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## Lithuania United Methodist Church

Volume 2, Issue 1

### Christian Alsted elected new Bishop for the Nordic and Baliti Areas of the Central Conference

At its meeting in Strandby, Denmark February 18-22, the delegates elected Christian Alsted, 48, of Denmark to be the new Bishop for the Nordic and Baltic areas of the Central Conference which includes Lithuania. He will officially assume his duties on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Bishop Alsted is currently the Senior Pastor of the Jerusalem United Methodist Church in Copenhagen. He is married to Elizabeth and they have three children.

Bishop Alsted was one of five candidates for the episcopacy at the Central Conference

meeting which only meets every 4 years. He received the necessary votes on the 21<sup>st</sup> ballot. Bishop Alsted is a native of Denmark and will serve as the Episcopal leader for the Nordic and Baltic area which includes 7 countries. He is a graduate of the United Methodist Seminary in Gothenburg, Sweden and holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in the USA.

In his statement presenting himself to the conference he wrote: "Our focus is not the

survival or even the growth of United Methodism in Northern Europe – it is to participate in God's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the gospel and living out the commandments to love God and neighbor for the transformation of the world."



### Annual Conference Set for April 17-19

The 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Lithuania Annual District Conference will be held in Kaunas April 17-19. Bishop Olson, who retires as Bishop beginning May 1<sup>st</sup>, will be present to conduct the conference. Highlights of the conference will include reports from all areas of the church including local church reports. We will also have a special opportunity on Saturday evening to give a farewell and to say thank you to Bishop Olsen.

On Saturday afternoon we will have some time for "Holy Conferencing" around the 4 emphases of the United Methodist Church for the next 4 years:

- Developing New Congregations
- Leadership training for Pastors and Laity
- Ministry to the Poor

#### Global Health Issues

We want to examine the ways in which Lithuania can respond to these opportunities. If you would like to send greetings to the conference you can email them to the District Superintendent.

**John Campbell, Superintendent**

### Friends of Lithuania and Latvia Gathering

April 24-25, 2009

Fairview United Methodist Church  
Maryville, TN

**For details, registration form and program go to:**

<http://www.fairview-umc.org/news/317/latvia-lithuania-initiative-consultation>

**Representatives from Lithuania will include Pastor Vidas Mucute and his wife Andzelika and Superintendent John Campbell and Bonnie Campbell, pastor of Vilnius and Ukmerge Churches.**

## Pastor Walla brings Christmas Cheer

I think all of us want a Christmas gift given by hope and love and we also know that the biggest gift to everyone of us is the love from Jesus Christ. In 2008 I got a lot of gifts from congregations, schools, shops, private persons and so on. I had more than 2000 gifts to give out to children, youth, adults, prisons, special schools and so on.

We started in Taurage: we visited one family in the countryside and gave them some gifts and food. And in the children's home they had a program, they were singing and dancing for us, and it was so wonderful to see their happiness when they got gifts. The women in the congregation had made the evening meal for us and we had a wonderful time together. Andzelika and Vidas make a good work for children and families.

In Kaunas we visited the boys' penitentiary and we had a talk with them. These boys have a special place in my heart – they need hope and love



from everyone of us. I was happy that Rev. John C., pastor Giedrius, workers Alma and John were together with us; they meet the boys twice a week. We also had a special Santa Claus with us. All boys in the penitentiary and isolation got gifts. We met Danute and all her children in her wonderful work in the Methodist Church. They also had made a super program for us. Children and youth made a drama and they made it so good that I still remember and think about it. All got gifts.

In Siauliai we visited two children's homes together with the pastor Grazina. It was so good to see how she was working with the children and had them in her arms and hug them. These children need to trust adults. All children and staff got gifts and you could really see that they were

happy when they opened the gifts. For the evening Grazina had prepared a Christmas program. We were singing a lot of Christmas hymns and reading texts from the Bible. We shared the gathering in the name of Jesus.

In Birzai we met all workers in the Help Center, all women from the Day Center groups, all children in the after school work, visited a lot of families and gave them Christmas gifts and food boxes. In Birzai we also visited a new open center for handicapped persons. We gave Christmas gifts to social workers in different areas they were working, so they could give out Christmas gifts to their clients.

We have a very good cooperation with social workers around the region of Birzai and we are happy to help each other. The Help Center and Regina and her workers make a hopeful work for many people in the area of Birzai. They work together with love from the Lord and sow the Gospel out to them in need.

On Sunday, 21st of December, we had a big celebration in Panevezys. We celebrated a worship service, a Christmas prayer, songs and music, a Holy Communion and we were together with each other and also had a Christmas party. Children were singing and playing the violins. We were really celebrating that Jesus is our Lord and Helper in all situations. Some babies were sleeping and some were eating and all could eat the wonderful Gospel. All got Christmas gifts. If you could see the children's eyes – they were shining for the Lord with thankfulness.

On the road back to Klaipeda we stopped to the boarder to Kaliningrad and met some friends from our Church in Sovetsk and gave them gifts and food boxes for their Christmas celebration. And in Klaipeda we gave Christmas gifts and food boxes to the Salvation Army to their home for homeless people.

I also know that gifts were given out in Ukmerge, Vilnius and Pilviskiai, too.

On the ferry back to Sweden I could only say to the Lord "Thank you" and also thanks to all who have given the gifts. Blessed are those who have given the gifts and blessed are those who can have them.

Let the Lord Jesus inspire us to do His willing.

Your friend in Jesus,

**Pastor Walla**

*"I think all of us want a Christmas gift given by hope and love and we also know that the biggest gift to everyone of us is the love from Jesus Christ."*

## Betanien Support Provides Christmas Gifts

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Ps 118.1)

Christmas is a time for miracles. God shows His love for us through good works. In the autumn our guests from Oslo visited us: Kari and Larry, and in December they sent money for presents for Christmas. I thank God, that there are such persons who care about others and these persons' work strengthen others' faith. For this money 40 gifts were bought for the persons who are participants of the "The Home Care" and "The Care" programs. Before the holidays, together with Rev. Giedrius we visited people in Kaunas, and with Rev. Victoria – in Pilviskiai. The program workers helped distribute the gifts: Jurgita and Gene – in Kaunas (22 gifts); Lina, Danute, Anele – in Pilviskiai (18 gifts). Visiting lonely old people, we show God's love to them and that they are not alone and God cares about them.

All persons that are visited are extremely grateful that there is such a program of the Church for elderly people. They are grateful to the supporters of the Betanien for the gifts and to the Church and the persons who do this work.

We also want to thank the Lord for the opportunity to distribute bread to people. This project in the UMC in Pilviskiai was begun in November. Bread is distributed 2 times a month. Helping others, we express our ministries to God.

**Zaneta Rimskyte, District Diaconal Coordinator**



## Kaunas Church Celebrates Christmas

December – the time of wonderful feasts! It's such a time, when our hearts fill with goodness, love and honesty. We all wait for miracles and presents.

But we know that the largest miracle and present – the Jesus Christ's birth.

The feast of miraculous Christmas didn't pass by the

Day Center of the United Methodist Church in Kaunas. This year we began celebrating Christmas on December 17, when Rev. Walla Carlson and other guests from Sweden arrived. Five years together already Rev. Walla brings presents for our children from Swedish Santa Claus.

The children and their friends wait for Rev. Walla and prepare for her arrival. This year children arranged the program of the celebration themselves again, they rehearsed a lot, decorated the Church and made costumes for themselves. Every child knows that Rev. Walla collects statuettes of little cows, so this year children also brought different little cows to Rev. Walla's collection.

So during the program children read and performed „Jesus' letter”, sang hymns, danced liturgical dance, recited and even rejoiced at the artificial snow. Children included Rev. Giedrius in the program, too, who participated in the celebration with pleasure. Though children were worried very much, but all revealed their talents during the program. Every child took out from the celebration an honestly prepared Swedish present and some sweets. We also hope that they considered the sense of Christmas: that Christmas is Jesus' birthday and presents are a reminder of the first Christmas. May the spirit of this celebration go with us all year!

**Egle Chomyniene, District Youth Leader**



*“Of course, there was the drinking of tea and a short worship at first.”*

## Lay Speakers Seminar a Surprise

I woke in that cold morning, on January 31, and I was irritable and in a bad mood. I remembered that I promised to come to the Lay Speakers' seminar, organized by the United Methodist Church in Lithuania. I regretted about promising to take part in that seminar. But after breakfast I went there.

When I came to the Church, I saw a lot of people there. These people were serious and concentrated. Also they were much older than me. At one time I felt uncomfortable.

I was interested when I got the program of the seminar. Of course, there was the drinking of tea and a short worship at first. Then serious work was begun. The very first theme seemed to me very interesting. I had heard all this before, but later I heard a lot of interesting and new things, the more because the seminar was led by priests, whose eloquence was beautiful and imaginative. I was interested and fascinated.

Finally there was the discussion of the program of the seminar. Seminar was finished by the ending prayer. Though I was ill and felt not well, I was satisfied that I hadn't missed such a great seminar. I was cold a little, but I had no regrets about that, because I knew a lot of new things.

Before the seminar, I didn't go to school all week, because I was ill. And then on Monday, after one week during which I was ill, I went to school. The first lesson was on history, and during it we had to give a written account on „Reformation and Contra Reformation“. I told the teacher that I couldn't write it, but the teacher just said strictly, that I was not in a kindergarten. When the account papers were distributed, I laughed, because I remembered that I heard all this on Saturday, during the seminar. The teacher looked at me angrily from time to time. I was the first who finished the work, and I put the paper on the teacher's table. She looked at

me and asked when I would come to rewrite the account. And she began to read my work. And what do you think? I answered all questions correctly. I got 10. And I was in a very good mood all day. How grateful I am to God, Church, Rev. Giedrius and other priests, that I could use the heard information at school, too!

I reached my hand for God and He reached both hands for me... I gave my life, future, wishes, successes and difficulties to Jesus – my Redeemer and Lord of life – and I understood that all what is meaningful comes through Him...

**Ausrinė, the UMC in Kaunas**

**\*Editor's Note:** Ausrine is a High School Senior who is participating in the 2 year Lay Speakers Training Class being offered now for the second time in Lithuania.

## Samaritan's Purse Comes to Lithuania

On January 29 of this year a big children's team gathered in the lovely Church in Sanciai. A happy children's clatter, an uproar and a laughter were heard there.

Children felt protected by God and people, who think about them though a short moment. When the children hushed, it was said that the presents for them were brought from very far and God is with them always and everywhere.

Children heartily sang hymns, glorifying God. All children were asked to write their names on a big paper heart. To everyone who did it, a present and a book about God were given.

When all presents were given, children began sharing their experiences and thoughts how God had come in their lives. A nice boy told, that his father was dead, and

his mother wasn't able to buy the necessary things for school; and there God and good people took care of him. As it happens not only Christmas is a time of miracles, but a common day also is a miracle. Some miracles really happen in this Church.

Though presents weren't very expensive, but they were practical and necessary for God's children. They felt gratitude to God and nice Samaritans; now children know that people from far away think about them. And this showed to children, that we are one God's children of one Earth and we think about each other.

Children dispersed being happy and satisfied. One carried a doll in his hands, another –

needful crayons. The most important thing is that they felt love and care of them in this God's Home.

**The youth of the UMC in Kaunas**



## Lithuanian Pastor Attends Youth Seminar in St. Petersburg

On February 3–7 there was the seminar for the youth of the Eurasian United Methodist Church in St. Petersburg, Russia, which theme was „The Source of Life“.

The seminar „You are the Light of the World“, that has already become the annual one, gathers youth's leaders from various places of Russia, Belarus and other CIS countries, which constitute the Eurasian part of the Northern Europe Central Conference. This year Lithuania was represented in the seminar for the first time. The aim of the seminar is to round up the youth and give them the practical information and inspiration to continue their ministries in local churches.

The event surprised us pleasantly at its variety. The everyday lecturers for youth on topical themes were supplemented with practical lessons: people were taught to solve conflicts and understand their reasons, to lead small groups or Bible studies, to glorify God by dance and music and even take photographs and make a film. The days, which would begin with the morning consid-

eration, wouldn't lose the climate of piety even during the very busyness – the glorifying group, rounded up of representatives from different churches, would invite all participants for the common song (and according to John Wesley, when people sing, they pray twice).

The guests of the seminar, who lectured and led practical lessons – Jonathan Pak and Mark Kim from USA – emphasized over and over, that the heart of all service is an alive relation to God, which is constantly developed through the prayer, reading the Scripture and glorification. Considering the subject of the seminar, they explained to the youth the importance of that alive relation to God, which is the source of all believers' lives, not only to their services, but to the faith and saving, too. Especially affecting was Jonathan Pak's witness about his father's ability to forgive his assailants after when he was cruelly beaten during his service in Moscow. Rev. Pak said that he had learned from his father to look for power during challenges and for strength to

service after painful disappointments in Jesus Christ.

The organizers of the event – Andrew Kim (the superintendent of the district of St. Petersburg) and Irina Margulis (the priest of the UMC, who serves in St. Petersburg) – offered a hope that this relation, that was originated during the seminar, will grow into the communication and give an opportunity to exchange experiences and learn from each other and in this way to strengthen the collaboration among the churches.

**Grazina Bielousova**



*Seminar Leader, Jonathan Pak*

## String Man Comes to Lithuania

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19, 1)

On February 1–4 the United Methodist Church in Lithuania was visited by Dave Titus (USA), the Christian missionary, the lively teller of stories and the author of books for children. He has visited thousands of children in the entire world: North and South America, Scandinavian countries, Europe, Asia and Australia. In 2003–2007 he published some books about the national art of string figures in America, Alaska and Africa. Dave visited Lithuanian children in 2001, but most of youth still remember his unique capabilities to relay God's Word using a simple string, which

like revives in his hands and transforms into different animals and things. This year Dave visited children again in Kybartai, Taurage, Kaunas, Ukmerge and Birzai.

Such a simple teaching way which this man uses helps children, gathered together with a gay uproar, through a story and a game to hear, see and repeat wonderful stories about the God's created Earth and animals, love and the power of a prayer. Even the most fidgets, the little ones and elders, listened with interest and tried to repeat not only what Dave did, but also memorize and learn those valiant tricks. Seemingly a simple string in man's hands, fancifully changing it's forms among fingers, helped child-

ren to concentrate and become interested in something new and extraordinary usual... It was a really funny time, spent together. All who met with this man, will remember that meeting, his good and loving eyes, the patient and gentle teaching for a long time. Thank you, Dave, for a given joy, God's Word and unforgettable moments, spent together with children of LUMC. May God bless you!

**Andzelika Micutiene**, District Children's Coordinator



## A little Church, where people get help

One of the United Methodist churches in Lithuania is in Taurage. On November 1, 1923, the Methodist congregation of Taurage was registered there, and in 1925 the Methodist Church was built. During the Soviet time the Church, like many others during that period, was closed and during 70's an addition – the enlargement was built and a funeral home was equipped (all these buildings were privatized). When Lithuania regained its Independence, in 1996 the United Methodist Church in Taurage renewed its activity. Now it is a small believers' congregation, which has 49 members. The worship is in a small rented facility, and the congregation cherishes hopes, that in the future the a new Church building will be rebuilt in the purchased site, which is almost in the same place where the prewar Church building was.

The people of the congregation gather there to worship for thirteen years already, and on weekdays when doing different humanitarian programs and programs of Christian education they try to keep and strengthen their faith and to strengthen and grow the Church by their ministries and gifts ,they have received from God. Despite the fact that the congregation is one of the oldest in the LUMC by the mem-

bers' age, you will be always met by loving, honest and hospitable people. Though most of them are poor – they are rich by their spirits, arising from God, and doing good works, giving their love and caring for the people around them. They are people who have their own troubles and difficulties but they try to help the needy, to feed the hungry, to comfort and hear out the disappointed. Though we face difficulties because of the lack of premises in the Church (we have only 65 sq. m. of the usable space), the men's and women's groups function further, there is a program of humanitarian feeding for people who are on the lowest income and the disabled, we have a Bible study, the newspaper of a local church is published and there are also computer classes and lessons for children and youth.

It's good to be here, sharing the faith and looking for the way to God and for the real „me“ in the windings of life. But only a good heart, a comprehension, and a will wouldn't be enough for doing this. For that our Church can do these programs, for that the people's hope to have a church building in the future is alive and even for that we can lease the present premises, we are thankful to our partners of the UMC in Geneva, Illinois, USA, who in

every possible way help our congregation to exist, grow, strengthen and understand that we are important doing the work which God has committed to us (even if we do small things). The unity in Christ and faith joins us. These connections of part-

nership are very important and precious to us. We are thankful to our brothers and sisters from the UMC in Geneva for their being together, love, patience, care and nobleness and their gifts, and especially for the greatest gift – the partnership.

We are happy to share the news that on June 12–22 the UMC in Taurage, like last year, will be visited by a group of people from Geneva (USA). The aim of our partners' visit – to strengthen friendship and connections of partnership among congregations; to help educating the leaders of the LUMC; to gather people's, who live here, in Lithuania, stories and witnesses about the LUMC and its ministries and to help sharing these stories in the entire world. The coming group plans to make a documentary film, which will help people in America to hear and know more about the LUMC. They will arrive prepared to become “a part of the little Church, where people get help”, and they wish to hear our stories how the Good Jesus' News changes our lives. The group also plans to lead the teaching seminar for leaders and priests of the Church on June 20, which will be organized in Kaunas. The seminar will be led by Dr. Philip Jamieson, the professor of the seminary, and Rev. Matthew Johnson.

We invite you all to pray together with us, that God would bless the preparation of this group for the journey and their ministries, and for partner churches, the UMC in Lithuania, its growth and consolidation of faith and our unity in Christ, too.

**Andzelika Micutiene,  
the UMC in Taurage**

Advance # for Taurage  
Building Project: **14716N**

*“We are happy to share the news that on June 12–22 the UMC in Taurage, like last year, will be visited by a group of people from Geneva (USA). “*



## Vilnius Church Returns to Old Location With New Hope

The UMC in Vilnius is alive and growing ... thanks to a valuable decision to move back to our old location. While we offered a very successful after-school program for youth in Lazdynai ... our rent proved to be entirely too high and we had to pull up stakes and leave. But first Vyta did some fine repairs and gave the new-old church a fresh coat of paint. Now we are amazed at the number of new visitors we are getting! It just looks like God had a plan for us that we did not even expect. The good news is that one of our members volunteered to take over the week-day program for young people so there has not been any interruptions in this ministry. One day they cook, one day they do crafts and another day they sing. The new director, Jurga, is especially talented in music and she has had each of the children test their voices and rhythm ability. Next she began teaching them songs out of the Lithuanian hymnbook and they

sang for the Ukmerge congregation last week when we all gathered for Dave Titus' string program [see the article on Ukmerge]. The kids have already memorized the words to these songs and we all look forward to hear them singing for Sunday worship.

Some of you in America are familiar already with Franklin Graham's shoebox ministry at Christmas time called Operation Christmas Child. Well, now we are on the receiving end of these gifts but I was surprised that they came from Germany and not the US. Apparently this idea is catching on. Of course, a part of receiving these gifts one year is to then think up places where we can give to others next Christmas. So since these gifts were late getting to us this year, we are going to give them out at our Valentine's party. And what better time to tell about God's love ... not only God's love for us ... but also

how we are to show love to each other. I'm sure it will be a very happy time watching the kids open up their boxes and being reminded that there are many who care for them. That reminds me ... we want to send our love to all of you! And also, we want to express our deep appreciation for your prayers and for your support, which makes all of this possible.

**Bonnie Campbell, Pastor**

*Valentine's Party at Vilnius After School Program*



## Ukmerge Church finds solution to a Cold Night

What can warm our hearts [and toes] more, on a cold winter night, than being together in fellowship at church? That was why, on an icy, way-below-zero evening recently, we experienced an amazing act of Evangelism. A member of one of our other churches decided to help her family out a bit. It seems that her mother-in-law lived in our town and had heard about our church, but because she did not know anyone who attended, she was shy about coming. This was when the caring relative decided to pave the way for her. And that evening, she and her husband drove the slippery roads for 80 kilometers and picked up her mother-in-law, a neighbor, and her cousin. Then they all joined us for Bible study. And we are thrilled that ever since, these new folks have been coming faithfully. It was a

good example for all of us, of how a personal invitation is one of the best forms of Evangelism.

Then on another, freezing cold night, we were treated with a visit from Dave Titus ... also known as String Man. He comes from Oklahoma, but was in Germany before traveling to Lithuania ... and then he continued on to Latvia. But while in Lithuania he managed to spin his webs of string and tell many stories from the Bible. It was fascinating and the folks at Ukmerge were drawn to his wit and skill with a simple piece of string ... shaped in a circle. The first thing he did was to create a beating heart and he asked us if our hearts were beating for God. Then he made other figures that told the story of Creation: a bird, a fish, the setting sun, even a mosquito. Dave said, that with everything that God made ... "God

said that it was good," but maybe not so good with the mosquito. Then Dave made the mosquito disappear! Some of us were thinking, "If only it was that easy". But folks loved it. Next he taught us how to make a figure of the Holy Spirit ... which, he showed us, moves in and out among us. Then together we connected our strings so that the Holy Spirit grew larger and larger, just the way we imagined it. Next Dave made a string figure that demonstrated how we often try to deal with our problems ... he said sometimes we deny them, sometimes we eat chocolate, sometimes we blame others and also we try to hide them. But if we just give our problems to God, we can get lots of help, until the next day, when new problems come our way. But still, God is there to help us again, Dave said. A

whole van-load of kids and adults from the Church in Vilnius joined us that evening, and then we all got in the sauna. It was an awesome way to cheer up during a cold winter night. But the best part was just being together and sharing our faith.

**Bonnie Campbell, Pastor**

## The Streets of Faith

When I come to town which is called The Life, I get into the Avenue of Freedom. I hear talking about the Street of Faith there: people talk that God lives in it, who shares Hope and Love. I don't know where this Street is, but I decide to find it.

I go to the Square of Loneliness, but it isn't there.

When going by the Port of Sadness, I see the quay, where I am suggested to take a boat for the Country of Emptiness.

I refuse.

I find the Store of Pride.

I come in.

I expect to buy some Compassion, but I see the note hanging on the shelf: „We don't sell any Compassion“.

And a sale of Indifference is nearby.

The bright labels call: „Take for free!“

I leave.

I go by the Street of Pain and I see – the Bar of Obliteration.

I come in.

The barman smiling widely pours the cocktail of Oblivion.

I drink it.

It's a little more funny....

I ask him, if he knows where the Street of Faith is.

And he just smiles and asks:

– And what do you need it for? Is it bad in here..?

Look, you just drink, and the Pain disappears!

And he pours more.

But I leave, because I know that the Street of Faith exists.

I keep going.

I pass across the Bridge of Betrayal.

In the end of it there is the Gate of Unforgiveness.

I try to open it – it's heavy, but finally I succeeded.

I come into the Avenue of Disappointment.

I turn to the Circle of Anger, and I spot a reference towards the Crossing of Choice.

I come to it.

I find a lot of ways.

But one leads to the Street of Faith!

With my heart full of joy, I fly along it, because I know – God lives in it!

**Ausrinė**



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**"Open Hearts, Open Minds,  
Open Doors"**

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