce that the seminary was now in recess. Once they suspended the practice of giving financial stipends to seminary students, all the students left the seminary. Since the consultation, St. Sophia Seminary of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church in Ternopol, Ukraine and the ELKRAS Seminary in Novosaratovka also ceased regular residential classes. The seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kazakhstan in Astana has also been closed. This leaves only the two residential seminaries in Novosibirsk and Koltushe.

The reasons for the seminary closings include the massive exodus of German Lutherans immigrating to Germany, the cooling down of initial enthusiastic openness to Western Christianity, an increase in cultural secularism and cut backs in fiscal subsidies.

During the Ingrian Synod in St. Petersburg, Oct. 16–17, 2015, a meeting took place between the Novosibirsk Rector and the new Ingrian Seminary Rector at which they determined to foster closer collaboration between the two seminaries. At the meeting, the Ingrians also invited Professors Streltsov and Ludwig to teach intensive courses in Koltushe.

Conclusion

Defining issues in the assessment of the Novosibirsk Seminary model include:

- The curriculum should be explicitly shaped by Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and promote true unity with confessional Lutherans around the world.
- Commitment to the residential seminary model, supplemented, however, with appropriate use of technology and distance education, particularly before and after the on campus training.
- The necessity of setting high academic standards for faculty and students.
- The seminary exists to serve the Church by the preparation of her pastors as pastors, not mere academicians; pastors who are evangelists, catechists, liturgists and *Seelsorger[s]*.
- The curriculum should be shaped by ecclesial needs and concerns which in turn shape pastors as spiritual shepherds.

Major challenges facing the Novosibirsk Seminary:

- The SELC is a minority church in a majority Orthodox culture.
- A rising secularism in Russian society and pressure from liberalism from European Lutherans.
- Persecution.
- Fiscal support and long term sustainability.

The Novosibirsk Seminary is not a model to be rigidly copied everywhere in the world. Each church and seminary must flesh things out in its unique context with its unique gifts, resources (or lack of gifts and resources) and problems.

The Russian Project in Fort Wayne and Novosibirsk is not a completely new model for pastoral preparation. It builds on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. All Lutheran Seminaries build their curriculum on AC V, “The Office of the Ministry”; VII, “The Church”; XIV, “Order in the Church” and XV, “Church Usages.”

In many respects the Russian Project “anticipated” the Global Seminary Initiative. This is particularly apparent in that an LCMS seminary was directly involved in the theological training of pastors and church leaders on the international level and directly involved in the establishment of a seminary overseas. The Russian Project was not a totally new model as much as an adaptation of previous practices. Bringing foreign students to study on the Fort Wayne campus was practiced under the “Forward in Remembrance” mission offering CRISP program. CTS was previously involved in the establishment of a Lutheran seminary in St. Catharine, Canada. Finally, many faculty members brought considerable overseas experience as a result of having served as missionaries overseas.

What is the future of Novosibirsk in particular and seminary theological education in general the world over? The curriculum for theological education of pastors must be shaped by and include the Office of the Holy Ministry, Word and Sacrament and liturgy. Show me the daily chapel at the seminary, and I will show you what the Church will look like in the future. Where Lutheran liturgy and theological education go, there go the pastors and the Church.

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