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UM food gifts form lifeline in Moscow

MOSCOW—Her name was Anna.

But it might as easily have been Lena or Julia—or the names of any of nearly 100 women standing in line last week in the shadow of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Russian Orthodox Church just a 15-minute drive east of the Kremlin.

On a frigid afternoon, Anna was waiting to receive one of many boxes of food that had arrived that day from United Methodists in the U.S.

Willing to wait

She, like countless other elderly Russians, was willing to wait for the food—and to receive it on a Maundy Thursday, a traditional day of fasting for Russian Orthodox Christians—for a simple reason:

Her family needed it. "This food is really important to those people," explained Alexandra, a parish worker overseeing distribution of the 36-pound boxes of food to individuals standing outside a garage-size storage shelter.

"Many of our elderly have so very little, and their pensions are very small," she said.

When asked, Anna said that she wasn't sure where the food had come from. But, when told that it had been sent by United Methodist Christians from America, she beamed and made the sign of the cross with her hands.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," she said.

Anna's words and broad smile symbolized the contact that is being made several days each week throughout Moscow with United Methodists in the United States.

Food arriving regularly

The means of that contact—food—is arriving regularly at a Moscow Red Cross warehouse via 1,000-box containers shipped by CSX/Scalant freight company.

The cost of the shipments—nearly \$5,000 per container from the U.S. to Moscow—is being borne jointly by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Department of Defense, according to the Rev. R. Bruce Weaver, interim chief executive of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Stories from Russia
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Associate Editor

The food itself consists of boxes of rice, powdered milk, chocolate bars and other items with which the boxes were packed a few weeks ago by individual United Methodists and other Christians across the United States.

On this Maundy Thursday, boxes were opened from such locations as Faith UMC in Coleman, Minn., Asbury UMC in Webster City, Iowa, and a collection center in Oroville, Calif.

Dr. Weaver and a delegation of four other United Methodists from the U.S. witnessed last week's food distribution outside St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church.

"This is just an example of what's going on all over Moscow," Dr. Weaver said.

Delivered by volunteers

He pointed out that many of the boxes are delivered by parish volunteers to individual apartments and homes for people unable to pick them up.

Dr. Weaver said that actual distribution of the food in Moscow is coordinated by officials of the Russian Orthodox Church and the International Peace Fund.

He noted that security for the food shipments has been very effective and that the food is arriving with very little damage or pilferage.

He praised the efforts of the Rev. Adam Kuczma, a Polish United Methodist pastor who is the church's coordinator of the Moscow food shipments, and Anatoly Kurnznin, Mr. Kuczma's Moscow counterpart representing the International Peace Fund.

"People here have expressed deep appreciation for what they've received in the name of Christ," Mr. Kuczma said.

A Russian government official, Stanislav Yeliseyev, also expressed gratitude for the food shipments and said he foresees the need for such aid, including medical supplies, for at least another year, until the ravaged Russian economy gets on its feet.



MOSCOW—The Rev. R. Bruce Weaver, interim chief executive of the United Methodist Committee on Relief, hugs a Russian woman waiting for a box of food being delivered at St. Peter and Paul's Russian Orthodox Church. Food boxes collected by American United Methodists especially are aiding elderly Russians who live on small pensions.

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The Rev. Dorsey E. Levell of Springfield, Mo., a United Methodist minister, was among the delegation accompanying Dr.

Weaver to observe the Moscow food distribution.

"I spent 27 years in the Army Reserves preparing to go to war with the Russians," Mr. Levell mused as he watched the boxes

of food being loaded to go to St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church.

"Now I'm here delivering food when I might have been here in a war. This is so much better—a real spiritual experience!"

Church outreach efforts to Russians pose bewildering array

MOSCOW—Are you, your congregation or conference interested in assisting United Methodists in Russia?

If so, you have a bewildering array of choices.

Like much else in this sprawling city, getting the lay of the land can be confusing in the chaotic aftermath of the fall of communism and the resurgence of interest in religion following 74 years of religious repression.

Recent sightings

Recent sightings of United Methodists include:

■ The church's General Board of Global Ministries has assigned a missionary, Chris Hena, to the Moscow area.

Ms. Hena works at a hospital for children with congenital disorders. Since her arrival in Moscow last fall, she also has been teaching Bi-

ble studies for youths and adults at a Russian-American-Korean United Methodist Church.

■ As a direct outgrowth of Ms. Hena's Bible studies, a new Russian-speaking United Methodist congregation is planning to conduct its first worship service May 10 (see related story below).

No pastor has been assigned to the new congregation, but Ms. Hena says that the pastor of the Russian-American-Korean United Methodist church has agreed to serve the sacraments as needed.

■ The Russian-American-Korean UMC, whose minister is the Rev. Young Chuel-Cho, may be the oldest United Methodist presence in Moscow.

Mr. Cho is a clergy member of the New York Conference and appointed to his post by Bishop C. Dale White. According to Mr. Cho's wife, the church was started by Chang Sun

Kim, a Korean diplomat and United Methodist who moved three years ago from Washington to Moscow. Mr. Kim had been an active member of Ban Suk Korean United Methodist Church in Elmhurst, N.Y. The congregation receives financial support from a Korean mission committee in the New York Conference, Mrs. Cho says.

■ A United Methodist congregation that organized last fall in the city of Ekaterinburg about 900 miles east of Moscow is thought to be the first United Methodist church on Russian soil outside Moscow.

The Ekaterinburg congregation was helped to organize by the Rev. Dwight Ramsey, minister of Broadmoor UMC in Shreveport, La. Its pastor is a Russian laywoman, Lydia Istomina. She works under the supervision of Bishop Hans Vaxby, episcopal leader of the church's Northern European Central Conference.

■ Three pastors of large United

Methodist churches in the U.S.—the Rev. Maxie Dunnam of Memphis, Tenn., the Rev. William Hinson of Houston, and the Rev. James Buskirk of Tulsa, Okla.—began arriving in Moscow the week after Easter.

According to the Rev. H. T. Maclin of Atlanta, retired president of the unofficial Mission Society for United Methodists, the pastors are in Moscow to "assess the situation."

Mr. Maclin, who arrived in Moscow before Easter, said that he will help coordinate the visit of the three ministers. He said no specific plans have been made regarding future Mission Society activity in the city or in Russia.

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He said, however, that the Mission Society has offered to work with the church's official mission

agency (the General Board of Global Ministries) to develop the church's work in Russia but has not received a reply.

None of the above "sightings" include the more-or-less independent efforts of individuals, such as United Methodist layman David Stone, who was promoting group-exchanges between Christians in the U.S. and Russia.

In response to the bewildering array of church-related activities in areas recently liberated from communist rule, the General Board of Global Ministries has called a meeting for mid-May—immediately following the church's May 5-15 legislative General Conference—to help sort out the situation. The meeting is to be held at the Scarritt-Bennett Conference Center in Nashville.

New United Methodist congregation in Moscow set to begin worship May 10

MOSCOW—A new congregation of Russian United Methodists plans to hold its first worship service May 10 in Moscow.

The congregation is being formed at the request of some 40 Russian families, according to Chris Hena, a United Methodist missionary assigned to Moscow.



Chris Hena

Ms. Hena, a Liberia native who speaks Russian, said that the request followed several months of Bible studies she has led since arriving in Moscow last fall.

She said she and the Russian families have been attending a Russian-American-Korean United Methodist Church in Moscow. But, as the numbers of Russians grew, so did dissatisfaction with the worship services having to be translated

from Korean into Russian.

The group is breaking off from the Korean church with the pastor's blessing, Ms. Hena said.

Ms. Hena said that she had received a response from the Rev. Robert Harman, head of the World Program Division of the church's General Board of Global Ministries, approving of the new congregation and the way in which it was formed.

"I didn't set out to start a new church," Ms. Hena explained. "My goal in the beginning was to invite people who were interested to study the Bible with me in my apartment."

But, she said, the more people learned, the more they wanted to know.

They reached a point, she said, where they felt strongly about the need to be together "as a church" where they could support each other and grow together in their faith.

Ms. Hena said that Centenary UMC in Lexington, Ky., has agreed to be a "sister congregation" to the new Moscow congregation.

She hopes that this relationship will lead to more opportunities for teacher training and Christian education, which the Russians desperately need and want.

So far as she is aware, this will be the second United Methodist congregation in Moscow. The "mother congregation," started in 1990, is pastored by the Rev. Young Chuel-Cho of the New York Conference.

A medical doctor is providing the key lay leadership for the congregation with which she's associated, Ms. Hena said.

She said the physician and others have been putting up posters all over the neighborhood inviting people to be part of the new church (see photo) and that for their first worship service they've hired a meeting hall that will seat 300 people.



MOSCOW—This poster in Russian invites people to come to the new United Methodist congregation (see related story at left). The new Russian congregation had been worshipping with a Korean United Methodist congregation, but is breaking off from that connection with the pastor's blessing, said missionary Chris Hena. Ms. Hena, who has been holding Bible study for some of the Russian worshippers, is helping the new congregation organize. Its founders have rented a hall seating 300 for the first worship service scheduled May 10.