

Vision Petrozavodsk

By Carol and Paul Anderson

History of Mission, September 2024

[**Editor's Note from Bill Moberly:** I was the new Director of what was then East European Mission Network (EEMN) in June 2004, when Paul and Carol worked with Don Richman to start the first "Lutheran" Friendship English Language Camp in Petrozavodsk. I worked with Paul and Carol over the next ten years, as well as with Alex and Nadya Krongholm, from those early days as *Vision Petrozavodsk* came together. Watching it unfold and being a small part of it along the way was an amazing blessing. I am thankful they accepted my invitation to share the full story in this issue of *CGM* magazine! It's a simple and powerful testimony of what can happen when the Living Lord Jesus uses faithful people to take steps of faith, one step at a time! To God be the Glory.]

Vision Petrozavodsk, a Journey



“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”



Map of Russia (public domain), courtesy of CIA World Factbook, with added relevant info

It All Began in 1991

Carol and I vividly recall the wheels touching down at the St. Petersburg, Russia, airport back in January 1991, our first visit to Russia. Duluth had established a sister-city relationship with Petrozavodsk, and the purpose of the trip was to help set up an exchange program between the Petrozavodsk State University Medical School and our University of Minnesota Medical School-Duluth Campus in Duluth, Minnesota.



Meeting with Medical School faculty and students

A providential connection:

Before we left for Petrozavodsk, we had been asked by church leaders in Duluth if we would inquire about possible connections with churches. With help from our gracious hosts, we learned about and visited the Lutheran church there – we hadn't even been aware that there were Lutherans in Russia! We also had no idea this would lead to 13 later trips to Russia as participants in developing a ministry with this church, eventually referred to as Vision Petrozavodsk – this story is a summary of that journey.

We were warmly welcomed by the Petrozavodsk Lutheran congregation and learned about the long history of the “Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria

in Russia” (ELCIR), about the devastation of the ELCIR during the Stalin years, and about the “Saints” who kept the faith alive and were instrumental in efforts to begin rebuilding the ELCIR.



First Petrozavodsk Lutheran Church building, built in 1983 with help from Finland churches



Warm hospitality with tea (Maria on right)

A story of faith:

One of these Saints, Maria Kajavan [a member of the Petrozavodsk congregation], shared her story with us. In the 1930s, her family was shipped to Siberia, one night her husband was taken away and never seen again, and both daughters died. In the 1950s, Maria was shipped to Petrozavodsk to work in the sawmills, but she never gave up her faith. She gathered believers together for worship and Bible study, and ultimately secured a meeting with an authority in the Kremlin to request permission for their faith community to be registered as an approved congregation. When she was shown to his office, she prayed, “Jesus, you go first!” Her request was approved.



Cover of Maria Kajavan biography



Baptisms at day-care in Shunga

Paul returned that summer with our pastor, Peter Strommen, one objective being to establish a Friendship Congregation relationship. While there, at the request of the congregation, they visited the village of Shunga and were asked to baptize 120 kids at the day-care center and 24 adults in their homes.

Called:

Looking back, these two visits in 1991 helped define the vision that led us to continue following up on opportunities, which always seemed to show up as next steps leading to *Vision Petrozavodsk*. We had a sense of call that there was a need and place for a Lutheran perspective for witnessing to and benefitting the Russian people about the peace, joy, and righteousness that accompanies the Gospel by the Grace of God.

One Thing Leads to Another: 1992 – 1993

The Petrozavodsk congregation invited us to return the following summer, 1992. We spent two weeks in Shunga at the invitation of the Shunga mayor, conducting “Bible study” with kids (including a young boy named “Max”) during the day and adults in the evenings, with many wonderful gatherings with families and town leaders.

Responding to an invitation:

While at the Petrozavodsk congregation, we received an invitation to meet with the directors of the Department of Education for the Province of Karelia – to our surprise, they asked if churches in Duluth could provide Bibles for the 150,000 school kids in Karelia!! We shared this request when we returned home and it was decided to go forward. We established a 501-3c organization called *Sister City Ministry, Inc.* Many of the churches in Duluth got involved, and aided by the American Bible Society, the needed funds were raised, New Testaments were purchased in Australia and shipped to Petrozavodsk. In the summer of 1993, 36 individuals from churches in Duluth visited the 18 Karelian school districts in

pairs, helping distribute the Bibles. Some years later we visited Shunga – Max’s mother showed us a tattered copy of one of those Bibles, sharing with us that he had been very ill and had found solace in reading it.



Meeting with Directors of Education for Karela

A Meaningful Connection with the ELCIR

The late Pastor Antti Lepisto proposed establishing a Companion Synod relationship between the ELCIR and our N.E. MN Synod, which was adopted at the 2002 Synod Assembly. A Synod Task Force was formed, which became the focal point for coordinating the many meaningful exchange visits and ministry partnerships that subsequently developed between several churches and many individuals here and in Russia, including financial support for several new ELCIR church buildings.

Ministry Continues to Evolve

We connected with Pastor Don Richman, founder of *East European Mission Network (EEMN)*, in the mid-1990s when he heard about our relationship with the Petrozavodsk church. The focus of EEMN (now renamed SON, *Spiritual Orphans Network*) was to provide opportunities to work with Lutheran congregations in Russia and the Eastern-bloc countries of the Soviet Union in their ministries of rebuilding after the years of devastation under communism. Don had started an outreach program for youth in a public school in Petrozavodsk called *Friendship English Language (Bible) Camp (FELC)* as a way of getting youth interested in the Petrozavodsk Lutheran church.



Nadia Krongolm

In 2004, he asked if we would help co-direct a “Lutheran” FELC with a young woman he had met at the Petrozavodsk Lutheran church, Nadia Krongolm. The idea was to invite Lutheran kids and for them to invite friends. Nadia was a public-school English teacher who had become a Christian and was volunteering in youth work at the Lutheran church. The FELC was very successful and continued several years thereafter. We were particularly impressed by Nadia’s spiritual gifts and her understanding of discipleship. We asked if she’d thought about being a youth worker in the church. One thing led to another and our church, First Lutheran in Duluth, came up with part-time support for her in youth ministry.



Nadia with Youth Leadership Team



“Lutheran” FELC kids, 2004

The Spirit Leads

Antti Lepisto encouraged us to contact Saint James Lutheran Church in West St. Paul, which had a connection to Petrozavodsk. We were invited to give an Adult Forum, which had a wonderful reception. A week later we received a call from Pastor Michael Albrecht to say their church had voted to contribute substantial yearly financial support for the Petrozavodsk congregation – this was quite a surprise, as we had not mentioned anything about contributing financially!



Pastor Alexei and Nadia Krongolm

And again:

In 2007, Paul met with ELCIR Bishop Arri Kugappi and Tapio Karjalainen (a missionary from the Lutheran Church in Finland and the Rector of the seminary), to inquire about plans for Alexei Krongolm (Nadia's husband, a spiritually gifted and capable young man), who was graduating from the ELCIR seminary. They wanted to call him to be youth pastor for the "Deanery" in Karelia, based out of the Petrozavodsk church, working with Nadia, but they had no resources. Paul asked them to hold off and we'd see if there was some opportunity for support. On the plane on the way home from the FELC program in Petrozavodsk, we visited with *Pastor* Pastor Tim White (who had also been at the FELC) from Trinity Lutheran in Columbus, NE, about participating.

They subsequently budgeted a significant monthly contribution, which along with some additional funds from our church, made placement of Alexei possible.

And again:

In 2010, Alexei shared with Paul that he needed to resign and find a secular job because he couldn't support his family (a serious problem for pastors in the ELCIR). Paul asked him to hold off and we'd inquire about possibilities back home, but we had no idea where the money would come from. We received a call from David Norland, pastor of New Life Lutheran (a new LCMC church forming in Duluth). They were looking for a global mission to support and had heard about this developing mission ministry. We met and had a very good visit; two weeks later we met again, and Pastor Norland proposed a substantial yearly contribution, asking if that would be helpful!

Since 2007 several other churches and many individuals (including many who had been volunteer staff for the FELCs) have donated or pledged support for Nadia and Alexei and the Petrozavodsk congregation, often at just the right time. In addition, many members from these and other churches have participated in exchange ministry visits.

Vision Petrozavodsk, a Ministry Partnership

The term "*Vision Petrozavodsk*" was chosen to describe this ministry partnership of several Lutheran churches, organizations, and individuals with the ELCIR congregation in Petrozavodsk. The **Mission** is to accompany the Petrozavodsk congregation in their ministry of "rebuilding" the church based on God's Word. The **Vision** is that the congregation become a financially self-sustaining, Spirit-filled worshiping community of faith in its mission of sharing the Gospel, serving as a "leadership center" for the ELCIR churches in Karelia.

We feel enormously privileged to have had the opportunity to be involved in this ministry with the Petrozavodsk Ingrian Lutheran Church and are full of gratitude for all those who were partners in this journey. We are especially grateful for the opportunity to become friends with Nadia and Alexei and to learn from them about living our faith. They are just what the ELCIR needs as leaders.

Epilogue

The pandemic and then the war with Ukraine has caused a major hiccup in the steady progress the congregation was making over the past decade in sustained growth leading to financial self-sufficiency. The devastating impact of the war on the church is not only financial, but also on the lives of members of the congregation and Russian citizens, including, e.g., despair, depression, disillusionment, grief over losses, and shortages. But under Pastor Alexei Krongolm's leadership, ministry continues despite the terrible situation. Efforts by *Vision Petrozavodsk* are especially important now to sustain the congregation, so it is active and ready to move forward when the war in Ukraine is over.

Paul stepped down as Coordinator of *Vision Petrozavodsk* a year ago. Susan (Sue) Brezny from Saint James Lutheran Church has enthusiastically assumed that responsibility and has a great Advisory Committee to help guide the ministry of *Vision Petrozavodsk*.

If you would like to be on the *Vision Petrozavodsk* Newsletter and Update Email list, please contact Sue at: susanbrezny@gmail.com



Carol and Paul Anderson both graduated from the University of Minnesota, Carol with a degree in Elementary Education, Paul with B.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Biochemistry. They are active members of First Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota, where they have lived for the past 52 years. Carol serves as Coordinator of the 4- and 5-year-old Sunday School classes at church and served as Director of the Children's Program for Community Bible Study in Duluth for 44 years. Paul retired in 2001 after 30 years of research and teaching the University of Minnesota Medical School-Duluth Campus as Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and has been involved in a variety of programs and initiatives at church. They have 3 children and 3 grandsons.

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Links:

Russia map: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/RS-map.jpg>

St. Petersburg: <https://www.britannica.com/place/St-Petersburg-Russia>

Russia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>

Petrozavodsk: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Petrozavodsk>

Medical School: <https://medipediaoverseas.com/petrozavodsk-state-medical-university.php>

Duluth Campus: <https://med.umn.edu/about/duluth-campus>

Vision Petrozavodsk:

<https://nemnsynod.org/companion-synod-relationships/what-is-vision-petrozavodsk/>

ELCIR: <https://elci.ru/>

Stalin: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Stalin>

Siberia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Siberia>

Kremlin: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moscow/The-Kremlin>

Shunga: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shunga,_Republic_of_Karelia

Karelia: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Karelia>

American Bible Society: <https://www.americanbible.org/>

NE MN Synod: <https://nemnsynod.org/companion-synod-relationships/russia/>

EEMN: <https://sonetwork.org/2020/06/12/telling-their-story-better/>

SON: <https://sonetwork.org/>

Soviet Union: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union>

Lutheran FELC: https://www.flcduluth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Russia_Nadia-article-of-2007-FELC.pdf

First Lutheran: <https://www.flcduluth.org/>

St. James: <https://saintjameslutheran.com/>

Trinity Lutheran: <https://trinityalive.org/>

New Life Lutheran: <https://newlifeduluth.org/>

Ukraine: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>