

THE LORD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

March/April 2020

Pandemic Пандемия

Every conversation these days begins and ends with an involved discussion of the coronavirus. It's understandable, as this pandemic has completely upset our daily routines in ways that one month ago we could not have imagined. From school closings to border closings, cancelled trips to learning how to work from home, our everyday lives are being shaken and turned upside down. Every day I have to think creatively to figure out how to live my life under these new circumstances.

My students at the seminary are memorizing Psalm 23 as part of our English class. At the end of class this week, the conversation (naturally) turned to the coronavirus, and one of the students stated, half in English and half in Russian, that if the Lord really *is* our shepherd, then we have nothing to fear. This is a chance for us to cling to that promise and really see where our faith lies. If God's Word is true, then we can trust that we are being lead to green pastures and still waters—God is taking attentive care of us in the midst of all this.

Daily Life

For this newsletter, I mainly wanted to let you all know that I AM OKAY! The coronavirus has certainly changed life around here, and things will continue to change, but I am healthy, I have internet, and my circumstances are uncomfortable but not unbearable.

The situation in Russia is not as serious as what we've seen in China, Italy and are currently observing in the United States. Of course, accurate figures of how many people are infected are not available and, frankly, impossible to come by, but it seems that the coronavirus has not spread to the same extent in Russia—yet.

However, we are all still aware of the situation, checking the news daily, and following what instructions the Russian government has given. Those instructions include limiting gatherings to less than 50 people, and staying home as much as possible. We're limiting our activities, doing as much as possible online. I'm taking

Prayer Requests

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.”
Psalm 23:1-2 (ESV)

- Pray for the governments and officials making decisions to protect the citizens under their authority
- Pray for all those affected by the pandemic, those sick and those caring for the sick
- Pray for all those whose studies, plans and travels have been interrupted
- Pray for those whose economic situation will be drastically hurt by this crisis

Russian lessons over Skype, and preparing to teach a few students over the internet as well. The seminary is still functioning, but just this week classes have switched from onsite to virtual, and the staff decided to cancel the intensive onsite courses for the distance learners. Sunday services have also moved over to online formats, and we met last Sunday on Zoom. Travel is, of course, limited, and all extra activities (getting my hair cut, shopping for a tripod) will have to wait until all this is over.

But working from home is not so bad, and I've been using this time to work on other projects that usually get shuffled to the back burner. I finally finished editing the service folder that we use at St. Anne's and put together a hymnal supplement for that congregation as well. Together with a team of other LCMS workers, I've started working on another curriculum for the English Bible Camps. This will be the third curriculum we've written together, each designed with English activities, games and songs centered around Bible stories, all pointing to Jesus.

One of the challenges we're facing now is all of the events that must be cancelled. Small things were the first to go, like the weekly English club, but with the future prognosis looking grim, much bigger events have also taken the cut. The decision was made to cancel the short-term team we were planning on hosting in the beginning of June; they were going to lead an English Bible Camp outside of St. Petersburg. While we're certainly disappointed that these plans have been changed, I'm confident that God will work through this. I'm confident that He is in control, and I trust in His sovereignty, wisdom and timing.

Support

I'm now online! If you would like to support my work in Russia, visit:

www.lcms.org/anders

You can also send your gifts of love to our Friends at:

MISSION CENTRAL
40718 Highway E-16
Mapleton, IA 51034

Make checks payable to Mission Central

Write "Russia/Alyssa Anders" on the memo line

If you receive this newsletter through the mail, but would prefer the email version, just let me know! Send me an email at alyssa.anders@lcms.org and I'll gladly make the change.

Building Community

During this time, I've been realizing the importance of community. My family, friends, the acquaintances I see in church every week and say hello to—all of these people play a role in my life. Now, when I'm suddenly stuck at home for an extended period of time, I've been thinking about how all of those interactions, small and large, make an impact on my life.

Community is vitally important, for encouragement, for debate, for learning, for sharing and the list goes on. This also relates to the work that I do here. I teach English—but why? To enable the students to build their own communities. There are many subjects that future pastors and church workers need to learn during this time of preparation, but once they are already working, one of the most important influencers in their lives, and in their service, will be the communities that surround them. They will rely on their communities during worldwide pandemics, times of personal crisis, seasons of doubt and depression, and also times of success and great joy.

One of the seminary students, Anya, has started attending the English service at St. Anne's. Her English is intermediate, and she was looking for an authentic English experience where she could practice. Two weeks ago, because of the coronavirus concerns, we only had seven people in the English service, and our pastor invited us sit in a circle and we celebrated a shortened version of the Divine Service. We were each able to add our own petitions to the general prayer, and since a few of the people there were Russian, he clarified that we were free to pray in whatever language was most comfortable for us. I was surprised when Anya's turn came, and she prayed clearly and boldly—in English! I have the students practice praying in English every week in class, but I was certain that without preparation she would find it much easier to revert to Russian.

Of course, Anya speaks Russian and lives in Russia, so for her, the English service does not provide a vital connection to the Sacraments or the Word of God. But that confidence she now has enlarges her circle of contacts to include English speakers—this opens up opportunities of conferences she could attend, books and articles she can read, visitors to Russia that she can interact with, even theologians she can follow on YouTube. Now, her community can grow, and can include Lutherans around the world. I pray that this will be a blessing to her as she studies and when she graduates and begins her service in the church.

The Lord *is* our shepherd, and I praise him that even though our worlds are being shaken, we still see glimpses of Him working.