

# The Unbroken Hymn

By Valery Hryhoryk

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## The Resilience and Rebirth of Belarus' Lutheran Church

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Nestled amidst the fertile plains and dense forests of Eastern Europe, Belarus stands as a nation deeply marked by history. From the devastation of World War II, where every third citizen perished, to the enduring shadow of the Chernobyl disaster that rendered vast swathes of its land uninhabitable, Belarusians carry a legacy of hardship. Politically aligned with Russia and often described as Europe's "last dictatorship," its path since Soviet collapse has been complex, hindered economically by outdated models and restrictive politically.

Religiously, while 79% identify as Christian, the dominant Orthodox Church holds sway, often viewing other denominations with suspicion, a stance solidified by a highly restrictive 2002 Religion Law demanding state registration and limiting activities. Yet, within this challenging landscape, a story of remarkable resilience and quiet revival unfolds – the story of the Lutheran Church in Belarus and the home mission Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship (BLMF).

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## Roots Deep in History

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The Lutheran flame in Belarus was lit remarkably early. While Luther nailed his theses in Wittenberg, Belarusian humanist Francisk Skaryna was translating and publishing parts of the Bible in his native tongue in Prague, later bringing his press home, driven by a desire for his people to know God's Word. Quickly, Lutheran churches sprang up across the land, from Vitsyebsk to Polatsk, even finding resonance among some Orthodox clergy. For centuries, patronized by dukes and nobility, the church flourished independently.

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## Centuries of Suppression

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However, Belarus' turbulent history subjected its Lutherans to repeated devastation.

**The 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries:** Counter-Reformation pressures and the Union of Brest (1596), followed by the partitions of Poland-Lithuania absorbing Belarus into the Russian Empire (end of 18<sup>th</sup> century), stripped the church of its independence.

**The Soviet Era:** From 1919, systematic destruction ensued. Churches were shuttered, repurposed as archives (Grodno) or museums (Polatsk). The banning of the Vilno consistory in 1930 and full Soviet annexation completed the near-total eradication. Only three historic church buildings remain, with only Grodno's returned.

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## A Fragile Rebirth and New Foundation

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The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 left spiritual emptiness alongside economic ruin. In this void, three Lutheran parishes cautiously re-emerged in Grodno, Vitsyebsk, and Minsk. Hope surged with the founding Synod of the Belarus Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC) in Vitsyebsk in December 2000 and the ordination of a bishop in January 2001. Yet, internal struggles and leadership issues fractured the BELC by 2005, forcing many parishes to register independently, a precarious position under the restrictive laws. This is when the history of BLMF begins.

Recognizing the need for unity and spiritual nourishment, after much prayer to God, the Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship (BLMF) was formed, led by Pastor Valery Hryhoryk. Its core mission was clear:

1. Restore the Biblical, historical Lutheran Church in Belarus;
2. Make Disciples, proclaiming the Gospel and fulfilling Christ's Great Commission; and
3. Show Christ's Love through active charity and service.

In 2006, Pastor Valery Hryhoryk got in touch with Pastor Bill Moberly, a director of East European Missions Network (EEMN) in the USA, and after much prayer a partnership in the Gospel was established between EEMN and BLMF. BLMF also became a member of ELSA (European Lutheran Sunday School association, Norway), directed by Alf Dambolt, with the aim to restore Sunday School work in Belarus.



*Youth meeting and prayer during Pastor Bill's visit to BLMF in 2006*



*Pastor Bill and his wife Sally with the future deacon of the Holy Trinity congregation in Vitebsk (2006)*

Operating in an environment where non-Orthodox groups are often labelled "sects" and face political and ecclesiastical obstacles, the BLMF started, employing creativity and perseverance.

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## Nurturing Future Generations

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Annual Summer Bible Camps are going non-stop since 2005. God said to us that we need to grow our parishioners... it is vital to create conditions for talking about the Gospel. We gather youth and kids to grow faith lost under communism. We build relationships and plant seeds of truth! Bible camp became a place for many children to pray to the Great God for the first time in their lives. Seeing former camp children, like Nastya Zuboreva now bringing their own children, embodies the "succession of generations! Praise the Lord!



*Praying for the first time to the Great God at the Summer Bible camp, 2023*

*above: Former participant of the Bible camp in 2007 Nastya Zuboreva (wearing orange dress), her mom, and Nastya's three children coming back to the Bible camp in 2024*



*Bible camp, 2018*



**Singing the Gospel:** Facing public preaching bans, the "Golden Gate" music studio and club create songs that spark thoughts of God and eternity. We leverage concerts and participation in national music events, including TV shows, to spread God's message melodically. The recorded spiritual songs are present in all social network platforms.

*above:*

*Official logo of the recording music studio that records and distributes spiritual songs*





*Singing the Gospel*

**Hands of Love:** The “On Duty for Good” movement mobilizes youth to serve the needy, exemplified by their ongoing partnership with the Society of Invalids in Vitsyebesk, offering practical aid and spiritual companionship.



Society of Invalids in Vitebsk summer retreat where BLMF took part in organizing the event, 2022

**Spreading the Word:** Through “Good Book Publishes” initiative, over 40,000 Lutheran books in Russian have been distributed across Belarus and the vast Russian-speaking diaspora since 2005.

BLMF’s Books available for distribution at the Theological conference in Odessa, Ukraine, 2019





### Meeting People Where They Are:

Innovative “Market Mission” is established with the aim to build “handshake relationships” with ordinary people like seller Marina, who gratefully accepted a Bible, opening doors for future discipleship.

*Marina (right), seller at the local market who accepted the Bible with gratitude. She is open for spiritual talks, 2024*

**Core Spiritual Life:** Regular Bible studies, youth meetings, church services, and prayer gatherings sustain the faithful within BLMF congregations.

*Ministry to God in the GARAGE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH, 2025*



**A Story Still Unfolding:** The journey of Belarusian Lutheranism is a testament to an unbroken spirit. From Skaryna's pioneering vision to the ashes of Soviet persecution, and now through the innovative, faithful work of the BLMF amidst ongoing challenges, the flame of God's love persists in this part of the world.

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## BLMF Celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

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This year BLMF celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! For 20 years BLMF has been planting seeds – in children at camp, in melodies on the airwaves, in books passed hand-to-hand, in meals shared at the market, and in acts of service – praying for growth in God's time.

We are grateful to God for all these years of service and protection. We are grateful to God's servants Bill and Sally Moberly who came to visit us back in 2006, where it was not safe to travel to post-communist countries and when the support for the just emerged BLMF was so much needed. Thank you, Lord, for their boldness!



Partnering with Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM) and its director Pastor Bill Moberly, and with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), we look forward – not to ease – but to continued faithfulness. In the heart of a nation marked by struggle, the Lutheran community of Belarus continues its quiet hymn of resilience, hope, and unwavering commitment to sharing the transformative love of Christ. The story of Belarus Lutheranism and BLMF is one of faith refusing to be silenced that still continues.



*Anton, Tanya and Valery Hryhoryk*



**Valery Hryhoryk** was born in June 1966 in Kobrin, Brest district Belarus, into a family of working people. He served in the navy for three years. He graduated from Minsk State Pedagogical University of Foreign languages and is a teacher of English and German by secular profession. He became a Christian in 1992. After University he was actively involved in the translation and printing of Christian literature, which at that time was so needed. Valery studied theology in England for two years, where he got acquainted with Luther's theology and the concept of salvation by grace.

(At that time everyone in Belarus believed in salvation by works). After his studies in England, he took an active part in the rebuilding process of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belarus, which was almost totally destroyed by communists. In 2004 Valery was called to be a pastor in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of John the Baptist in Mazolovo village, Vitebsk district (that became a member of LCMC in 2006). In 2005 he founded Belarus Lutheran Missionary Fellowship (BLMF), a home mission with the aim of restoration of historical Lutheran Church in Belarus. A year later he founded Good Book publishers with the aim of translating, printing, and distributing good Lutheran books. The books are distributed mostly in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other countries where Russian is spoken. In 2012 Valery was elected secretary of the Union of Evangelical-Lutheran

congregations in Belarus, and in 2013 became a member of the Board of Trustees for the Lutheran Bible School in Petrodolina, Odessa region, Ukraine. He is currently a director of Bible camps for children and youth, and a pastor in two other Lutheran congregations in Vitebsk and Orsha. In 2017 Valery was officially called by NALC to be a NALC Global Worker in Belarus. The ministry is conducted via ALWM (Awakening Lives to World Missions, a recognized ministry of NALC, and directed by Pastor Bill Moberly. Valery and his wife, Tanya, have a 19-year-old son, Anton.

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### **Links:**

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

Chernobyl: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Chernobyl-disaster>

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

Orthodox Church: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy>

BLMF: <https://www.alwm.org/belarus>

Luther: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther>

Theses: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Ninety-five-Theses>

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

Francisk Skaryna: <https://www.belarus.by/en/about-belarus/famous-belarusians/francysk-skaryna>

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

Vitsyebsk: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vitsyebsk-Belarus>

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

Union of Brest: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Union-of-Brest-Litovsk>

Archives: <https://archives.gov.by/en/welcome-to-the-archives-of-belarus-website/archives-and-records-management-authorities-and-the-state-archives-network/state-archival-service-of-grodno-region/state-archives-of-grodno-region>

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

Grodno: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hrodna-Belarus>

Vitsyebsk: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vitsyebsk-Belarus>

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

EEMN: <https://sonetwork.org/learn/who-we-are/>

ELSA: <https://www.facebook.com/sundayschoolmovement/>

ALWM: <https://www.alwm.org/>

NALC: <https://thenalc.org/en-us/>