

God's Mission ...as told from the perspective of Alyssa Anders

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

July/August 2020

Normalcy *Нормальность*

We're learning what the new "normal" looks like. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic continues in most countries around the world. Here in Russia, we are still seeing new infections every day, and there is a lot of discussion about a vaccine on the verge of being released.

On the streets though, the situation is very different than a month ago. Stores and restaurants are open, the metro is once again full of people and tours for tourists are in full operation downtown. It's not quite back to the "normal" of pre-coronavirus days. The tourists in St. Petersburg are all Russians, as the borders haven't opened up yet to foreigners. Most entrances to businesses have signs asking people to wear a mask and gloves in order to be served. There are ongoing speculations about what the opening of the school year will look like.

Since the middle of July, restrictions due to COVID-19 have been relaxed, and we have more opportunities to gather and organize events outside of our homes. It seems like

my schedule is exploding—I went from going out of my apartment only for a walk every day to having events and trips planned back to back!

One of the first events was an Evening of Prayer and Praise at St. Mary's church in the middle of July. Another missionary couple in St. Petersburg gathered various musicians together to lead the music and invited the pastor, Rev. Mikhail Ivanov, to pray with the congregation. It was an informal setting where everyone sang, worshiped and prayed together, witnessing to the glory and love of our God. I joined the band, which was made up of Russians, Finns, Uzbeks and Americans. We communicated in various levels of broken Russian. The one thing that united us was our faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, a truth that maintains its power in any language.

In the end of July, I, along with a group from St. Petersburg, had the opportunity to travel to several cities throughout Russia to attend different events hosted by Ingrian parishes.

Prayer Requests

"He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake."
Psalm 23:3 (ESV)

- For the workers planning and supporting youth and children's work in the Ingrian church
- For those considering or preparing for service in the church, whether in a pastoral, teaching or musician role
- Praise for the recent confirmands who recently confessed their faith publicly
- Pray for the start of the school semester, especially as we continue to deal with the effects of COVID-19

We visited parishes in Nizhney Novgorod, Yoshkar-Ola, Kazan, Rzhev, and Shyokino. Aside from visiting each of the churches and meeting the pastors and some of the congregation's members, we attended a seminar, a family camp, and witnessed the consecration of a new sanctuary in the small village of Shyokino. The trip helped us to understand the extent of the Ingrian church and introduced us to parts of Russia we had never seen before.

Each parish has a different story to tell, with different struggles and needs. In Kazan, the Tatar culture is largely Muslim, and in Yoshkar-Ola a large ethnic minority, the Mari El people, follow a traditional pagan religion. And yet at each parish we saw life and growth. Many of these churches were started by missionaries, and they have since grown to have their own Russian pastors and church leaders.

The next week after arriving back to St. Petersburg, I headed out again to the village of Koltushi where Confirmation Camp was being held. In the Ingrian tradition, a yearly 10-day camp is held for confirmation age youth, with lessons every day on different parts of the catechism, basic

theology and the Lutheran Church. In addition, they participate in Bible studies, informal prayer times and fun activities. The last day of the camp is Confirmation Sunday, where the participants stand up in front of the assembled crowd and confess their faith.

This year there were 16 participants. It was wonderful to spend some time with the confirmands and witness their confirmation. Some of the participants came because, as we would expect, their families sent them. But others were there because a member of the church had invited them, and not everyone came from a Lutheran, or even Christian, family. I loved seeing how the church used this opportunity to spread the Gospel. In each lesson God's Word was clearly proclaimed, and each participant was quizzed at the end of the week to make sure he/she had understood the information presented. No one is pressured into participating in

the confirmation service, and of the 16 participants, 11 were confirmed on Sunday (four were previously confirmed, but chose to take the course again, and one boy decided to wait to be confirmed in his own parish).

Right now, I have a week to get catch up on work (such as this newsletter!) before heading off to help with another children's camp. There are several other youth events being planned, and then the school semester, and classes at the seminary, will start on September 1st (unless the pandemic ends up changing those plans).

Please keep the church in your prayers as things open up, and God keeps working in the church!!



Our group in Kazan



Seminar in Yoshkar-Ola (above) and the church in Kazan (right)

