

## The Gospel Knows No Borders



*Figure 1 The total group that met in Serbia representing the CSS and 2 other synods from the ELCA plus 3 Russian synods plus facilitators from the Churchwide office and the Archbishop of the Lutheran Churches in Russia.*

The comment, “The Gospel knows no borders” underscores what it means to be the body of Christ in the world. Though territorial boundaries, political divisions, and differences of language, culture, and ethnicity may separate us, our Christian faith proclaims that we are part of something much larger, the body of Christ united in God’s mission for the world.

The opportunity to travel to Serbia in September as a representative of the Central States Synod (CSS) deepened my understanding of what it means to be the church together for the sake of the world. The consultation, facilitated by representatives from the ELCA’s Companion Engagement Team and European Desk, brought together bishops, pastors, and lay leaders from three ELCA synods (Central States, NE Minnesota, and NW Washington) to engage

in conversations with our respective companion synod partners from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia (ELCER), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia, and Far East (ELCUSFE), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (ELCIR).

During our time in Serbia, we prayed together, participated in working sessions, and shared table fellowship. Our deliberations were guided by prayer, listening for understanding, mutual respect, and honest conversation. Together, we reviewed the history of our companion relationships, shared the joys and challenges of our current ministry contexts, and agreed upon shared goals and commitments moving forward. The representatives from the CSS and the ELCUSFE (including Archbishop Vladimir Provorov), recognizing the importance of nurturing our existing relationship, pledged to communicate and share the good news of our ministry partnerships through newsletters and video greetings to promote our ministry partnerships and shared commitments. The companion synod partners also acknowledged the need to schedule planned Zoom meetings in advance, involve youth from our respective countries, and facilitate the connection between Youth and Family ministers.

The Lutheran Church in Russia, comprised of some 40,000 congregants spread out among a vast territory extending from Kaliningrad in the west to Vladivostok in the east, “has no power or influence,” notes Archbishop Provorov. Yet, it persists in the face of sanctions, political challenges, and legal restrictions crafted to thwart evangelism. The church persists, notes the archbishop, because “the biblical witness gives us the strength to continue in the face of difficult circumstances.”

On Sunday, October 6th, we celebrate our companion synod relationship with the ELCUSFE. May we also thank God for an enduring relationship that transcends borders, political divisions, and distance. Though the challenges before us are daunting, we move forward together in faith, trusting that God is leading us, guiding us, and empowering us – all of us – for mission and ministry.

*By Rev Jon Brudvig, pastor of Salem Lutheran Church, Lenexa, KS.*