

## NOVOSIBIRSK SEMINARY: TRAINING PASTORS TO PASTOR GOD'S PEOPLE



For the most part, the foundation has been the sole source of funding for the Novosibirsk Seminary. Although, the LCMS experienced a serious shortfall in its fund-raising for theological education (i.e. Global Seminary Initiative) in 2017, this cannot continue indefinitely. The foundation has requested that the primary stakeholders (CTS and LCMS Church Relations) explore alternate avenues of support. It has become clear to all those involved that the financial strategy must include raising funds to cover the cost of the annual operations of the Novosibirsk Seminary and building an endowment for future operations.

At the request of the LCMS Church Relations, the SLMS was asked to assist with fundraising and to develop a strategy leading to the point where the seminary no longer requires financial support from the foundation.

If you feel moved to be a part of this important work or have any questions, feel free to contact any of the SLMS Siberian Seminary Fundraising Committee members:

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# Answered Prayer

Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Russia



THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



# A Brief History of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia



## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Thank you for asking about the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia. This brochure is intended to answer several questions:

- How the Novosibirsk Seminary was established through the joint efforts of Concordia Theological Seminary and a large, American, charitable foundation, following the fall of the Soviet Union.
- How the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society came to be involved in supporting this endeavor;
- How you can help in the five-year strategy to save the seminary from being closed.

In April 1996, Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, the newly elected president of Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) and Concordia's academic dean, Dr. William Weinrich, were asked if the Fort Wayne, Indiana, seminary would be interested in accepting a significant donation from a large, American, charitable foundation to develop what would come to be called the "Russian Project."

The original project charter included three goals:

1. Preparation of men for the pastoral ministry on the Fort Wayne campus to replace the hundreds of pastors killed by the Soviet communists.
2. Assist Lutherans in Siberia in establishing a seminary in Russia for the training of pastors and lay leaders.
3. Work with the Russians in the former Soviet Union in organizing evangelism/catechetical summer seminars.

Since then, nearly 40 people have studied in Fort Wayne, including six women who now serve as translators, church musicians, and deaconesses. These students came from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, and Latvia. Over the past 20 years, hundreds of laity have attended the annual evangelism and catechetical summer seminars held in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia.

## THE BISHOP'S LETTER

On September 19, 1996, President Wenthe received a letter from Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin, written on behalf of the West Siberian Christian Mission. He wrote:

"For many years, we think and dream about the foundation of a Confessional Training Center (Seminary) in Siberia. After years of official atheism, the people are mostly unbelieving ... . As Lutherans, we know that only Confessional Lutheran teaching can give people the pure understanding of the Christian faith, so that they could find real comfort in the true Gospel.



## REFLECTIONS

### REV. ALEXEY STRELTSOV, NOVOSIBIRSK SEMINARY RECTOR

In August 2000, Rector Alexey Streltsov articulated the foundational principles and goals of the Novosibirsk Seminary in an open letter that appeared online in Russian and English. Today, his thought-provoking observations remain as true and insightful as they were 19 years ago.



Streltsov quoted 2 Timothy 2:2, *"...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

He then explained,

"We in Novosibirsk are convinced that in our day serious seminary training comes closest to the meaning of Paul's words in this passage. It is neither lay discipleship training or short-term leadership preparation, but a serious effort that makes demands upon both teacher and student. After all, the Apostles themselves spent no fewer than three years in the 'seminary' of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"After 70 years of devastating atheism and 10 years of infiltration of all kinds of sects and cults into Russia, people will not be satisfied with the shallow talker who is no different from the pop psychologist. People long for deep theology and for the real sacraments. By 'deep theology' I do not mean scholastic construction, but a truly Trinitarian and incarnational hermeneutic that alone is able to offer hope to people amidst this world of despair and chaos.

"It is no secret that, humanly speaking, the state of modern Lutheranism, as well as that of virtually all other Christian confessions, is lamentable. Many people no longer recognize Holy Scripture as the authentic Word of God. Various churches practice the ordination of women into ecclesiastical ministry. There are even homosexual pastors and bishops in certain places. And so-called conservatives among Lutherans, in their attempt to protect the Bible, all too often unite with the conservative Protestant camp, thus making their worship and practically the whole of their theology barely distinguishable from that of the Methodists or Baptists.

"The Lutheran Church in Russia will have something to offer to the Western world in the future, regardless of what exigencies it may experience itself."

apartments, etc., are excellent. It has the best theological library in Russia when it comes to supporting Lutheran curriculum and research.

The sole drawback threatening the stability and survival of the seminary is the capacity of being fiscally self-sufficient. The SELC continues to grow, but it will take many years before it can support the Novosibirsk Seminary on its own.

The "Russian Project" began as a "dream" of the American foundation. By the grace of God, the project became a reality through the generous ongoing financial support of the foundation over the past two decades, and the dedication, sacrifice, and theological strength of the president and

faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and the indispensable support of Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod president, Alvin Barry.

## Moving to a Financially Solid Future

With the election of President Harrison in 2010, the long overdue fellowship status with the SELC was quickly and rightly approved. The seminary is now a strong independent institution, fully capable of self-governance. It is no longer necessary for Concordia Theological Seminary to send professors or oversee the administration of the Novosibirsk Seminary. And, under the Harrison administration, fiscal responsibility was transferred to the LCMS Office of Church Relations.



in the center of Novosibirsk's Akademgorodok (Academic City). The former bank building was remodeled and now houses the seminary and the SELC Consistory; as well as St. Andrews, the church where Bishop Lytkin serves.

Over the past 20 years, nine Lutheran seminaries have been established in Russia, Central Asia, Ukraine, and the Baltics. Five have now closed, and the remaining four are struggling to survive. Of these four, Novosibirsk has—without question—the strongest faculty and commitment to confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice. Its academic qualifications are stellar. More importantly, the seminary understands that its purpose is to serve the Church, to prepare the best pastors possible to faithfully preach, teach, conduct the liturgy, and give pastoral care to the faithful and reach out to the lost throughout this vast land. It is painful to imagine what will happen to Lutheranism in Russia if the seminary closes.

**The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society Founded to Support Russian Pastors**

When the first pastors graduated from the Fort Wayne and Novosibirsk seminaries, the SELC consisted of two, newly established mission congregations. Seminary graduates were sent into the mission field to plant new churches.

The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (SLMS) was organized in 2002 to raise funds to support these pastors and their mission stations. Today, the SELC has 23 pastors and 25 congregations, as well as preaching stations in cities and towns from Moscow to Khabarovsk on the Pacific Ocean, serving about 3,000 baptized members.

The 2009-2010 academic year was a major milestone. The Novosibirsk Seminary achieved self-sufficiency—with the exception of financial



support. In November 2009, the seminary received the long-awaited *License for Education* from the Russian Ministry of Education. It was also the first year that all the classes were taught by the local faculty. The indigenous, LCMS-trained, faculty have earned graduate degrees in theology and will soon have two faculty members with doctorates. The facilities: classrooms, offices, technology, student



“Also, our Christians need to know how to resist the liberal theological influence that is growing in Russia at the present time. According to our experience of studying on the Fort Wayne campus in the summer of 1995, and after our experience this past summer of having professors in Novosibirsk, I can say that only the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can help us in Siberia to fulfill our dream, and only your seminary can help Russian Lutherans to establish a training center in Siberia ... . So, we ask you to assist us in setting up this training center in Siberia.

“We don’t know how long this religious freedom will last in our country. So, we need to start the education project here as soon as possible.”

**ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT FROM THE MISSOURI SYNOD**

In September, Wenthe and Weinrich met with Synodical President, Alvin Barry, and received his enthusiastic encouragement and approval to press forward with the project.

The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) appointed Alexey Streltsov, a CTS graduate, to work with the Fort Wayne seminary to establish a new seminary in Novosibirsk. This involved recruiting students, locating facilities to house them and their families, designing curriculum, building a library, identifying and scheduling short-term visiting professors from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and a multitude of other tasks. A house was purchased in Novosibirsk, remodeled, and dedicated in July 1997. Classes began in October with short-term visiting professors from the Synod.

In 1998, Rev. Alan Ludwig was deployed to serve as a full-time professor. Two years later, the growing seminary was given the unexpected opportunity to move to a more adequate building

**AT THE REQUEST OF SYNOD LEADERS**

At the request of President Matthew Harrison and the LCMS Church Relations Office, the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society has been asked to build an endowment capable of making the Novosibirsk Seminary financially self-sufficient.

The goal is to raise \$7 million over the next five years (2019-2023). Please consider supporting this mission endeavor with a one-time gift, five-year pledge, or in your estate planning.

A large, American, charitable foundation will continue to support the operational budget of the seminary while the mission society raises money for permanent, on-going support. Please help with your gift to the *Save the Seminary Campaign*.