

### The path to Novosibirsk ...

... is not a short one. Not, really, from anywhere. It is almost directly opposite on the globe from the United States. The city is known as the capital of Siberia; with about 1.5 million inhabitants, it is Russia's 3rd largest city. The Lutheran church in the city is still quite small and modest, but there are many signs that point to potential for growth – a highly educated population, our congregation's unique, grace-centered approach to faith, and its positive, ecumenical relations with other churches.

The congregation in Novosibirsk celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2010, but it's history is not without tragedy. Like many other Christians, Lutherans were persecuted by the Soviet government. Our denomination's structures were dismantled and all congregations were officially disbanded. To gather together secretly as a community of faith was an enormous risk, but in Novosibirsk many Lutherans (most of whom had been exiled to Siberia in the 1930s), began to meet. After gathering strength they approached the government with the request to be officially registered. It must of have been to their own great surprise that the authorities granted this request. This congregation had hundreds of members by the time true religious freedom began to return to the country in the early 1990s. At that time, however, the congregation's membership was constantly changing as many ethnic Germans arrived from newly-independent republics in Central Asia while many others were leaving for Germany. While these waves have now reduced to a trickle, our congregation in Novosibirsk today is left with only a few dozen ethnic Germans, most of whom are elderly.

This congregation, with its tradition of maintaining the faith in good times and in bad, is about to undergo significant change once again as it welcomes a new pastor. Together they will consider the ways the community might develop and thrive in order to live out the Gospel in word and in deed, acting as witnesses to Christ in Siberia.



**The Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony** is a non-profit foundation based in the northern German village of Hermannsburg. It is supported by three regional churches in Lower Saxony and private donors as well as congregations. Annually it needs 1.5 mil. Euro (about 2 mil. U.S. dollars) in donations to fund projects.

**If you are able to support our work – and especially the encouragement of congregations in and around the Siberian city of Novosibirsk – please send your donation to:**

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Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony, Germany **(ELM)**  
Georg-Haccius-Str. 9 • 29320 Hermannsburg  
Phone: +49 (50 52) 69-240  
E-Mail: [s.liebner@elm-mission.net](mailto:s.liebner@elm-mission.net)  
Web: [www.elm-mission.net](http://www.elm-mission.net)

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## New Ways of Trust

**Novosibirsk, Russia:**  
Encouraging and supporting congregational change on the way to the future



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## Svetlana's Question Hour

It all started with a phone call that Pastors Stephanie & Michael Fendler received soon after their arrival in the capital of Siberia, Novosibirsk. Having served through the Evangelical Mission of Lower Saxony since 2000, they were fluent in Russian. Yet, the congregation gathered in Novosibirsk still held on to its German tradition.

Yet, Svetlana's questions started to change all that. She was longing for a congregation that she could call her spiritual home, and she had clearly done her research. She invited the Fendlers over to her place for conversation.

Pastor Stephanie tells what happened after they arrived. "As the apartment door opened, we saw a young woman in a wheelchair. She led us in for a time of intense questions concerning 'what we think as Lutherans.' During a later visit we learned that Svetlana had been paralyzed from the waist down since childhood." In Russia it is very difficult for a person in a wheelchair to move around freely. In winter Svetlana has to worry about snow and ice, so she does not go outside; in the summer she is able to travel only as far as she is willing to push herself. Her only



means of livelihood are a small government pension and the income which comes through letting out one of her apartment's bedrooms.

Svetlana was ready to be involved in the congregation and so, a Bible study for young adults was gradually developed from these "question hours with Svetlana." There, in her living room, she felt comfortable, but the congregation's worship services felt foreign to her – she speaks no German and the the style of music (very slowly sung a cappella hymns) is quite uninviting for a young person. And she gave us the impetus to begin a Russian-language service."

Now on Sunday afternoons a group of younger people gathers together for worship in Russian. They have a deep respect for those German-speakers who maintained their faith throughout the years of Soviet repression. The German group still meets on Sunday mornings, but now the two groups are getting together more frequently and will eventually form one small (though stronger) congregation, a congregation that knows its history and its roots, but is willing to move forward to be a community where all can hear the Gospel of Christ clearly proclaimed.

## Pastor Bradn Buerkle continues on the way of his German predecessors

Pastors Michael & Stephanie Fendler accompanied the congregation in Novosibirsk as it set out on the path to a more open and inviting approach to faith. They helped bring understanding to those who held on tightly to old traditions ("church should be in German;" "women need to be in skirts and headscarfs") while at the same time working to preserve the best aspects of those traditions – commitment to the church, to prayer and to Bible reading.



The Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony will be sending, as of September 2011, Pastor Bradn Buerkle to take care of the congregations in Novosibirsk and surrounding communities. Bradn is an American and hails from Montana. From 2003 to 2011 he served as lecturer at the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church near St. Petersburg. Pastor Buerkle's emphases in the coming years will be on working to attract new members, to develop the congregation's sense of stewardship and service and, thus, to help make the congregation vital and capable of supporting its own, local pastor in the future. In addition Bradn will be providing advice and support to newly-ordained local pastors serving in congregations in the region.

