

# **The Lutheran Church in Russia, with special emphasis on Ukraine: Intertwined with the history of Russia**

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This article is about the history of the Lutheran Church in Russia with a greater focus on Ukraine, or South Russia as it was known until 1991. The tragic story regarding the lives of 400,000 Lutherans who lived within the boundaries of modern Ukraine in 1914 is also summarized. The article specifically reviews the 1915-1945 era and its effect on large groups of German Lutherans in the former USSR. The same stories may be extrapolated to Catholic, Mennonite, Reformed, and Baptist Germans living in Russia and Ukraine and the tragic uprooting from their homes and daily lives. Most of this information is based on Adam Giesinger's 1974 classic book, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*. Other sources are indicated directly in the text or in a footnote.

## **Part I: 1576-1913**

### ***Early history***

Giesinger states that the story of Lutherans in Russia goes back to the reign of Ivan the Terrible who brought German artisans and professional men from Western Europe to Moscow. The first Lutheran church in Russia, named St. Michael, was established in Moscow 423 years ago and was completed in 1576. By the end of the 17th century, Moscow had 3,000 Lutherans and an additional 3,000 were scattered throughout the empire. Archangelsk, Astrakhan, Kazan, Olonets, and Pavlovsky each had one congregation.

In 1710, Peter the Great of Russia wanted the expertise of the Baltic barons. During his war with Sweden he made a secret deal with them that promised them complete cultural and religious freedom. Thus in 1715, the new Russian Lutheran Church was granted complete freedom in liturgy, dogma, and administration. In the Peace Treaty of Nystad in 1721, Sweden ceded the Baltic provinces of Livonia and Estonia to Russia. Courland was formally annexed somewhat later and became a part of Russia in 1795 during the third partition of Poland.

Because of these political events the Lutheran Church already had official recognition from rulers in Russia in 1715. Further administrative changes occurred in 1734 when all Lutheran parishes were placed under the Imperial College of Justice. In 1810 another change was made when the authority was transferred to the Main Administration for Ecclesiastical Affairs of Foreign Faiths.

The Lutheran Church's acceptance in Russia prepared the way for the immigration of Lutherans into Russia in the years we are familiar with, 1763-1825. Empress Elizabeth, Tsarina of Russia, designed an extensive plan to colonize the borders of Russia with immigrants. Although she did not achieve her goals because of wars and the political environment, her plan was later implemented by Catherine the Great of Russia in 1763. Lutherans then poured into central and southern Russia.

Because of the large number of German Lutherans arriving in Russia, Tsar Alexander I established the Imperial General Consistory on July 20, 1819. A single bishop would now exercise full authority over all Evangelical Lutheran churches and clergy in Russia. The Ordinance of 1832 was the result of 13 years of deliberation after the establishment of the Imperial General Consistory in 1819. This ordinance created three administrative groups within the Empire: the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Imperial General Consistory.

Our interest lies with the Imperial General Consistory, which was divided into five districts: Courland, Estonia, Livonia, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. The Moscow district included the provinces of Astrakhan, Kaluga, Kazan, Kharkhiv, Kurst, Moscow, Nizhni-Novgorod, Orel, Orenburg, Penza, Perm, Ryazan, Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk, Stavropol, Tambov, Tula, Tver, Vyatka, Vladimir, Voronezh, and the communities of Armenia and Siberia.

The St. Petersburg district included the capital St. Petersburg, the cities Narva and Kronstadt, and the provinces of Archangelsk, Bessarabia, Chernigov, Ekaterinoslav, Kiev, Kherson, Kostroma, Novgorod, Olonets, Podolia,

Poltava, Pskov, Smolensk, St. Petersburg, Taurida, Volhynia, Vologda, and Yaroslavl.<sup>1</sup> The Ordinance of 1832 required a duplicate of all Lutheran church records be recorded in St. Petersburg. When these records became available in 1996 and were filmed by the LDS Church they became a great resource for researchers.

## **Lutherans come to Ukraine**

The first Lutherans in the Black Sea region were not Germans, but Swedes from the island of Dago. They settled near Berislav on the Dnieper River in 1781. The first Germans came from West Prussia to establish Alt Danzig near Elisabethgrad in 1787, and Josephstal and Rybalsk near Ekaterinoslav in 1789 and 1791. Josephstal became the first Lutheran parish center in the Black Sea region. Pastor H. A. Kirchmann was the first Lutheran pastor in the region, serving all the Lutherans in the area until 1799.

In 1803 a flood of German immigrants came into the Black Sea region. By 1806 there were 23 new Lutheran villages: six in the Odessa District, two near Berislav on the Dnieper River, eight near the Molotschna River, and seven in Crimea. A second Lutheran pastor, Johann H. Pfersdorff, arrived in Odessa to serve the city and district. By 1810 the number of new Protestant villages had reached 35, making a total of 40 stations to be served by two pastors. In 1811 and 1812 six pastors arrived, August Böttiger from Germany and five from Sweden. Only two of the new pastors became permanent and the other four pastors returned to their homes between 1814 and 1816.

In 1814 German settlements began in Bessarabia. All the early colonists, except those in Krasna, were Lutherans. By 1818 there were 12 new villages and by 1820 there were 10 Lutheran parishes in the Black Sea region. By 1832 there were 82 Lutheran colonies in the Black Sea region, one Swedish and 81 German, with a few of the German colonies having sizeable minorities of Reformed people. For these 82 colonies and the German Lutherans in the cities there were 15 parishes served by the following pastors: Steinmann in Josephstal, Fletnitzer in Odessa, Voigt in Grossliebental, Granbaum in Freudental, Helwich in Tarutino, Williams in Arcis, Lesedow in Sarata, Pensel in Glückstal, Bonekemper in Rohrbach, Zehlink in Prischib, Föll in Hochstädt, Kylius in Neustatz, Kyber in Zürichtal, and Holtfreter in Grunau. Kherson was vacant.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia had the status of a state church in 1832 with leadership installed and salaried by the crown.<sup>2</sup> Giesinger added additional information about Tsar Nicholas I and his decree that set up a new government system for the Lutheran Church in his empire in 1832:

“At the head of the new organization was a General Consistory in St. Petersburg, consisting of a lay president and pastoral vice president, both appointed by the Tsar and two lay and two pastoral members. They had supervision of eight consistories, each consisting of equal numbers of lay and pastoral members and ruling over the Lutheran parishes in their district. The Pastoral and Vice-presidents in each case being the General Superintendents of the district. Six of the eight consistorial districts were in the Baltic provinces: Riga, Reval, Oesel, Livonia, Courland and Estonia. The other two consistorial districts covered the vast areas of the empire. The St. Petersburg Consistory ruled the Lutheran parishes in western and southern Russia including the Black Sea region. The Moscow Consistory ruled those in eastern European Russia including the Volga colonies and all of Asiatic Russia. Congregations and parishes, which were scattered in remote areas were also ruled by the General Consistory. In the region of more concentrated Lutheran parishes such as the Black Sea and Volga areas, chief pastors (Proepste) or deans were appointed to rule over the sub-districts. Two such sub-districts were established for the Volga region and two in the Black Sea region, one for Odessa area and Bessarabia and the other for those farther east.”<sup>3</sup>

Later the Baltic region was consolidated from six into three districts and an addition made for Poland. This system of government remained in effect until the end of the Tsarist regime in 1915. The government made all appointments to the various offices, so it was not a democratic system. But parish clergy did have the right to submit nominations for all offices except the top positions. This system, while not democratic, gave Lutherans a source of strength and stability until the Revolution in 1917.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Lutherans of Russia* by Thomas K. Edlund, 1994, Vol. I.

<sup>2</sup> Noted by the article “The Problem of Theological Education: the Experience of Lutheran Institutions in the CIS” by Gerd Stricker, author of *Russland, Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*. The article also appeared in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000, pp. 25-31.

<sup>3</sup> From *Catherine to Khrushchev* by Adam Giesinger, pp. 168.

## **Growth in numbers and area**

The population of the Black Sea Germans had doubled from 50,000 colonists in 1825 to 100,000 in 1848. Giesinger states that in 1848 Lutherans lived in 94 colonies with 18 parishes. Fifteen years later, in 1863, the Black Sea population had increased to 150,000. Using the “76 percent of German colonists were Lutheran” measuring stick from the 1897 Russian census,<sup>4</sup> we can roughly estimate that there were 38,000 Lutherans in 1825, 70,000 in 1848, and 100,000 in 1863. By the year 1863 there were 100 Lutheran colonies. On page 176 Giesinger writes “the Lutheran population had increased to 220,000 in 1911.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, just prior to the beginning of WWI and the first deportations of German Russians, the Lutheran population in the Black Sea area had increased 120 per cent in the 48 years between 1863 and 1911.

In 1911 the total Black Sea population of all faith groups who were German was 275,000. Thus, the Black Sea German colonist population had increased five and a half times in the 90 years between 1825 and 1911. The German population (both Lutheran and other faith groups) in the Black Sea area had spread over a wide area extending to the Don Region and into the North Caucasus.

The number of Lutheran parishes had also increased, from 23 in 1863; 31 in 1880; 41 in 1900; 43 in 1910; and 46 in 1914. Of the 46 Lutheran parishes in 1914, 19 were in daughter colonies, 3 in Bessarabia, 3 in Crimea, 5 in the Don Region, 5 in the North Caucasus, and the other 5 scattered. Giesinger reported (pp. 176-177) that the number of parishes in the populous original mother colonies had hardly increased at all since 1860.

In addition to the Black Sea and Volga areas there was another large group of German colonists in Russia, those in the western province of Volhynia. By 1862 there were 45 German villages in Volhynia and by the end of the century there were 170,000 colonists, almost entirely Protestant. In 1914 the German population exceeded 200,000 and the number of Lutheran parishes had increased to 10. Giesinger claims that one-fifth<sup>6</sup> of the Lutherans in Volhynia had become Baptists. Baptists had arrived in 1860 and spread their teachings among the religiously neglected Lutherans with success.<sup>7</sup>

By 1900, a vast new field had opened for the Lutheran Church in Siberia. After 1890, and even more so after 1906, great numbers of Germans from the Volga and Black Sea regions moved eastward. By 1914 there were 100,000 German colonists in Asiatic Russia and more than half were Lutheran. There had been three Lutheran pastors stationed in the Siberian cities of Tomsk, Tobolsk, and Irkutsk since the 18th century to serve Germans, Letts/Latvians, Esths/Estonians, Finns in the military forces, and among deportees to Siberia. A fourth had been stationed in Vladivostok in 1866. By 1914 six additional pastors had been sent to serve the new population.

The South Caucasus had another pocket of German Lutheran colonists whose church had developed separately from the main groups. They had not joined the consistorial organization and instead, in 1823, had formed an independent Lutheran synod with clergy and lay representatives from the parishes. This synod was presided over by a chief pastor who was appointed by the Tsar’s governor from among the clergy. There were five parishes before 1850: Tiflis, Elisabeththal, Katharinenfeld, Helenendorf, and Marienfeld. Later Annenfeld and Alexanderhilf made a sixth and seventh.

The Baltic provinces became part of Peter the Great’s empire through the Treaty of Nystadt in 1721 and the Lutheran Church in Russia gained two million Lutherans in the Baltic provinces by 1900.<sup>8</sup> In 1900, Germans, Letts/Latvians, Esths/Estonians in Estonia, Livonia, and Courland<sup>9</sup> had more than 300 well-organized Lutheran parishes.

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<sup>4</sup> See Giesinger, Adam, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*, 1974, pp. 155 regarding the 1897 census in Russia.

<sup>5</sup> A population jump of more than double in the 50 years between 1863 and 1911 seems open to question. This time span must also account for losses through the migration of Germans to North and South America.

<sup>6</sup> Other sources say the Baptist population of Volhynia was 10 percent in 1911. Statistics from Amburger show 3,000 Baptists in 1866 in Volhynia and the census of 1871 show 28,560 Germans in Volhynia, thus 9.5 percent Baptist. Whether the percentage of Baptists in Volhynia increased to 20 percent as Giesinger states by the 1911-1914 time period is not clear.

<sup>7</sup> There were also small settlements of Mennonites and perhaps a smaller number of Roman Catholics. By the 1920s there were also some Volhynians who joined the Church of God based in Anderson, Indiana.

<sup>8</sup> Giesinger obtained his figures for 1900 in Baltic area from *Handbuch des Deutschtums im Auslande*, pp. 174.

<sup>9</sup> Now part of Latvia.

Since 1802 the Lutheran Church had had a theological school at Dorpat University in Estonia. This university trained pastors for the Baltic area as well as the Lutheran congregations and parishes in distant parts of the Russian empire. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, increasing numbers of German colonists' sons began to undertake theological studies at Dorpat, then returned to serve their people in South Russia and the Volga. A survey of 152 Lutheran pastors who had served in the Black Sea Region before 1910 showed that 30 were trained in Germany, 23 in Basel, and 96 in Dorpat. Of this group of 152 pastors, 45 were born in Germany, 54 were from the Baltic provinces, and 15 were colonists' sons.

Nearly 100 years after the first migration of Germans to the Odessa region, the Russian government conducted a census. This census, taken in 1897,<sup>10</sup> showed 1,790,489 Germans in Russia and 1,360,843 (76 percent) were Lutheran. They lived in all parts of the empire, including:

- 368,000 in Poland
- 313,000 in the Volga colonies
- 170,000 in Volhynia
- 165,000 in the Baltic provinces
- 163,000 in the Black Sea colonies
- 60,000 in the St. Petersburg district
- 50,000 in the Caucasus
- 15,000 in Moscow
- 9,000 in Siberia
- 48,000 were scattered across European Russia

An additional survey in 1914 in Russia showed 3.67 million Lutherans using German as their official language: 1.3 million were Latvians, 1.1 million Estonian, 1.1 million German, and 150,000 Finnish. This did not count Finland and Russian Poland.<sup>11</sup>

## ***The Lutheran Church of Ukraine (as it was then)***

The history of the German Evangelical Lutheran congregations in Ukraine is 221 years old dating back to when the West Prussian Lutherans settled in Josephtal and established a Lutheran parish in 1787. The biggest concentrations of Lutheran congregations were in the area around Odessa, in the area around Zaporizhya, in Crimea, in Bessarabia, and in Volhynia. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were more than 3,000 Lutheran congregations with 400,000 members in the territory that is modern Ukraine today.

In 1911, just prior to the outbreak of WWI, we have quoted Giesinger's total of 220,000 Lutherans in the Black Sea area alone. Giesinger states that there were 400,000 then residing in the area of present-day Ukraine and Moldova. (The modern Ukraine also includes those who lived in Northern Bukovina, Eastern Galicia, and in Volhynia. These are all part of present-day Ukraine but not identified as Black Sea.)

In 1911 there were also 196,000 Roman Catholics, 104,000 Mennonites, and 25,000 Baptists and Reformed.

The Lutheran congregations in Ukraine became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia which had the Tsar as its head when the constitution was instituted in 1832. Each Lutheran congregation had its own place of worship in a prayer house or church building. The Lutheran churches had their own schools, seminaries for pastors, lay leaders, and other church workers. The Lutheran Church was able to adapt, win some concessions, and continue to develop its ministries in spite of the struggles with the Russian government that occurred in the 1870s when military service was required and the Russian language was installed in schools.

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<sup>10</sup> The 1897 census, cited by Giesinger on pp. 155, listed people by religious affiliation. The number of Lutherans counted does not include the 20,000 in the cities Karl Stumpp assumed had been assimilated into the Orthodox Church through intermarriage over 200 years.

<sup>11</sup> From "The Problems of Theological Education: the experience of Lutheran Institutions in the CIS" by Gerd Stricker, published in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000.

## **Part II: 1914-1945**

### ***War and terror***

The Tsarist government fell on March 8, 1917 and the provisional government took power in Russia on March 16, 1917. This government lasted eight months, until November 7, 1917 (October 25 Russian old style calendar).

Until WWI the Lutheran Church was strong, organized, and pretty much intact with strong functioning leadership. The Bolshevik Revolution at the end of WWI changed everything.

### **New hope for the thousands of Germans in Russia**

When the provisional government assumed power, it issued a proclamation of democratic liberties including freedom of speech and the press, workers' right to strike, amnesty for political prisoners, and the abolition of discrimination on social, religious, and ethnic grounds. It also called for a Constituent Assembly which would decide on the future government. There was great hope in the German villages and towns that life would now be better.

German colonists had taken no part in the revolutionary activities against the Tsar. They breathed a sigh of relief when the threat of dispossession and deportation which had hung over them since 1915 was removed by the fall of the Tsar's government.

Germans soon developed a sense of enthusiasm for the new democratic liberties. They formed delegations from 15 governments that met in Moscow for a "Congress of Russian citizens of German nationality." This was the first time in their history that German colonists from all regions came together to plan their future role in Russia.

This nationwide congress was followed by local congresses in the main areas. More than 300 official delegates from all German districts in the Volga region met in Saratov on April 26, 1917. Two thousand Black Sea Germans, representing all colony groups from Bessarabia in the west to the Don region in the east, met in Odessa on May 14, 1917. The Siberian Germans, 1,500 in number, met in Slavgorod on May 17, 1917. Germans of the South Caucasus also met during the same month.

In each case a central executive committee was elected and resolutions regarding schools, newspapers, and local government autonomy were adopted. During the summer of 1917 there was enthusiastic activity, German schools were reopened, German newspapers founded, and vigorous discussions of the future government were held.

### **The Bolshevik takeover in Russia**

From its beginning, the new provisional government, with its base of support in the liberal middle class, had a rival which was almost a parallel government, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies. This group had the support of the socialist-inclined working classes. For a few months the two parties cooperated in an uneasy alliance.

By September the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Party, which was led by Lenin and Trotsky and was hostile to the provisional government, had won control over the Soviet and began to look for an opportunity to seize power. On November 7, 1917 a successful coup inaugurated the Communist era of Russian history.

Lenin issued a decree on peace with other nations. He followed this by a decree on land. It abolished land proprietorship, ordered confiscation of the landed estates of the propertied classes and authorized the division of the confiscated land among the landless peasants by rural land committees under the supervision of each district's Soviet of Peasant's Deputies.

The first decree ended any further war effort in the west and brought mutinies against the officers in the army and mass desertions of the army. The second decree led to mass looting and land seizures by roving bands of peasants, which brought chaos to the countryside. The peasants were thus won over to Lenin.

The other group of leaders – the hereditary nobility, the dispossessed landowners, the captains of industry, the army generals, the higher clergy, and the liberal intelligentsia – were eliminated or cowed into submission by a deliberate reign of terror. The newly created secret police executed thousands of “class enemies” with little or no regard for their innocence or guilt.

The war with Germany ended with the harsh Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. But civil war was to convulse Russia for four more years. By late 1919 the Red Army subdued the White Army, although fighting continued in some regions into 1921. As a result of the chaos and civil war, Russia lost borderlands inhabited by non-Russian people. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania won independence. Poland regained its independence it had lost first in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and then again through war with Russia in 1920. Bessarabia became a Romanian province. Other areas that had attempted to break away during the Revolution were dragged back into the fold by the Red Army.

## Effects of the revolution on Volga Germans

The Volga Germans were taken over by the new Communist regime on November 10, 1917, only three days after the coup in Petrograd.<sup>12</sup> Although the new regime had promised autonomy to ethnic minorities, Volga Germans taking proposals to Moscow failed to get a hearing.

The large landowners were destroyed as were many small farmers, who were the most successful and considered the backbone of Volga German agriculture. This caused drastic cuts in agricultural production in the Volga region in the next years.<sup>13</sup> At this time the new regime began to requisition grain and livestock. By the spring of 1921 there was little food left. This caused an uprising against the Communists.

## Volga Germans fight the Reds

“All over the Volga region anti-Communist bands of peasants, Russian as well as German, wandered from village to village, torturing and killing the Communist Commissars and the local men who had collaborated with them. For nearly two months in the spring of 1921 no Communist’s life was safe in German villages in the Volga region. Germans who had served as the local stooges of the regime were killed by their own neighbors. The fury of the people against their oppressors knew no bounds. They tortured, maimed, and killed all the Communists that they could capture.”<sup>14</sup>

The Red Army arrived two months later with harsh vengeance and never again did the Volga region dare to resist the regime. Then came the famine of 1921. From January 1 to August 15, 1921 the population of the Volga Germans decreased by 93,000. Only the American relief societies saved more from dying.

## Effect of Revolution on Black Sea Germans

In the Black Sea area, Communism did not take over until late 1920. Soon after the October 1917 Revolution, Ukrainian nationalists proclaimed independence from Russia. At German insistence the regime recognized Ukrainian independence through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. Needing help, the Ukrainian nationalists invited units of the German and Austrian armies to eliminate the Red Army pockets existing in the cities of Ukraine.

The Germans quickly took Kiev and the Austrians took Odessa. In a few weeks Ukraine and Crimea were occupied by German and Austrian troops. One German unit had advanced as far as Rostov-on-Don. The occupation forces brought back law and order, giving the people freedom from the marauding bands of peasants who had been plundering the countryside. This gave the Black Sea region a few months of peaceful development.

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<sup>12</sup> This city was known as Petrograd at the time of this coup. From 1924-1991 it was known as Leningrad. In 1991 it reverted to its former name of St. Petersburg.

<sup>13</sup> Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*, pp. 259.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev*, pp. 259. Bishop Kessler’s report seems to question whether this backlash against the initial Communist leadership was as widespread as Giesinger describes.

## 1918-1922: Total chaos and terror for German villages

In November 1918, with the collapse of the German war effort in Western Europe, the German troops had to leave Ukraine. Robber bands now renewed their terror with great vigor and cruelty, bringing a reign of terror to the German colonies.

Nestor Makhno, an avowed anarchist, led Ukrainian peasant bands that numbered hundreds of thousands. He made deals with the Whites and the Reds. Using the black flag as their emblem, his followers behaved like devils loosed from hell, terrorizing the countryside. They robbed, tortured and killed without mercy, including the landowners and officials of either Whites or Reds.

The colonists knew that after their protectors, the German army, withdrew, they would be punished by their Russian and Ukrainian peasant neighbors. To defend their villages, a Home Guard was organized and trained before the German armies withdrew. The Home Guard fought bravely and kept the bands away from many of their home villages. But they were overcome by sheer numbers and brutally punished for their resistance to the roving bands.

Grunau's daughter colonies, Silbertal, Reinfeld, Alexanderfeld, Mariental, and Eigenfeld, suffered most severely. They were attacked in the fall of 1918. Their houses were burned, the men shot, and the survivors forced to flee to the mother colonies.

The Kankrin<sup>15</sup> and Schoenfeld Mennonite villages were attacked in the first weeks after the withdrawal of German armies. Plundering, burning, raping, torturing, and killing went on in this area for several weeks. The Grunau colonies to the southwest, the Prischib and Molotschna Mennonite colonies to the southwest, and the Chortitza colonies to the north and west were next in line. The Grunau villages were attacked in January 1919. After receiving heavy losses, the remaining 67 men of the Home Guard were executed. The Home Guard of the Molotschna region had a stronger force and was able to hold off the bands several weeks. But by the end of February 1919 they too had to surrender.

By the spring of 1919 Makhno terror ruled a large part of Ukraine east of the Dnieper river. In June 1919 the White Army marched in and brought a few months of respite from robbers. But they, too, lived off the land, taking what they needed and paying with worthless rubles. But the colonists were able to harvest the 1919 crop in peace.

When the White Army withdrew in late 1919 the Makhno bands resumed their activities. The Prischib and Molotschna Mennonite colonies were under attack for six weeks after the withdrawal of the White Army in October 1919. Late in November a large force suddenly appeared in the Kronau and Sagradovka settlements about 160 miles to the west. The destruction they caused against a defenseless population is unbelievable. They burned and pillaged five villages in the Kronau group and terrorized the people with rape and murder. In the Sagradovka settlement, in three days of brutal activity, they murdered 200 people and completely destroyed the village of Muensterberg and heavily damaged five other villages. Less damage was done in the Chortitza colonies but it lasted through the winter of 1919-1920. Attacks continued until the spring of 1920 when the Red army regulars moved into eastern Ukraine and ended the Makhno reign of terror.

In the Odessa region things went differently after the withdrawal of German troops. The city itself was taken over by allied troops under French command who had come to the Black Sea on December 18, 1918. This occupation force had control of the city only and not the countryside. Early in the winter of 1918-1919, the robber band leader Grigoriev, a rival of Makhno, was active in the Odessa region. Grigoriev found a substantial body of followers in the Russian villages north of the Beresan valley who were glad to be able to despoil their German neighbors. The robber band found determined armed resistance at Rastadt and at the village of Worms where the battle raged for days. But in the end, the ammunition of the Home Guard ran out. Many of the fighters saved their lives by fleeing, but they lost their homes and possessions. Landau, Karlsruhe, Kathariental, and Sulz also suffered heavy losses in life and property.

In April 1919 the French government changed its policy with respect to Russia and withdrew its troops. Red

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<sup>15</sup> Grunau colonies were north of Mairupol off the coast of the Sea of Azov. Kankrin was approximated 25 miles northwest of Grunau. The Sea of Azov, north of the Black Sea, is a shallow sea connected to the Black Sea by the Strait of Kerch. A map by Georg Leibbrand (Bd 3:Rempel, Petersburg 1869) shows the Grunau colonies north of Mariupol. This area is labeled in German as Kreis Alexandrowsk and it bordered Don Kosakken.

partisans moved into the vacuum and acquired control over the region lying between the Dniester and Bug rivers. The Odessa region was controlled mostly by Red Army forces in the city, with the exception of a short period during the summer of 1919 when the White Army occupied the region. The robber bands also provided continual challenges to the Red Army's control of the area.

## **The Russian Civil War and the absence of civil order**

Giesinger summarizes the disastrous results of the Communist revolution in 1918:

“During the civil war in which White armies fought against Red armies, marauding peasant bands attacked villages in Ukraine. Crimea was mostly saved from much of the wild robber bands by the presence of the White army. Since the summer of 1918 Crimea had an independent anti-Red government under the protection of the White army until 1920.

“But killing, burning, raping defenseless colonists throughout the rest of eastern Ukraine took place until 1920 when the White army was defeated and Red rule stood unchallenged in the Black Sea region from the Dniester River in the west to the North Caucasus in the east.”

## **Ukrainian Germans and Russian peasants fight the Reds**

The Red Army practiced requisitioning in the German villages. A crisis occurred in the spring of 1919 when Communists from Odessa, actually Austrians who had been prisoners of war, were killed while on a requisitioning excursion in Grossliebental. The killing was the result of extreme exasperation with Red requisitioning methods.

When Red authorities sent troops to punish the guilty, an insurrection occurred in which colonists from several villages and some of their Russian neighbors fought side by side against the Reds. The insurrection was crushed with great cruelty. About 50 or 60 of the leading citizens were shot without trial, and the neighboring villages also had executions. From this time forward these colonists were always under suspicion of plotting against Red rule.

A massacre occurred in Selz in the summer of 1919, in which 107 men were shot without inquiry or trial. This was an obvious aftermath of the Grossliebental insurrection. In the summer of 1920 those who looked for deliverance from the Red oppression or from robber band anarchy had some hope as the White Army from Crimea pushed into Ukraine. But the White Army was defeated by the Red Army in November 1920, after the Red Army returned forces from its war in Poland. The White Army escaped across the Black Sea to Constantinople.

The first years of the new Red rule were disastrous. Famine and pestilence on an unprecedented scale struck southern Russia, killing hundreds of thousands of Russian peasants and German colonists. Agriculture had been badly disrupted in the region during the civil war. The war itself, the absence of law and order, the land seizures from the most competent producers, the shortage of horse power resulting from constant requisitioning of horses, and the destruction of initiative by the hopelessness of the outlook brought a drastic decline in agricultural production. The yield had been good in 1919 and average in 1920. But the new Red government shipped grain out of the region and then disaster struck with the drought of the spring of 1921, causing a complete crop failure. A general food shortage rapidly developed. By the spring of 1922 famine afflicted the whole population, accompanied by typhus and other diseases, all contributing to the death rate.

Thus, shortly after the civil war of Revolution, famine and pestilence struck southern Russia, killing hundreds of thousands of Russian peasants and German colonists. Yet the government continued to ship grain out of the area to other parts of the country. The American Relief Administration, an organization which established offices in Odessa in the spring of 1922, soon had stations all over the Black Sea. By July 1922 the Americans were feeding 120,000 children in the Odessa area alone. By the middle of the summer they were feeding ten million adults and children in the famine regions of Russia. Church organizations in North America responded as has been written in numerous publications. This forced starvation was the first form of repression by the new Communist government.

## The critical events of 1916-1917: The miraculous suspension of deportation orders for the Bessarabian Germans

Threats of deportation must have been in the minds of the Bessarabian Germans because of the press and the deportation of the Volhynian Germans in July 1915. The Bessarabians were threatened with deportation to Siberia by “a secret order in January 1916 was presented to the Bessarabian village offices for the deportation of Germans from the Akkermann District.”<sup>16</sup>

March routes were already laid out when the deportation was postponed because the president of the provincial administration protested to the governor and vouched for the Germans. (Although a small group in northern Bessarabia did get resettled to Ufa/Bashkiria.)

On July 14, 1915 all German schools were closed and children received no instruction for three years. Teachers were drafted or released as unsuitable. No more sermons could be preached and worship was restricted to prayer, hymn singing, and a chapter read from the Bible. Funeral sermons were forbidden. Two German pastors were banned for breaking the rules: Johannes Jundt and Johannes von Toerne. The German press was suspended and passenger pigeons had to be killed. German could not be spoken on the street and no more than three persons could assemble. Failure to observe these regulations was punished by the police with a monetary fine up to 300 rubles and three months imprisonment.<sup>17</sup>

The deportation of the Bessarabian people was set for January 6, 1917, in spite of the protest to the original order of January 1916<sup>18</sup> This order read: “On January 6, 1917 all German residents [of Bessarabia] must be on their own wagon at the railroad station.” Each person was allowed to take 16.3 kilograms (about 35 pounds) of baggage.

Free delivery of wagons to the rural police was a further requirement. From the southwest train stations thousands of wagons were placed for the trip to Siberia. Karl Knauer wrote about this in a report published by the *Mitteilungsblatt* in December 1963. At the Arzis railroad station, large barracks were built to be used in some way during the deportation.

Each teacher or secretary of each village was required to go to each house in the village and announce the deportation decree. This was received with much crying and anguish, especially among the elderly. People immediately searched for and prepared food: smoked meat, flour, cooking grease, dried vegetables. While the wife prepared food, the men prepared the wagon, making it into a covered wagon for the trip. With horror and dismay every person packed, preparing for deportation in mid-winter. One person who experienced this wrote that he never again heard a prayer as touching as the one his father prayed over the family as they gathered for this deportation.

Suddenly, on Christmas Eve 1916, it began to snow in southern Bessarabia. It snowed without ceasing until January 6, 1917. Everything was in lockdown and no person could even get to their neighbor, much less to a train station. Farm animals had to be dug out in order to feed them. The command came from the higher police commander Isprawnik in Akkermann: “the deportation of the Germans is temporarily put aside until a more favorable time.”

The defeated Russian 6<sup>th</sup> Army came through the Danube Delta in wild flight and took the wagons that had been placed for deportation of the German population. The outbreak of the Revolution occurred on March 8, 1917. Later in March the Provisional Government suspended the deportation decree of the Bessarabian Germans. On Good Friday, April 6, 1917, the German Army crossed the Danube and Pruth Rivers and by afternoon, German units under August von Mackensen<sup>19</sup> had occupied all German towns in Bessarabia. It was a joyous Good Friday.<sup>20</sup> On May 14,

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<sup>16</sup> *Bessarabien: Deutsche Kolonisten am Schwarzen Meer*, Ute Schmidt, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Documented in the book by Ute Schmidt, *Bessarabien: Deutsche Kolonisten am Schwarzen Meer*, pp. 284-286.

<sup>18</sup> *Heimatkalendar 1965* p. 33 ff. by Artur Kraenbring and published by the Bessarabien Verein in Stuttgart, Germany provides details of deportation preparations in Bessarabia in late 1916. Theodor Hummel in his book, *One Hundred Years of Inheritance Rights of German Colonial Farms in Russia* lists the laws passed upon which deportations were based. Albert Kern in his *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans* writes on page 8 that the liquidation laws of January 2 and February 15, 1915, expropriated all German property and provided for deportation to the east. Pastor Horst Gutsche (German-Russian researcher) confirms that a large number of Bessarabians migrated after 1910 indicating tension and fear among the Bessarabian people in this time frame. Rumors, no doubt, occurred before the laws of 1915.

<sup>19</sup> Further description of the German armies defeating the Russian and Romanian armies can be read on the Internet

1917, German schools reopened.

Almost a year later, in March 1918, Romanian armies moved into Bessarabia and took political and military of the region. The Romanian takeover of Bessarabia was possible because of the confusion in the Russian leadership caused by the defeated armies and the breakout of the Revolution. So the Bessarabians were saved from deportation during WWI. On March 7, 1919, a German Congress in Bessarabia petitioned the Romanian government to remove the liquidation decree of January 6, 1917. On October 6, 1919 the law was removed by legislative action of Romania and the Bessarabians felt a dagger had been removed from their hearts.

These examples give evidence that repressions of Germans in Russia began twenty years before Hitler came into power in Germany. With the memory of 1917, no wonder the Bessarabian Germans gladly accepted Hitler's deal to return to Germany and be reassigned to farms in central Poland.

## USSR is formed

In the tenth congress of soviets in December 1922, six national republics were formed into a federal union, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The eleventh congress of soviets in January 1924 raised the Volga region to the status of an autonomous republic. This was approved by the central government on February 20, 1924.

The newly founded Autonomous Soviet Republic of the Volga Germans with a population of 500,000, two-thirds of whom were German, had the appearance of a state. But neither the autonomy nor the democracy was real. Policy decisions were made in Moscow. The commissars of the Volga Republic were not free agents but were the emissaries and servants of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The elections were rigged so that no one other than party members could be elected. Class enemies such as the clergy, wealthy farmers, employers of labor, and officials of the old regime were not allowed to vote.

Only in the use of language was there freedom. In the Volga Republic, German, Ukrainian, and Russian were all official languages. Each village was allowed to use the language of the majority in that village.

## The reign of terror

After a period of relative stability from 1922-1927, a new reign of terror was instigated by Stalin. The drive against the German "kulaks" (the so-called "rich peasants") started in the summer of 1928 with the imposition of ruinous taxation. This applied to everyone except the volunteers for the collectives. In the spring of 1929 deportations began. The first victims were landowners and leading citizens known to be most hostile toward the Communist government. In June came grain requisitioning on a scale so drastic that it threatened starvation in the months ahead. If one did not comply, the threat of deportation hung over your head. Many colonists were brought to the edge of despair.

As a reaction many colonists decided to sell or even abandon their farms and leave Russia. Five thousand were in Moscow in October 1929 attempting to escape. By the middle of November there were 13,000. They had also attracted the attention of the international press. The initial 5,000 were able to emigrate but the rest were arrested and sent east where the secret police found them "jobs." The 13,000 Germans who were deported to Siberia and other eastern regions would soon be joined by fellow-colonists who were arrested as kulaks and were shipped out in January and February 1930.

The Black Sea Germans were the most resistant to collectivization. But the Volga Germans were in the forefront of collectivization with 86 percent of their farming collectivized by 1931. Their collectives were the most successful and became a model for the country.

## Liquidating the kulacks

There were some years of greater stability after the anarchy of the 1917-1922 time had passed. The Red Army

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by searching for "Mackensen," field commander of the eastern front.

<sup>20</sup> Also written in the *Mitteilungsblatt*, by Karl Knauer, "Kirchliche Nachrichten" edition 81, December 15, 1963.

stopped the marauding robber bands and after the 1922 forced starvation passed things became better. From 1922 to 1927 there was relative peace. But then Stalin destroyed his enemies and gained control of the USSR at the December 1927 Fifteenth Party Congress.

Already on November 27, 1927 at the tenth anniversary of the revolution, Stalin had announced the program of collectivization of the peasants. It was decided and approved at the December Party Congress to pursue “a vigorous offensive against the kulaks,” who were its strongest opponents. There was a drought in the Black Sea area that caused a grain shortage in 1928 and excessive grain exports to earn foreign currency for the purchase of industrial machinery. These became the excuses to take action against the kulaks who were accused of withholding grain supplies from the market. All through 1928 and 1929, the dispossession, arrest and banishment of kulaks convulsed the countryside and frightened many peasants into joining the collectives.

On December 27, 1929, Stalin announced “the liquidation of the kulaks as a class.”<sup>21</sup> This was the signal of the beginning of another reign of terror. In the course of two months, January and February 1930, more than a million peasant families were uprooted from their homes and deported en masse to the mines and work camps to the north and east where they became a slave labor force for building an industrialized Russia. In his book *Why Are You Still Alive?*, Georg Hildebrandt describes the reign of terror that followed in 1928.<sup>22</sup>

Georg Hildebrandt was born in 1911 in Kondratyevka, Don Region, into a well-off Mennonite family. After he completed junior high school, he worked on his parents’ farm until 1929 when they were dispossessed during collectivization and banished. Hildebrandt’s book tells us that repression of the individual Germans in Russia was already well on its way in 1928.

## More famine in Russia

Another famine occurred in 1932 and 1933. The best farmers had been deported and those remaining were forced into collectives against their will. They were surly and apathetic and many slaughtered their animals rather than donate them to the collectives, bringing about a disastrous decrease in numbers of livestock. Drought in 1932 and 1933 did not stop the bureaucracy from demanding the same quota of grain. By late 1932 there were no grain supplies remaining in Ukraine, the North Caucasus or the Volga regions. Millions of peasants died and no relief was allowed or requested. Denied by the Soviet government, this man-made famine of 1933 “was undoubtedly the most inhuman of Stalin’s crimes” according to Giesinger.

The Stalin political purge of 1936-1938 was exceptionally thorough and ended with the defeat of Stalin’s last political opposition. One of the consequences of this period was the banning of the use of the German language in the schools, except in the Volga German Republic.

## Deportation to Siberia and the far east

Adam Giesinger states in *From Catherine to Khrushchev* that the Soviet reaction against German-Russians began soon after the rise of Hitler. “From 1935 onward they were effectively cut off from the outside world. Correspondence with foreign relatives and friends was treated as traitorous activity.”

The history of Russia and Ukraine tells an even more devastating story; that the repressions against German Lutherans (also Roman Catholics and Mennonites and Reformed Church Germans) and other minorities began twenty years before the rise of Hitler.

Deportation of Germans in Russia was not the brainchild of the Communist Revolution or the Communist government but originated with an Imperial decree of February 2, 1915 during the last years of the Tsarist government in Russia. This first decree was designed for border areas. A new decree was framed on December 13, 1915 to include all in European Russia.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Giesinger, pp. 285-286.

<sup>22</sup> Information was received in January 2009 that Georg Hildebrandt recently died in Germany.

<sup>23</sup> *Homeland Book of the Bessarabian Germans* by Albert Kern, originally published in 1976, states on p. 172 “WWI also disturbed economic progress. The anti-German political tendencies of the period brought difficulties to the communities of the Black Sea, almost ending with the exile of the (Bessarabian) colonists.”

The Volhynian Germans were the first large group to be impacted by this policy. They were deported beginning July 15, 1915 when 200,000 of them were shipped in train cars to the east. After the Tsarist government fell in 1917, only 150,000 Volhynian Germans remained to return to their villages in the summer of 1917 and spring of 1918.

One hundred thousand received their farms back with the help of German armies who were in the area. Fifty thousand did not own farms and were taken back to Germany, where they immigrated to Canada, the U.S., and Brazil. Due to the 1921 Treaty of Riga, 50,000 Germans in western Volhynia in the region of Lutsk came under Polish rule and the other 50,000 in eastern Volhynia remained Soviet citizens.

At the beginning of WWI the German and Austrian armies destroyed the Russian army. In Russia, the press blamed local German-Russians for the outcome of the war. While their families were harassed behind the lines, 250,000 German-Russian soldiers fought for their country in the Tsar's army. The German-Russian soldiers were distrusted and discriminated against. Finally most of them were transferred to the Caucasus to fight against the Turks, where they distinguished themselves.

## **World War II**

Hitler ordered his troops across the Russian border on June 22, 1941. Knowing how much the German-Russians detested his regime, Stalin decided to take no chances. He would remove all the Germans from their old settlements in European Russia and transport them far to the east where they could do no harm.<sup>24</sup>

The deportations began in August, but the world heard of it first in September 1941. All 400,000 Volga Germans were deported in mid-September. First the men age 18-65 and then the women were taken into slave labor camps scattered across Asiatic Russia. Two hundred thousand Black Sea Germans living in the region between the Dnieper River and the North Caucasus were also deported. Fifty thousand Germans living as far east as the Donetz River region and the North Caucasus escaped deportation because they were too scattered to be rounded up in a short period of time. Deported without exception were the 25,000 Swabians of the South Caucasus.

Crimean German deportation began on August 20, 1941. The exact number is not known. But the census of 1926 showed 43,600 Germans in Crimea (although there may have been fewer in number by 1941 because of the harsh repressions of the 1930s in this area). When German troops arrived in Crimea they found only 4,900 Germans who had avoided deportation.

Twenty-six thousand Germans left the Leningrad district on March 17, 1942. Altogether, including the Volga Germans, the total of German Russians uprooted from their homes and transported to the east in 1941 and 1942 numbered between 650,000 and 700,000.

## **The flight to escape the Russian Army surging into western Poland**

There were still Germans living in their homelands in Russia in spite of these deportations because some of the persecutions and deportations affected only the adult males from age 15 to 60. But in the case of the Volga and Volhynian Germans, the whole population was deported.

Following the retreat of German armies in Russia, evacuees of Germans still in Russia began their movement toward the west. Eleven thousand left the North Caucasus in February 1943. In the spring and summer of 1943, scattered Germans still in the region between the Don and Dnieper rivers totaled some 40,000 Germans who had been missed in the 1941 deportation to Siberia and Far East. About 35,000 including Chortitza Mennonites from the region between the Dnieper and Bug rivers, began their trek in October 1943.

At the same time, 45,000 Germans still in Russian Volhynia were evacuated to the Warthegau area in Poland. By February 1944, Germans in the Odessa region, a total of 135,000, would soon have to leave. By the time Odessa fell to Russian troops on April 10, 1944, Germans who had lived in the Odessa region for 130 years had all departed. Altogether, including 4,000 from the Leningrad region and 10,000 from White Russia, more than 280,000 Germans

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<sup>24</sup> See *From Catherine to Khrushchev* pp. 304.

were repatriated from Russia to the German Reich in 1943 and 1944. This group of fleeing Germans was particularly destitute because they had been under Soviet repression for more than ten years. They were settled in western Poland on formerly Polish farms, alongside the Baltic, Volhynian, and Bessarabian Germans who had been repatriated in 1939 and 1940. The last of them had hardly settled when they all had to move again to escape Russian Army.

## **“The Flight” in January 1945**

In January 1945 Russian troops broke through German defenses. On January 17 they took Warsaw and on January 19 they took Krakow, Kutno, and Lodz. The sudden Russian movement surprised those repatriated Germans now living in the Wartheland. With only a few hours notice they left in a hurried confusion. In the bitter cold of winter, with Russian bombers overhead and Russian tanks on the horizon, they made a desperate attempt to reach central Germany.

Some made it, but the majority were overtaken by Russian tanks and suffered a large number of casualties. Those surviving were forced to remain in Poland. Over 100,000 appear to have escaped to the west. Thousands died when the battlefront overtook them. The rest were herded into freight cars and shipped to deportation destinations in Soviet Asia. An estimated 45,000 that made it back to Germany were rounded up by Russian soldiers and shipped back to Soviet Asia in the confused days following the end of WWII.

## **Effects on the Lutheran Church in Russia**

After the Revolution the new Red regime needed to have the support of the peasant population, so it could only attack the churches indirectly to avoid antagonism toward the government. The groundwork for the destruction of religion was an indirect attack. Anti-church measures were included in the legislative decrees of the first weeks of the new regime.

In December 1917 the Red regime transferred control of parish schools and seminaries to the Commissariat for the People’s Education. Civil marriage was instituted as the only legal means of marriage and the churches were deprived of their right to register births and marriages.

On February 2, 1918 all financial support for church institutions was cut off and payment of clergy salaries was stopped. On February 5, 1918 a comprehensive decree was issued which provided for “the separation of the Church from the state and the school from the Church.” Teaching religion in both public and private schools was forbidden. All property now owned by churches and religious organizations – land, church buildings, church furnishings, parsonages, schools and welfare institutions – were to become the property of the state. In 1921 the teaching of religion to anyone under the age of 18 was forbidden.

The free use of church buildings, now owned by the state, was abolished. Local soviets were encouraged to charge rent for use of church buildings for religion. The rents were so high so that the congregation could not pay the cost and the buildings were then converted into other uses.

The regime understood it had to eliminate the clergy and lay leaders, but it could not be done directly or they would appear as martyrs. So they were accused of a variety of crimes against the state. Many were arrested, imprisoned and executed during the reign of terror. Many bishops were killed during this period. The moral code of religion was ridiculed and divorce was encouraged by easy means. The Lutheran clergy, driven out of their homes and deprived of their salaries, were dependent on their congregations.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gerd Stricker’s article “The Problems of Theological Education: the Experience of Lutheran Institutions in the CIS,” which appeared in German in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000, states that within the boundaries of the Soviet Union in 1918 there were 178 Lutheran parishes for 1,500 congregations. In 1918, there were 183 pastors in office, but by 1922 only 84 pastors remained. The number of pastors steadily decreased each year until there were only 10 in 1936, and none in 1937. The last church closed in 1938.

## The battle over religion

In spite of great losses during the revolutionary period, religion had survived that first phase of Communist persecution. As publishers of the magazine *The Godless Worker* and a newspaper called *The Godless*, Emilian Jaroslavsky and Anatole Lunacharsky attempted to eradicate religion in Russian life through ridicule. Despite the support of the Communist Party, the impact of these publications was minimal. In December 1929 they launched a campaign of propaganda against observing Christmas.

The liquidation of clergy now began side by side with that of the kulaks. Lutheran losses of clergy had been heavy during the revolution and civil war. The number of Lutheran clergy was 198 in 1914 and only 81 in 1924.

Amazingly, still believing the church could survive the Communist regime, those leaders remaining met in a General Synod in Moscow in June 1924. They reorganized the church structure and the scattered German settlements were divided into 14 synodical districts: 12 in European Russia and 2 in Siberia. Each was supervised by a head pastor and all were subject to the High Consistory headed by two elected bishops, Artur Malmgren of Leningrad and Theophil Meyer of Moscow.

To overcome the lack of pastors, the General Synod agreed to set up a theological seminary in Leningrad. The theological faculty of Dorpat University in Latvia, formerly the chief source of clergy in Russia, was no longer part of the USSR. Malmgren was appointed head of the seminary and asked to supervise the Church's relationships with Lutheranism in Western Europe. Meyer was asked to supervise the synodical districts scattered over the vast parts of Russia.

They had very little time. The arrest of pastors became a common occurrence during the summer of 1929<sup>26</sup> and increased in the following years, reaching a high point in 1934. In 1930 alone, 27 German Lutheran clergy were sent to slave labor camps. Of the 81 pastors in service in 1924 and the 57 others who had graduated from the Leningrad seminary in the ten years that it existed, only a few managed to escape to Western Europe. The majority ended their days as slaves of the secret police. When Bishop Malmgren left Russia for Germany in 1936 there were only ten Lutheran pastors left free in all of Russia. By the fall of 1937 nine of these ten had been arrested and the other sent home to Finland.

## Hope turns to persecution and deportation to slave labor camps

During the first years after the Revolution in 1918, there was an official separation of church and state. In spite of an anti-religion political climate, the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia received a new constitution in 1924. But this constitution was soon unacceptable to the state. In the 1930s, growing persecution of German minorities, and of Christians in general, ended in official acts of persecution. In 1937 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia ceased to exist.

The Soviet leadership decided to deport the entire German population in the Black Sea and Volga areas of the USSR to Middle Asia and Siberia. Only the western part of Ukraine was spared because of advancing German troops. Those remaining Germans kept some churches open, but they were deported eastward by the Soviet security services as soon as the Ukrainian territory had been "liberated" from Hitler's control. Lutheran congregations then ceased to exist. By 1942 almost all Germans in Ukraine had been deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan, except for 130,000 German-Russians in the Odessa area who got a temporary reprieve when the German Wehrmacht occupied the area.

The Lutheran Church in Ukraine was dead. All buildings belonging to the church were nationalized and misused as sports centers, libraries, swimming pools, or other businesses. Most pastors were deported or murdered. The lay leaders who took over the work of the pastors were also sent into slave labor camps. Public church services and prayer meetings ceased. The local soviets then converted the church buildings into other uses. German Lutheranism in Russia had been liquidated, except in the hearts of the people.

The Catholic Church suffered the same fate. The Mennonite and Baptist leaders were harder to identify since they had lay-preacher leaders, but these, too, were soon closed down.

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<sup>26</sup> Due to the famous Law on Religion of 1929, which made possible the "legal" destruction of all religious societies.

## **The result on the Lutheran Church in Russia**

Churches were closed down and Germans either escaped to the west or were deported to forced labor camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan. This is the long sad story from 1914 to about 1956 when millions of German-Russians died. After 1956 some of the restrictions were relaxed and Germans with Russian citizenship were allowed to move to areas with less severe climates, but were not allowed to return to their old homes and villages.

## **Part III 1946-2008**

### ***What happened to the Lutheran Church between 1945 and 1990?***

The Lutheran Church was absent in the USSR, including Ukraine, for fifty years from 1942 to 1992. Despite being officially banned, a few Lutheran congregations were registered in the USSR in the 1960s. But there were none in Ukraine until 1990.

In 1988 Mikhail Gorbachov allowed a new beginning for the establishment of church structures and congregations. An invitation was later extended by Leonid Kravchuk, president of Ukraine, by then an independent nation, for 400,000 Germans from Middle Asia and Siberia to resettle in Ukraine. It is not known exactly how many Germans actually accepted this invitation and resettled in the new Ukraine.

However, there were some earlier attempts at reorganizing the Lutheran church in Russia. Toward the end of 1960 a number of congregations were officially registered in the deportation areas. Pastor Harald Kalnins of Riga, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, was permitted to visit them. He was ordained as bishop of the deported Lutherans in Soviet Asia in 1988 and allowed to build up a church structure.<sup>27</sup> The first evidence of a revival of Lutheran presence in Ukraine occurred in a Christmas service held in Odessa in 1990. Three students from the theological seminary in Riga, Latvia, which had been established by Bishop Kalnins, were called to serve the congregations in Ukraine.

### ***What is happening with the Lutheran Church today?***

There are three Lutheran organizations operating in Ukraine today. All three groups have members of German-Russian heritage, as well as those of every other nationality present in Ukraine. Altogether, there are about 75 congregations in the three Lutheran denominations with a total of only 8,000 people in the area of Ukraine and Moldavia; an area that contains 55 million inhabitants.

#### **SELCU:**

The Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Ukraine is connected to and supported by the Lutheran Church of Canada and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.<sup>28</sup> When Russia opened up for mission work, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod took over missions in the republics of the USSR. Moldova and Ukraine were designated for Lutheran Church Canada.

SELCU includes congregations in Kagarlyk, Armyansk, Krasnoperekopsk, Pyervomaisk, Central Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, three in the Savran area, Ochiryetnye, two in Nikolayevsk, Oktyabrskoy, Yalta, and Zariya.

The majority of these congregations are of German heritage, but use the Russian language in worship.

#### **ULC:**

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<sup>27</sup> From Stricker, "The Problem of Theological Education: the Experience of Lutheran Institutions in CIS" editor of *Russland Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas*, 1997, also in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt* January 2000, pp. 25-31.

<sup>28</sup> Our reports tell us that the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod does not financially support SELCU because it gives this area to its sister church the Lutheran Church Canada (LCC).

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church is connected to and supported by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (an American group also known as the Little Norwegian Synod). It has 25 congregations and 11 mission stations, 22 national pastors, 2 missionaries from the U.S. and 2,500 members. The Ukrainian Lutheran Church started in the Reformation times, then died out. In the 1930s it revived and had congregations in Stanislav, Mykytyntsi, Krekhivtsi, Litsk, Stari Bohorodchany, Kaminna, Zarvanytsya, Antonivtsa, and Poberezhzhi. But in 1939 church leaders were arrested and killed by KGB.

In 1996 the church body was officially registered and developed the Ukrainian Theological Seminary St. Sophia in Ternopil.<sup>29</sup> Presently it has congregations in Kiev, L'viv, Ternopil, Kremenitz, Zaporizhzhya, Sevastopol, Simeropol, Kharkiv, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Mariupol. The language of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church is Ukrainian. This contrasts with other Lutherans of German origin, who are now making a transition from German to the Russian language.

#### **GELCU:**

The largest of the Lutheran Church organizations in Ukraine is the German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (GELCU). GELCU is connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada<sup>30</sup> and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. GELCU includes 40 congregations.

GELCU is also a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELCROS), which is the largest Lutheran Church organization in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). CIS is an organization of nations which used to be part of the USSR.

Unfortunately, the split that exists among Lutherans in North America has now been taken to Ukraine since different divisions of the North American Lutheran Church support different groups in Ukraine. The ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) and its Canadian partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada (ELCIC), support the GELCU. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod supports missions and congregations outside Ukraine, while Lutheran Church Canada supports SELCU. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod supports the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, which is a small group of Ukrainian-language churches.

## **The new beginning for the Lutheran Church in Russia & Ukraine**

In 1992 the Lutheran Church was re-created with the historic name German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine (GELCU). The Martin-Luther-Bund organization in Germany provided an immense amount of assistance with this new beginning. The majority of members are people with German roots. In the beginning there were large numbers of baptisms and confirmations. Now there are smaller numbers because many have returned to Germany, using church membership as the route to return. The average age of the church members is now 50 years of age.<sup>31</sup>

The first synod of the GELCU in Kiev from January 31 through February 2, 1992. It had representatives from four registered congregations: Kiev, L'viv, Odessa, and Dnipropetrovsk. Also representatives of congregations in Zaporizhzhya and Kharkiv took part as guests of the convention. Mr. Juri Schaefer was elected president and Viktor Graefenstein the superintendent or spiritual leader. A representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Germany, Claus-Juergen Röpke, was present.

After 1992 it was possible for Lutheran communities to regain ownership of some of their church buildings lost in the 1930s. Things then began to move forward. At the synodical meeting in 1994, 21 congregations were represented and in the 1995 convention, 26 congregations were represented. At the 1994 synod meeting the constitution of GELCU was adopted and Peter Giesbrecht was elected as head of the new church council. The constitution was adapted to that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELCROS), an organization with 500 congregations throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

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<sup>29</sup> St. Sophia Theological Seminary in Ternopil is supported by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Academic oversight is carried out by Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, according to Gerd Stricker in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000.

<sup>30</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada does not financially support GELCU at this time.

<sup>31</sup> Report written January 2008 by Karl-Heinz Ulrich entitled, "The History and the aspects for the future of the German Evangelical - Lutheran Church of the Ukraine."

In 1992 the ruin of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Odessa was returned to the church members. The first official rededication of a former Lutheran Church building was on October 10, 1993 in Dnipropetrovsk. In 1992 a new lay preacher's seminary was established under the leadership of Pastor Walter Klinger. In the fall of 1993 the first lay ministers were commissioned for service to congregations in Kiev, Krivoy Rog, Nikolaev, L'viv, Kremenschug, Poltava, and Peterstal.

In the synodical meeting of 1995 Superintendent Graefenstein announced his resignation because of theological differences. Superintendent Graefenstein established a new church body with several congregations who followed him. Those churches are now part of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Ukraine (SELCU) and supported by the Lutheran Church Canada. As successor to Viktor Graefenstein, the synod of GELCU elected Pastor Walter Klinger who served until 1998.

On September 1, 2000 the GELCU had 2,372 registered members<sup>32</sup> of which 1,500 were confirmed. Many others attended, giving a total of 4,000 affiliated members. Kiev, Odessa, Kharkhiv, and Dnipropetrovsk have the largest congregations, each over 200 members. Other congregations have less than 100 members. The smallest are Feodosiya and Mariupol each with ten members. In 2000, 32 congregations were registered members of GELCU with five congregations in formative status. A parish has been formed in Crimea consisting of five congregations. The congregations around Odessa are served from Odessa. Congregations/parishes were formed around Donetsk, Krivoy Rog and L'viv during 2000.

After a thorough debate, a new constitution was adopted in September 2000 at the seventh Synodical Convention. The church retained the adjective "German" and the church considers itself to be a regional church of the ELCROS organization. After long emotional debate the ordination of women was rejected. The leader of the church is now known as bishop. On September 14, 2000, at Peterstal near Odessa, the Archbishop Dr. Georg Kretschmar of ELCROS consecrated Dr. Edmund Ratz as the bishop of GELCU. This seventh synodical meeting also elected Pastor Wladimir Lenog from Crimea as president of the synod. Together with the bishop, the church council forms the leadership of GELCU with offices in Odessa.

In the last 16 years there have been 40 congregations reestablished with about 2,500 members. Eight congregations were added between 2000 and 2002. There is one bishop from Germany and 7 church districts with district pastors in all of Ukraine. The places where Lutheran churches are open within the GELCU are:

- Kharkhiv: two pastors, four parishes (one pastor from Ukraine and one from Germany)
- Crimea: one pastor (from Ukraine) and six parishes
- Odessa: two pastors, three parishes and four preaching places (one pastor from Germany and one from Ukraine)
- Dnipropetrovsk: one pastor (from Ukraine) and two parishes
- L'viv: two pastors, two parishes, and one pastor for the youth (one pastor from Poland and one from the Czech Republic)
- Kiev: two pastors and four parishes (one pastor from Germany and one from Ukraine)
- Schlangendorf: two pastors and two parishes (one pastor from Germany and one from Ukraine)
- Donetsk: one retired pastor (from Germany) and four parishes<sup>33</sup>

Total: 27 parishes/congregations and four additional preaching places.

## **The struggles of the new Lutheran missions**

In Ukraine there are approximately 30,000 people with a German background, but the majority of them are not members of GELCU. That is probably no different than in other parts of the modern world. Ukraine is now dominated by the Orthodox Church and by atheistic views from 70 years of Communist rule. The Baptist Church

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<sup>32</sup> Different numbers of the actual memberships in GELCU are given in various reports. Karl-Heinz Ulrich reports 2,500 members in his report, "The History and the aspects for the Future of the German Evangelical - Lutheran Church of Ukraine."

<sup>33</sup> From the report of Karl-Heinz Ulrich January 2008, "The History and the aspects for the Future of the German Evangelical - Lutheran Church of the Ukraine." (GELCU or in German, DELKU Deutschen Evangelisch Lutherischen Kirche Ukraine). The location of the other nine congregations is not known.

has had success in the southern area of Bessarabia, especially among Ukrainian ethnic populations.<sup>34</sup> An example of this is the former Lutheran church building in Sarata, Bessarabia which was turned over to the Baptist Church in 1994. Both the Baptist and Orthodox Churches have officially invited representatives at the GELCU conventions.

In spite of GELCU deciding not to ordain women, women are very engaged, well educated, and do much of the work of a pastor.

The second pastor in Odessa has responsibilities to the parish, is head of the department of education of the GELCU, and is also responsible for youth work. Every summer he conducts ten camps for the youth in the mountains.<sup>35</sup>

Efforts continue to regain more of the church property that was confiscated in 1942. The GELCU is mostly financed by their partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria. Since there are only a small number of pastors, the majority of the daily work in the congregations is done by lay people, who are carrying the church.

The GELCU mission plan for 2007 was:<sup>36</sup>

- Biblical foundation for all members of the church
- Education for the leaders and then for the people
- Religious welfare of everyone in the parish
- Service or Diaconia in every parish.

## **St. Catherine Lutheran Church in Kiev<sup>37</sup>**

This congregation was founded in 1767 and today is the largest Lutheran church by membership in Ukraine, with 350 members. On Advent Sunday 1998 the church was returned to the German Lutheran congregation. A worship celebration on October 29, 2000 marked the re-consecration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Catherine in Kiev, which had been used for secular purposes for 60 years.

Originally built in 1857, the church was closed down by the authorities in 1938 and used as a goods depot. From 1969 to 1996 it housed the Museum for the Architecture and Customs of the People of Ukraine. During this time the nave of the church was divided and the front half turned into a community center with facilities for food distribution. Presently the sanctuary, with its nave and galleries, has a seating capacity of 600 people. The re-consecration of the church followed the conclusion of two years of renovation.

## **St. Paul Lutheran Church of Odessa**

St. Paul Lutheran church was built in 1897, with space for 1,200 people. St. Paul's of Odessa was the third largest Lutheran Cathedral in the former Soviet Union, only St. Peter's in St. Petersburg and St. Peter and Paul in Moscow were larger.<sup>38</sup> In 1900 there were 10,000 Germans in Odessa, mostly Evangelical Lutheran. But in 1941, the German population of Odessa was deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia.

When Jurij Schaefer was seven months old, his parents carried him into a concentration camp run by the KGB. Fifty years later Schaefer returned to Odessa. But with no German Lutheran church in Odessa, he had to go to Riga to hear a German Lutheran pastor preach and he said that after all that time "it was like music to his ears." In 1992 the

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<sup>34</sup> Pastor Horst Gutsche reports that approximately eight percent of Ukrainians are now Baptists.

<sup>35</sup> From Karl-Heinz Ulrich report, "The History and the aspects for the Future of the German Evangelical - Lutheran Church of the Ukraine."

<sup>36</sup> From report written by Pastor Karl-Heinz Ulrich, pastor in Odessa, January 2008. Pastor Ulrich's grandfather lived in Borodino, Bessarabia but Karl-Heinz was born in northern Germany after the war. Unfortunately, he has recently returned to Germany for treatment of a serious case of tuberculosis. In March 2008, Karl-Heinz Ulrich conducted the first Lutheran worship service in Bessarabia since 1940 in Tarutino, where he hoped to establish a new parish.

<sup>37</sup> From website Kiev, Churches and Cathedrals on Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Catherine in Kiev, Ukraine [www.bestofukraine.com/churches.htm](http://www.bestofukraine.com/churches.htm).

<sup>38</sup> From a report of Dr. Claus-Juergen Roepke, president of Martin-Luther-Bund.

GELCU was organized and Jurij Schaefer was the president of the first synod.

One of the projects of the Martin-Luther-Bund organization of Germany is to renovate the historic St. Paul Lutheran Church. To renovate St. Paul, Martin-Luther-Bund formed a foundation in Odessa called “Fonds Theophil Richter” and known as “Evangelische Odessa Stiftung” in Munich, Germany. Both are public foundations. These foundations have helped raise funds to furnish St. Paul’s interior. This project’s financial support comes from donations from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, subsidies from the German and Bavarian governments and donations from Martin-Luther-Bund and Gustav-Adolf-Werk and other Lutheran churches in Germany. The renovation of St. Paul required €5.4-6.4 million.

The GELCU formed a partner affiliation with the Lutheran Church of Bavaria. The Bavarian Lutheran church of Germany, of which GELCU Bishop Guentsch is a member, contributed €2.6 million to the St. Paul renovation project. The Bavarian Social Services Ministry (Sozialministerium) gave €300,000 and the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesinnenministerium) gave €30,000

In the old days, St. Paul’s had a beautiful set of bells. During the Revolution, they were thrown from the tower and destroyed. In 2002, two new small bells were donated to the parish center next door. Next year, more bells are to be added to complete the set for the parish center. According to information from Dr. Claus-Juergen Roepke, president of Martin-Luther-Bund, the three new bells will cost about €49,000. The bells will be cast early next year if funding can be obtained. (German church and government resources for the St. Paul renovation are now exhausted, so further work will depend on individual gifts.)

The fall 2008 report on the reconstruction of St. Paul’s talked of good progress being made.<sup>39</sup> The plan is for the St. Paul Lutheran Church to be a combined center of church life, culture, encounter, and business. The front part of the church will be rebuilt as the church sanctuary and a concert hall. The outside structure will be restored as a whole. In place of the apse, which was badly damaged, is a new building that matches the style of the old architecture.

This new part of the building will provide office space and become home to the Odessa Bavarian House as well as a library and space for church office staff. Office space will also be provided to some German organizations supported by the German government. Some offices will be rented to businesses to ensure sustainable funding for the St. Paul German Center in the future.

Since May 2008 the spire of the main tower is being rebuilt so the gilt cross can be put back on top. Inside the church, plastering is making progress. Decisions have been made on artwork. By the end of the year a total of 36 stained glass windows (some of them very large) will be fitted into place. The new section has reached the fourth floor. Restoring the facade is a very labor-intensive process and utilities needed throughout the building come at substantial cost.

The hope is to dedicate the church and the St. Paul German Center in the fall of 2009 or in the spring of 2010. If the plans are blessed by God, all will fall into place. The reconstruction of St. Paul’s means preserving the most important architectural monument that the German culture and heritage created in the region previously known as South Russia.

## **Lutheran congregation in Tarutino, Bessarabia, Ukraine**

On March 14, 2008 the first Lutheran worship service was conducted in Tarutino since the resettlement of Germans in Bessarabia in 1940. The service was led by Karl-Heinz Ulrich, pastor of the GELCU in Odessa. Pastor Ulrich was born in northern Germany after World War II. Ten people attended this service, mainly those with German background and some of them born in the region. (After the resettlement and escape to Germany, they were taken by the Soviets in East Germany and returned to their former living area.)

Also present at the worship service was Alexander Jungmeister, a representative of a Ukrainian-German

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<sup>39</sup> A report was sent by Dr. Claus-Juergen Roepke, president of Martin-Luther-Bund to Michael Miller of North Dakota State University telling about progress on the renovation of St. Paul Lutheran Church of Odessa. The report was forwarded to R. Reuben Drefs November 2008.

organization in Odessa. Alexander has been providing assistance in the Tarutino area in humanitarian ways for more than two years. Mr. Jungmeister and Pastor Ulrich wished to begin a small congregation in Tarutino. Plans are to continue this regularly from Odessa. A family from Germany, which lives in the region of Tarutino and is working there, attends this church.

## Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States<sup>40</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELCROS) has approximately 16,000 members; counting children, adults and non-confirmed church members the number 80,000 is assumed. With its 500 congregations ELCROS is the most significant Lutheran Church in the Commonwealth of Independent States, a group of nations formerly in the USSR.

ELCROS was founded in 1988. Theological education began first in Riga in 1989, then in Sibiu, Romania, at the Theological Institute of the Transylvanian Germans, and after 1993 near St. Petersburg (which became Novosaratovka Seminary in 1997.)<sup>41</sup> ELCROS is the administrative body of the regional Lutheran churches, and has a general synod with yearly meetings at which time reports are made and decisions are voted upon.

In order to survive, the ELCROS churches in modern Russia and Ukraine have developed partnerships with the Lutheran churches abroad.

The member groups of ELCROS are the following:<sup>42</sup>

ELCROS Member	Congregations	Pastors	Preachers	Partnerships
Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia	133	48	50	NW Washington Synod of ELCA
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Urals, Siberia and the far east	144	9	104	Lutheran Church of Hannover and Central States (Kansas, Missouri) Synod ELCA
German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine	40	13	23	Lutheran Church of Bavaria
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kazakhstan	54	11	33	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mecklenburg and Westphalia
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kyrgyz Republic	16	5	6	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Uzbekistan	7	2	10	Gustav Adolf congregation of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hessen and Nassau

<sup>40</sup> Information can be found under: KALME:ELCROS:Structure of the Church and also in ELCROS NEWS

<sup>41</sup> "The Problems of Theological Education: the Experience of Lutheran Institutions in the CIS" by Dr. Gerd Stricker, this article appeared in German in *Glaube in der 2ten Welt*, January 2000, pp. 25-31. Der Glaube in der 2ten Welt is a research institute near Zurich, Switzerland, that publishes a journal by the same name.

<sup>42</sup> Gerd Stricker in his article published by *Glaube in der 2tn Welt*, January 2000 indicates that there are other Lutheran churches besides those with a German orientation. The Finno-Ingrian Lutheran Church had 32 parishes and 70 congregations of 147,000 members in 1930. Today it is a small group of 45 congregations and ten pastors and supported by the Lutheran Churches of Finland and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod of USA. The basic language is now Russian with a Finnish heritage.

Stricker also states that there is a Russian Lutheran congregation in Akademgorodok near Novosibirsk. Although small, Novosibirsk does not want ties to a German Lutheran group. Instead, it has ties to Estonia and support from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod USA. The information from this 2000 article is not supported by the current information on the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's website which states the following: "Lutheran Church Missouri Synod World Mission began working in Russia in 1992, and assists both The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELKRAS) and The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (ELCI). At the 1998 Synod Convention, the LCMS declared itself to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with the ELCI, and since that time, the ELCI has become the main mission partner in Russia of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's World Missions."

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Georgia	6 + 10 local groups	2	2 lectors	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belorussia	6	1	4	Gustav Adolf agency
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Azerbaijan	1	1	1	
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tajikistan	1 (Duschanbe)			

## ELCROS News

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States (ELCROS) publishes an annual report. This report tells of the main activities of each of the regional churches.

For the year 2002 a substantial report on the Lutheran missions in Ukraine is available. In the German Evangelical Lutheran Church Ukraine there were 40 congregations, 10 full-time pastors, 3 vicars, and 40 lay preachers. The administrative office is in Odessa and the church has a close partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. The highest decision making body is the regional church convention called the "synod assembly." The daily administration of the church is overseen by the regional church council and the bishop. Bishop Edmund Ratz was head of Ukraine Regional Church since 2000. In 2005 Georg Guentsch of Bavaria arrived in Odessa. On October 11, 2006 Georg Guentsch was ordained as bishop of GELCU and Dr. Ratz was moved into the ELCROS leadership, administrating all the regional churches.

In 2002 GELCU listed 40 congregations. The 29 listed in the materials sent by Martin-Luther-Bund and *ELCROS News* shows the following: Kiev(4), Odessa(2), Khar'kov(4), Dnepropetrovsk(2), Feodosiva(1), Mariupol(1), Donetsk(4), Krivoy Rog(1), L'viv (formerly Lemberg) (2), Zmeyevka (formerly Schlangendorf) (1), Kherson(1), Mykolayiv(1), Petrodolina(1), Novogradovka(1), Belaya Tserkov(1), Berdichev(1), Yevpatori(1).

The 2002 *ELCROS News* reported on the struggle to obtain church buildings lost in 1930s. A plea for worship in Russian and Ukrainian languages was made so the church would become a church with local people rather than a nationality church. There is not much future in remaining an ethnic German church. The other main issue was pushing ahead to become more self supporting so that the church does not have to rely so much on financial assistance from places abroad.

In the *ELCROS News 2007* the Ukrainian report shows: 40 congregations, 15 regular pastors, and 23 preachers. The spiritual leader of the church is Bishop Georg Guentsch. The church center is in Odessa. This is a gain of five pastors since 2002 reports, a few less lay preachers and the same number of congregations. There is a new mission in Tarutino, Bessarabia which began in March 2008.

The 2002 *ELCROS News* also reported:

- The Mykolayiv Lutheran church, used as a sports club for many years, had recently been restored.
- The Lutheran church in Johannestal (now Ivanivka) holds services about once a month.
- A Lutheran church was built for the German resettlement camp in Peterstal.

The Martin-Luther-Bund has the following reports on Lutheran churches in Ukraine.

- The church in Berdjansk was returned to the Lutheran community in the summer of 2007.
- The Donetsk congregation is led by Ludmila Pelich.
- A new building in Makeevka was completed with funding from Germany and the church is led by Pastor Gerd Sander.
- In Crimea, Pastor Michael Wolf leads a Bible study hour in Yalta. Pastor Wolf recently learned that the church building will be returned.
- In Kertsch, Crimea, a house for the congregation was purchased with financial support of the Martin-Luther-Bund organization.

## Novosaratovka Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of ELCROS

Timeline for the seminary:

- In 1763 German-Russian emigrants from the Volga moved to a St. Petersburg suburb and named it Novosaratovka, or New Saratov, after their main town in the Volga region.
- In 1766 they built a wooden church for their Lutheran services and named it St. Catherine after Tsarina Catherine the Great.
- In 1833 the colonists built a new stone church.
- In 1835 the stone church was dedicated.
- In 1900 the town of Novosaratovka had 1,100 people, mostly ethnic Germans.
- After the revolution in 1917, and later in 1935, the church was closed.
- In 1941 the last of the German population was deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan.
- During WWII, the bell tower was removed because the authorities were afraid it would be used as an orientation point for German military planes.
- After the war the church was renovated and made into a school.
- In 1987 the school was closed and a driving school occupied the building.
- In 1994 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia received the building in terrible shape. "One can recognize the old, classical church structure thanks to the classical columns near the western entrance, the narthex in front of the chapel and the arched windows."<sup>43</sup>
- On May 1, 1997, after a period of reconstruction, the first classes were held in the building of the Novosaratovka Theological Seminary. The seminary was dedicated to the preparation of pastors for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia (ELCROS).<sup>44</sup> The degree offered is the Bachelor of Theology.
- On September 26, 1998 the seminary was dedicated.
- In July 200 the first graduation occurred.

The inspiration for the seminary at Novosaratovka came about when Gerhard Krodel, a former dean and professor at Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania) went to Russia and observed the fledgling new Lutheran Missions in 1992.<sup>45</sup> He returned to the U.S. and raised \$1.5 million to support the Novosaratovka Seminary over thirteen years.

Krodel spoke of his experience in Russia to members of his Sunday School class in Virginia. Lay members became excited about the ministry in Russia and formed the LENS foundation: Lutheran Endowment for the Novosaratovka Seminary (<http://www.lensfoundation.org/>). LENS has a goal to provide \$40,000 annually for student aid, stipends for pastors furthering their education, and to pay some salaries. LENS's second goal is to provide a \$1 million endowment as a long-term commitment for student aid. Thirty Lutheran churches and many individuals and groups have supported this foundation.

The website for the Novosaratovka seminary is: <http://en.novosaratovka.org/>.

## The Lutheran Church in Moldova

Pastor Moser has constituted a church body called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Moldova (ELCRM). Moser lives in Tiraspol, which is in the self-governing Trans-Dniester Republic part of Moldova. He serves five congregations which are independent of the SELCU, but supported by the Lutheran Church Canada and Norske Lutherske Lekmansmisjon. A report of December 2007 says that the Norwegian Lutheran Mission Society sent \$20,000 for the purchase of a building in Tiraspol, Moldova.

The ELCRM congregations are:

- Tiraspol began in 1994 and now has 70 adults and 15 children, with 40 regularly attending worship.

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<sup>43</sup> From a report of the building of the Novosaratovka Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, reported by the LENS Foundation of Virginia. See the LENS website at <http://www.lensfoundation.org/>.

<sup>44</sup> The Novosaratovka Seminary sees itself in the tradition of the Lutheran seminary established in Leningrad in 1925. This seminary was allowed to exist until 1928 when it was moved. It was completely closed in 1930s.

<sup>45</sup> Gerhard Krodel also taught at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa while I attended Wartburg Seminary from 1961-1965.

- Kishinev has 20 people.
- Rybnitsa has 15 people.
- Bender/Tighina has 12 people.
- Kamenka, previously Unter Albota, has 25 people.

## **Conclusion**

In Ukraine, about 50 percent of the population is Orthodox and 2 percent are vangelical [Protestant?]. St. Paul Lutheran Church is a memorial for those who died in deportations and repressions of the 1930s and 1940s. Many Germans have returned to Germany, sometimes using their membership in the German Lutheran Church as the credential to return to Germany. Some, such as Jurij Petrowitsch Schaefer, have remained because they do not wish to lose their roots, but the German Lutheran Church of Ukraine is a small organization with only about 3,000 total membership.

## ***Some ways to help the Lutheran missions in Ukraine***

The NW Washington Synod and the Central States Synod have formed partnerships with the Lutheran Churches in the former Soviet Union (the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of European Russia and of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East). Other synods of ELCA or even individual congregations could form similar partnerships. This is an excellent way for a local congregation to become involved in global missions while helping struggling new congregations get on their feet.

In areas with significant German-Russian populations, North American congregations might also consider partnering with GELCU.

To find out more about what each of these organizations is doing in Ukraine:

- ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America): <http://www.elca.org/> and search for “Ukraine”
- ELCROS: [archive.elca.org/countrypackets/russia/elcros.html](http://archive.elca.org/countrypackets/russia/elcros.html)
- GELCU [www.georg-guentsch.de](http://www.georg-guentsch.de)
- LENS: [www.lensfoundation.org/](http://www.lensfoundation.org/)
- Martin-Luther-Bund: [www.martin-luther-bund.de](http://www.martin-luther-bund.de)