

**Report of the Diaconal Study Tour to the Kaliningrad Region  
June 6 – 14, 2012**



Initiated by the international Kaiserswerth General Conference (KGK), the diaconal study tour to the Kaliningrad Region was held June 6 – 14, 2012. The trip was organized by Winfried Gayko, Board member of the Kaiserswerther Verband (Kaiserswerth Association of German Deaconess Motherhouses and Diaconal Organizations), and founding member of the Friendship Circle (Support Group) for evangelical churches in North East Prussia, and with the support of Deacon Uwe Markward and Pastor Thomas Passauer.

The 44 participants, 41 from Germany, along with 3 from Canada, joined in the trip with different expectations - but all were excited and full of anticipation of good encounters and getting to know the region, but especially the diaconal projects in Kaliningrad and the surrounding area. The diverse group quickly grew into a community. On the first day, it travelled from Berlin to Frombork (Frauenberg), Poland. Then the journey continued across the border for four days and nights, with Kaliningrad as the starting point for the day trips through the region. The organizers had put together a varied and well-coordinated program. We were happily and very warmly received every day by the local people - the leaders of the various projects reported on the current situation, background, future plans and engaged in conversation.

First of all up, after driving into Russia on Thursday, there was a visit on Thursday to the Deanery, whose work has been hampered with financial struggles during the past year, and which also has implications for other projects (Jablonka Street Children's Center, Carl Blum Seniors' Home, the Diakonia Center in Gusew (Gumbinnen), and the congregation in Tschernjachowsk (Insterburg). We then met with the deputy of nursing for the current regional hospital, the former Deaconess Hospital of Mercy in Koenigsberg (until 1945), who told the story of the hospital and then invited us in for a glimpse into the hospital today. The presentation was supplemented by Henriette Piper from the Koenigsberg Diakonie in Wetzlar, travelling along as

a participant. Shortly thereafter, the group gathered on the site of the Jablonka Street Children's Centre, where the director, Sergei Kivenko spoke about his work and the difficult financial situation of the center. "Sometimes I have the impression of standing on a mountain: with the wind coming from every direction and having to always find a new balance." More gratifying was the official announcement from Sr. Monica



Denk, KGK Presidium member, that the Deaconess Community of the ELCA would be supporting the project. The previously submitted grant application has been approved for up to three years. It was followed by the official signing of the grant agreement. The center offers sleeping space for ten children, as well as food, clothing and assistance for another ten to 15 children, some homeless and orphaned. The center has been operating for eleven years, however, the sleeping rooms and daytime assistance must all be reassessed due to the tight financial situation.

On Friday, a visit was organized to the Diakonia Center and Church in Gusew (Gumbinnen). The director, Alexander Michel, reported on his current work and the history of the protestant Christians whom had been expelled from Salzburg in Austria in 1730 and found a new home in Gumbinnen in East Prussia.



He also explained about the reconstruction of the church, which was used as a warehouse prior to the restoration. Since 1998, the Diakonia Center has been helping the congregation and others in need through a home care service, the distribution of donations such as a noon lunch at no charge for up to 50 school children. In addition, a summer camp for the disabled and mother-child camps, where renewal and recovery can occur, as well as providing intensive care. Like Jablonka , the Diakonia Center's work is funded mostly by donations.

In the former Friedrich Grammar School, now the College of Agriculture, in Gusew, with 900 students, the students gave the tour group an historical presentation along with a performance with song and dance.

Following a short stop in the centre of Gusew, the group continued on to the only Lutheran seniors home in Russia, Carl Blum House in Sadoroshje (Mallenuppen). The Seniors' Home

offers facilities for 24 residents, of which 10 are currently bed-ridden patients. For nearly six years, the home has been caring for residents from all areas of the region. Many of them have dementia and are retired, but there are also some residents who are young people with disabilities. The director, Pastor Tatiana Wagner and the team try to encourage the residents to participate in activities. They are currently trying to find a school in one of the neighboring communities for one of the young, disabled residents. For the last two years, under the leadership of Pastor Wagner, the staffing has been stable, perhaps because of the twice-weekly morning prayers held for the employees, followed by a discussion time, in which the topic of death and leave-taking holds a special place. However, there are problems and challenges that need to be mastered. There are always projects to be completed, such as the current renovation of the bathroom and also the roof. The project is more financially stable than Jablonka: 1/3 of the costs are covered by the state pensions of the residents, 1/3 through donations and contributions of the main sponsors such as the North Elbian Mission Center (now known as the Centre for Global Ministries and Ecumenical Relations for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany), and 1/3 from donations that are collected locally.

Saturday was a very special day in Turgenjewo (Groß Legitten), with a bilingual festive worship service in the rebuilt church. The worship service was led by four of the eight pastors of the Kaliningrad region. The recently reconstructed former monastery church, (built around the year 1400), with thick, cold walls, was well filled by the congregation and the tour group and delegations from other churches and representatives from diaconal organizations. The hymns from the Russian-German hymnbook were sung in both languages. The singing even attracted the German Consul General in Kaliningrad, Dr. Aristide Fenster, who happened to be passing the church on a private excursion.



Following the service, there was opportunity for conversation along with lunch and coffee. To conclude, there was a discussion of the expectations of the Russian project leaders concerning the possibilities for cooperation with the international General Conference, along with German diaconal agencies. Elena Evdokimova, from the Kaliningrad Deanery, Pastor Tatiana Wagner from Carl Blum Haus, Alexander Michel from the Diakonia Center in Gusew, along with Sergei Kivenko from Jablonka Street Children's Center were in agreement: The desire for support for the projects and congregational diakonia is great. All are aware that there is still a long way to go until things are stable. They want spiritual support, sharing of experience and support for the Russian "new beginning." They do not just want the financial support of collections and donations, but also the exchange of experience, for example, participation in training courses or internships in diaconal agencies. The leaders of each project were agreed that in spite of the problems in the Deanery, that they are committed to working together and being taken seriously.



As a sign of solidarity, and with the hope of the success in the future, Sr. Monica Denk presented a candle from the Kaiserswerther Verband and the Kaiserswerth General Conference.

On Sunday, along with a trip to see the city of Sovietsk (Tilsit) the group met with Pastors Semenyukov (a clergy couple) and additional representatives from the congregation in Chernyachovsk (Insterburg). The construction of the Martin Luther Congregational Centre, begun 6 years previously, has been interrupted for the past

3 years for financial reasons. At this time, the 80 congregational members meet in a 3 room home. Right now, in addition to the worship services, there is a children's program, support for outpatient care, a choir, and a women's group. The situation with the facilities, however, also hampers the development of the congregational work. Nonetheless, the congregation is growing and receives support from three German partner congregations.

Continuing on to Lithuania, on the Curonian Spit, helped the participants to consider the experience from a distance, both physical and experiential. The landscape and the wealth of Lithuania on the peninsula does not compare to the Russian situation. The border crossing from Russia to Lithuania is a noticeable step into an EU country with the usual Western standards. For two days, the group was able to experience Nida (Nidden), Kalipeda (Memel) and the wood carvings of Witches Hill in Juodkrante (Schwarzort).

In the late afternoon of June 14, the tour bus returned to the starting point of the trip, Paul Gerhardt Stift in Berlin. After travelling a good 3000 kilometers, and returning with great experiences and memories (along with uncountable pictures of storks), the participants went their separate ways to return to their homes.



(For questions about individual projects and opportunities for donations, contact Winfried Gayko, Paul Gerhardt Stift in Berlin: [winfried.gayko@paulgerhardtstift.de](mailto:winfried.gayko@paulgerhardtstift.de) or in English: Sr. Monica Denk: [monica.denk@gmail.com](mailto:monica.denk@gmail.com))

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