

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAVELERS TO FAR-EAST RUSSIA

1. Contact the Reverend Dean Manfred Brockmann to let him know of your interest in traveling to Far-East Russia. If possible, have him put you in touch with Konstantin Pavlenko. Konstantin is the president of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Vladivostok. He also sets up tours. You will travel as tourists. This eliminates possible problems. *He is excellent in helping with the paper work and making sure your visit will be good!*
2. Write down your purpose for going. For instance, Our groups' goals were these:
  - ◆ To bridge our cultures through our unity in Christ,
  - ◆ To build up the body of Christ,
  - ◆ To put faces on our mission partners,
  - ◆ To learn about their culture, people, and circumstances, and
  - ◆ Possibly to help them with a service project.
3. Begin planning your trip early, in terms of finances and in terms of passports and visas. Do not depend on your Russian partner church to house or feed you. Korean Air is an excellent airline! Vladivostok is 16 hours ahead of us in time.
4. Do your currency exchange in a Russian bank.
5. No immunizations are required, but it is suggested that you have a tetanus shot and the three-shot regimen for Hepatitis A and B.
6. Make sure there will be a good interpreter/guide to be with you while you are in Russia.
7. Check to make sure how much luggage you can take with you on your airlines. Pack light. Know the regulations for how to carry liquids.
8. Here are some ideas of what to take with you.
  - Pictures of your church, people, congregational leaders, community, country.
  - Maps to show and give away.
  - Gifts for the people, the children, and the church (check with your partner congregation to see what is needed).
  - Money to pay for transportation and interpreter.
  - Extra money to pay for Russian interpreter/guide and others who may be eating out with you.
  - A handheld electronic language translator is very helpful.
  - Umbrellas or rain ponchos
  - Good walking shoes (You will walk a lot!).
  - Bag to carry your necessities for the day.
  - Little Kleenex packs (can use for toilet paper—good toilet facilities are scarce).
  - Ciprofloxacin (antibiotic—doctor's prescription—to take if there is any sign of intestinal problems)
  - Acidophilus (over the counter—take twice a day to help with digestion)
  - A list of your prescriptions, medications, blood type, doctors (and phone numbers), medical insurance information (check with insurance to see if they cover any medical expenses you may have in Russia).
  - A list of your family members, addresses, and phone numbers (in case of emergency or to mail them postcards from Russia, but realize that you will get home before the cards get there).
  - Women, take sensible dress clothes, including dresses and slacks—no jeans. Always look nice; the Russian women always are dressed nicely.
  - Men, take docker-style slacks—no jeans. Take a tie for church events—look nice. Clergy, wear clergy shirts, particularly for church events. Some public places do not appreciate them, so be prepared to take out the tab.
9. You will meet Christian sisters and brothers face-to-face, who are joyful about their faith. Be willing to listen and learn, to share and to grow. Be prepared to try new foods and experience a different culture. Be prepared to share God's love with them in words.

**RUSSIA TRIP**  
**Finances for September 2009 Trip**

<b>4 round-trip flights @ 1790.10</b>	<b>\$7,160.40</b>
<b>Travel insurance</b>	<b>431.00</b>
<b>Visa applications &amp; postage</b>	<b>981.20</b>
<b>Visa Support Letter @ 30.00</b>	<b>120.00</b>
<b>Seoul Hotel (2 nights, 2 rooms/night)</b>	<b>666.34</b>
<b>Seoul Hotel food</b>	<b>53.90</b>
<b>Vladivostok Hotel (4 nights, 3 rooms/night—34,800 rub)</b>	<b>1,078.80</b>
<b>Arseniev Hotel (6 nights/3 rooms/night—19,200 rub)</b>	<b>595.20</b>
<b>Translator (7,000 rubles)</b>	<b>217.00</b>
<b>Microbus (11,250 rubles)</b>	<b>348.75</b>
<b><u>Expenses in Russia—food, etc.</u></b>	<b><u>485.25</u></b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,137.84</b>

We spent \$80 on a gift we sent before going. We spent \$260 on gifts we took with us to give to them (some of our old altar paraments, simple crosses on cords, pencils, nicer crosses for Pastor Manfred Brockmann and Pastor Alexander Lapochenko, etc. We took \$3000 with us plus additional money for personal use. We used the cash to pay the Visa Support Letter (to Konstantin Pavlenko), the Russia hotels, the translator, the microbus and other transportation costs, food costs, and miscellaneous expenses. We found that we had some money left to give an offering in church at Arseniev. We returned with \$170, which we spent on sending subsequent gifts we found that the pastor and church needed.

## **REPORT ON OUR TRIP TO FAR-EAST RUSSIA**

In planning our trip to Far-East Russia, we decided on these goals:

- ◆ To bridge our cultures through our unity in Christ,
- ◆ To build up the body of Christ,
- ◆ To put faces on our mission partners,
- ◆ To learn about their culture, people, and circumstances, and
- ◆ Possibly to help them with a service project.

We met our goals, and then some, although we did not help our partner congregation with a service project. We, did, however, get an awareness for what the congregation needs. What stands out in our trip experience is the people. Many people we met were friendly, especially the church people. The people in our partner congregation, St. Luke's in Arseniev, were so happy to meet us! They welcomed us with open arms, colorful traditional dress, and joyful music! This part of our experience made the trip worthwhile.

On September 2 we flew from Wichita to Chicago, then from Chicago to Seoul, Republic of Korea, arriving on Thursday. We spent a night in the Best Western, near the airport and flew to Vladivostok on Friday. On Saturday we toured a public school, ate lunch with Konstantin Pavlenko and his wife Anna at their flat, got a tour of the Roman Catholic Church and of St. Paul's Lutheran Church by Pastor Manfred Brockmann. On Sunday we joined St. Paul's for worship, with Pastor Jim reading the Epistle and Gospel in English, giving greetings to the people of St. Paul's, and helping with the distribution of communion. That evening Manfred and his wife Tatianna invited us over to eat with them in their flat.

On Monday, September 7, we were transported to Arseniev in a rented microbus (minivan). On the way we stopped to see Nina Dimitrieva, a lay preacher who helps Manfred, and her guest Margaret Pfister from Switzerland. Margaret comes periodically to teach religion classes. We also stopped in Ussurisk to see St. Mary's Lutheran Church and meet with congregational president Alexsei Kramar. Pastor Alexander Lapochenko met us with a friend of the congregation, Alex, who was to be our translator and guide while in Arseniev. After eating in a Chinese restaurant, we walked to St. Luke's Lutheran Church. As we walked in the door, the people of St. Luke's, dressed in colorful, traditional clothing began to sing with great joy! What a welcome! We were overwhelmed! We met many people, including congregational president Evgeny Slinchenko.

On Tuesday we toured a couple Russian orthodox churches, a Roman Catholic church, the nice Arseniev museum, and the country around Arseniev (and another Russian Orthodox church in Anucheevo). In the evening we took part in a beginning English class led by Alex our interpreter at St. Luke's. On Wednesday we went to the outlying village of Novosihsoevka for Pastor Alexander's meeting with fellow clergy. We met at an Evangelical Free Church with Pastor Ruslan (did not catch last name) and another Evangelical pastor, Alexander Bandurov. Another pastor, Dimitri, was not there, because he had recently gotten married. We later toured some shops, took another drive out into the country, and toured some more shops. On Thursday we ventured out on our own to a school shop and the post office. We toured the Arseniev cemetery and went to St. Luke's to take pictures and learn more of the plans for St. Luke's remodeling. Then we visited the Arseniev Circus School and Cultural Center and took another ride in the country, including a little village called Veenogradovka. We ate that evening at the Lapochenko flat, with Pastor Alexander and his parents, Anya and Vladimir. Here is when we first learned that the driver of our rented microbus in Arseniev was Pastor Alexander's father! On Friday we toured a school, sat in on the Arseniev Russian Choir rehearsal (all over 60 years old, including some who are members of St. Luke's), and toured another school. On Saturday we visited the one shop we could find that had Russian-made items. We walked to St. Luke's three times that

day: the first time to speak with president Evgeny and hear his view of his congregation's needs, the second time to take part in a more advanced English class taught by Alex, and the third time to hear a wonderful vocal concert by Tamara, the oldest member of St. Luke's at 80. Although she sings with the Russian Choir, this is the first concert she had ever done. She was marvelous! On Sunday, September 13, we worshipped with St. Luke's. Edd read the Epistle in English. Pastor Jim read the Gospel in English, preached, and helped with the distribution of communion. Alex translated the sermon one phrase or sentence at a time. During the offering we exchanged gifts. They held a nice reception for us after worship. Then we packed up and were transported back to the Vladivostok hotel. On Monday we flew to Seoul and spent the night. On Tuesday we left Seoul at noon and arrive in Chicago at 10:30 a.m.! We flew to Wichita and drove home.

The highlight of our trip was the people, so welcoming and joyful, even though their living conditions seem so poor to us. It is difficult for us to understand how they can use cell phones, computers, and other electrical items, and yet be content with Asian outhouses and no running water. The country is beautiful, but there are no farms, as we know them. Fields that should have crops and cattle do not. We think this is because there is no capital to invest and no way to market what would be raised. Everyone seems to have their own little gardens, selling the vegetables and flowers by the side of the road or in the little shops in town.

We were pleased with the congregations. They are small house churches (even St. Paul's in Vladivostok, although it is the only Lutheran church we saw with a traditional church building). There is a sense of enthusiasm for the Christ and his church that we sometimes lack. Their remodeling and plans for remodeling are commendable. But they are totally dependent upon donations from German and American churches to fund their ministry and their remodeling. Because of this, we were quite upset when we found that the donations from our Central States Synod have been delayed up to five months at a time. This seems to us to be totally unnecessary. Sending money through the synod to the ELCA and from there to the German bank that handles the funds for the Far-East Russian churches is a waste of time and resources. Why cannot our synod deposit money directly into the German bank on a timelier schedule (like monthly) instead of going through Global Missions? It is easy enough to send to Global Mission reports of what we have sent for the Far-East Russian churches. This might also encourage our congregations to make more regular donations for our companion Synod congregations. ***Please consider this as our formal request of you as you meet as the Companion Synod Team of Central States Synod. Please let us know what you decide to do about this request.***

Thank you for providing us funds to help finance our trip to Far-East Russia! It was a marvelous experience we will not soon forget. We will encourage our congregation to raise funds and plan to help bring some of the St. Luke's people here to Great Bend in three years. We are available to make presentations of our trip to congregations in our synod, although more practically in Kansas. Unfortunately we cannot be present with you when you meet in November. Enclosed you will find some suggestions for groups planning to visit Far-East Russia, as well as a general financial report of our trip. Again, thank you for your financial assistance.

Peace in Christ,

Edd Jackson, Deanna Swank, Miriam and Pastor Jim Strasen  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Great Bend, Kansas