

Partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia (ELCER)

Our synod's partnership with ELCER began at the turn of this century. At a point over the first twenty years of this relationship sixteen congregations were partnered with congregations in Russia and these NWWA congregations raised \$350,000 for their partners, with the whole synod raising \$40,362 for the Team Russia fund. During this period eleven synod trips were made to Russia and eleven trips from ELCER to us.

Plans for a 2022 Synod trip to Russia, to be led by Bishop Bryan Wee, were in the works. Team Russia fund was to provide air fare for a student and visa costs were to be covered for everyone. Thinking that this trip would be a wonderful reconnection after the coronavirus pandemic restrictions, the great blow of the Russia/Ukraine war put an end to that plan.

The war also put an end to ELCER leadership. Having voiced opposition to Putin's inhumane aggression, our close contacts in Russia fled to Germany, among them Archbishop Brauer, who was also Bishop of ELCER. New elections were held for both positions. Tragically, just a few months later, the newly elected bishop died. After yet another election, Bishop Sergey Holzwert became our new partner.

Another blow last year was the death of Team Russia chair Ken Grigsby from Oak Harbor Lutheran Church, who was deeply devoted to our Russian brethren and Oak Harbor's partner congregation in Kazan. Fortunately, Mary Muller from Bethlehem L.C. in Marysville, who has Russian experience, was able and willing to step in.

Bishop Holzwert has expressed genuine interest in the future of our partnership. An ELCA Russia Companion Synod Leader Gathering will take place in Serbia Sept.6-12,2024. Bishop Bryan Wee and Mary Muller will attend and discuss possible future plans with Bishop Holzwert and another ELCER representative.

Amid all the difficulties of these last years, we have been able to remain active partners with KIT, a project started by Pastor Tatiana in Togliatti to provide aid to youth and children with mental and physical disabilities. We decided to help support KIT in 2017, financed architectural plans for an eventual project and provided funds for a van. The city of Togliatti is so impressed with KIT's work that it provided property for new construction. Unable to finance the whole project at this stage, KIT plans to begin with one building. Team Russia just wired \$28,000 from its KIT Fund to finance half of that project.

To learn all about KIT and more about our partnership , do go to the Northwest Washington Synod website: <https://www.lutheransnw.org/ministries/team-russia>. The videos will bring it all to life.

Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in Russia, that they may be cautious and stay safe.

Eva Mader, Team Russia Secretary/Treasurer