

Newsletter from Alex—October, 2009

Youth and children ministry in Karelia in summer

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life
Revelation 2:10

Dear Friends

I can say that this summer began with very pleasant and joyful moment for me and I think for all my friends. The thing is that I have an older brother who led and still continues to lead not a very honorable life. His name is Sergey. It happened so that by the beginning of the summer many bad things had happened to him. And those things made him think of how he lived and lives and for what purpose. Such thoughts led him to the decision to be baptized. Honestly speaking, I think for him as for many other people the baptism symbolizes some protection, it is like some guard in your life that drives the bad luck away. Sergey asked me to meet him and to talk about his desire to be baptized. Of course I was glad that he had actually made such a strong decision but at the same time I realized that the baptism for him is just a means to get rid of bad luck. Then I demanded from him a little bit more that it is supposed to be asked from a person who is going to be baptized. I asked him to study The Small Catechism and read the New Testament. But the most amazing thing was that he had done it and he conducted me all this material as a diligent student who has learned his lesson very well. All our meetings with him actually led to his baptism in Olonec at the beginning of June. For me it was the revelation from God and a big miracle. God has showed me one more lesson that even if we don't ever think that this person can be changed somehow by God, God can save him. After the baptism Sergey's life began to transform. But unfortunately by this moment he has come back to the same way of life he had led before. That is why I ask you for your prayer about my brother. After such a miracle it was hard not to do anything because that situation has become a real testimony for me about God's Almighty and His love.

At the very beginning of July there was the 5th session of exams for the future youth workers in Koltushi. I teach there. The thing is that the educational process is also included in the duties of the member of Children and Youth Committee. Because of that we organize different courses in the building of the Theologian Institute of the Ingrian Church. This course of the youth workers is supposed to last for 2 years and it includes 7 sessions of the exams. Each session lasts during 10 days. When a person finishes such courses he is blessed and sent to minister in some particular congregation. When a session is over the time for youth and children camps comes. Every summer has something special in itself and this summer was not an exception. (The Children and Youth Committee has been organizing camps for kids and youth for several years already on the territory of the Karelia and in different congregations there). There is joy in your heart when you see how the Holy Spirit touches the hearts of children and transforms their hearts. Until you see those changes you cannot believe it. In July this summer there were 2 camps in Kemi and Segezha. When you come to such congregations you never know how many people will be there, how old they will be. You just come and see what surprise you will

get to see this year. When we came to Kemi we faced one small problem. The thing is that on the 10th-11th of July there is usually an official celebration of the day of that countryside that is near Kemi. Usually some performances take place there. And the citizens of that countryside said that there was little possibility that the kids would come to the camp because they were likely to go to that holiday. But we were just waiting and preparing for the day the camp should begin. On the next day to our surprise many kids came. They were the kids who had already been in that camp in the previous year and new-comers also.

Every time when organizing the camp you are amazed how God can work in the hearts of children. In the first days the children look like small grey wolf cubs but when the last day of the camp comes they don't want to let you go. Why so? There is often no father or mother in many families of the kids. In some families both of parents are alcohol-addicts and so on. The kids don't see love and the street is the place that brings them up. When they come to a camp at first they are shy of each other, they are afraid of singing, praying and so on. But they see love and they see that the grown-ups can help them and that the grown-ups can not only yell at them and forbid them everything. I think it shocks them so much that they want to come one more time, just to sit near the grown-up, just to share their stories of life or some made-up stories when they are ashamed of their real stories of life. When you communicate with these kids it is very painful to realize that you cannot anyhow change their lives because the camp ends at some moment and they have to come back to the same world they had just run away for several days. They have to listen to a drunk daddy again, yelling daddy or friends who only laugh at them. We come, organize some camps for such kids, come back home again but what is going on with these kids during the whole year??? After Kem' at once we went to Segezha for 3 days and there several helpers for the camp joined us: Sima Chernisheva, Vika Chinyaeva and others. Almost the same situation was there: many kids come from very difficult families. But in this camp one more time God showed me how small I am in my knowledge and my trust. The theme of the camp was the Lord's Prayer. There were 7 Bible studies in the camp. One request from the Lord's Prayer –in one Bible study. The goal was that the kids wouldn't just read this prayer by heart but they would realize what they were asking God for.

Have you ever heard the prayer of a 3-year old girl who prays for her father? She was asking God so He would help her father find some job and give him strength and health to take care of the whole family. Have you heard the prayer of the 8-year old guy who was praying for that girl who was worried about her father. Because he is sure that God will help her. Do you really need any proofs that God does unbelievable miracles in the hearts of people. It was the first time in my life when I saw how God leads the parents to the church through the kids. The thing is that this year one boy came to this camp in Segezha who came with his parents from Vietnam and moved to Segezha. On the first day of the camp we paid attention that during the games in the camp outside he was talking to his mother who was standing behind the fence. When we invited her to the camp to see what we were doing there she agreed and she spent the whole day with us with pleasure. She was at the Bible studies with us. The next day he Hiep (it is the name of the guy) brought his little sister who was only three years old and she spoke Russian very bad. She was participating in the camp with pleasure also. At first she was very shy of us but on the last day of the camp she rushed to one person in the camp and didn't want let him go. She was holding that person and was saying something in her language.

Hiep's mother came on the last day of the camp and took part in it as the other kids. She did the lessons in her notebook, listened to the Bible studies and learned the Lord's Prayer. We hope God will bring this family to find Him. The Bible says to us that God's ways are not searchable. After the children's camps we came back to Petrozavodsk where we had already planned some camp for the youth - the camp in the tents on nature. Nadia will tell about this camp more detailed.

After that I went to Koltushi to conduct a confirmation camp. This camp takes place every year for the whole Ingrian Church in the Theologian Institute. On the 21-22 of July (right before this camp) there were the courses for the leaders of this camp. The leaders for this camp are chosen from different congregations. We try to choose those leaders for the camp who has gone through this camp already. The camp lasts 10 days. At the end of this camp there is the day of the confirmation itself and there is celebration afterwards where parents and friends of the youth come.

At the end of the summer there was the next session of exams of the youth workers which took place on the 21-22 of August in Koltushi seminary where I also gave lectures on Dogmatic Soteriology, History and Old Testament.

I want to thank you for all your prayers, care and help for the youth and children ministry in Karelia

Your support is really important

May God bless you

Alexei Krongolm