

## Team Russia Annual Report to Synod Gatherings 2023

Documents from Chicago were taken to Moscow in 1999 and the Synod Companion Agreement was signed by Siegfried Springer, bishop of ELCER, the ELC of European Russia. The mission was defined as follows:

*To create a spiritual bond and special friendship between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Northwest Washington Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia. To provide mutual support through prayer and other assistance which will promote the Kingdom of God. To obtain greater knowledge and appreciation for the traditions and mission of each church body. To that end we will work to forge bonds on three levels:*

*Synod to Synod (Companion Synod)*

*Congregation to Congregation (Sister Parish Relationships)*

*Person to Person (friendships)*

1999, the previous century! Next year we will have been partnered for a quarter of a century. This prompted me to reflect on those years and I strongly encourage you to go to the synod website (<https://www.lutheransnw.org/ministries/team-russia>) and read how those bonds (1998-2018) were forged. It seems amazing. And then the pandemic hit. Travel was out of the question. And worse, the war against Ukraine. Our major contacts, Archbishop Dietrich Brauer, Dean Lena Bondarenko and Pastor Bradn Buerkle, and their families, fled from Russia to Latvia (Lena) and Germany. Considering Russia's political actions, which they called a crime against humanity, there is no way they could return to Russia. Despite limited numbers of church leaders, the new Archbishop of Russia and the Bishop of ELCER were elected fall 2022. Just a few months later the new bishop had a stroke and tragedy upon tragedy-died in February, at age 55.

Andrei Holzwert, a very busy church leader in Kaliningrad, has just been inducted as new ELCER Bishop. With the help of Pastor Schwarzkopf in St. Petersburg, we are trying to establish contact, so that Bishop Shelley and Team Russia can discuss with ELCER who our contacts in Moscow will be (language issues!) and what the future of our companionship will look like.

One shining light continues to be the KIT project in Togliatti. Again, please go to the synod website. We hear from Pastor Tatiana at regular intervals. They are still waiting for the property the city donated to be cleared, after that they hope to begin construction of their amazing KIT facility.

Prayers are needed, fervently and regularly. On our website it says: **The 2022 Synod Trip to Russia has been postponed indefinitely.** The war must definitely end! We must return to Russia, they must come to the U.S. We must become acquainted with our new brothers and sisters and forge new bonds.

*Respectfully Submitted by  
Eva Mader, Secretary/Treasurer, Team Russia*