

Linksmų Kalėdų! Merry Christmas from Lithuania!



The picture is from the town square in Kaunas, where we live, with Europe's first Eco Tree! And what is that you might ask? The Christmas tree – is made of 40,000 recycled plastic bottles of Sprite! Nice? We are not sure, but it is a fun and huge tourist attraction and it did save a big fir tree from the beautiful Lithuanian forests. Every day new Christmas decorations and lights are added to the Christmas City here on the Kaunas main square– yes, it is soon Christmas, we see and feel it.

Moving to Lithuania after 14 years of ministry in Ukraine this September has been a time of adjustment and settling in. A new language needs to be learned, a new culture awaits to be discovered and it sometimes feels overwhelming to be back at the beginning of language and culture acquisition. But the joy of ministry and the grace of God gives us the inspiration for the challenge ahead. Here is a little of what we do: Bill is the District Superintendent of the Lithuania District of the Estonia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, meaning he is the head of the Methodist Church in Lithuania. Lithuania is the southern most of the three Baltic countries of Eastern Europe, bordering Latvia, Poland, Belarus and the Kaliningrad district of Russia. The Methodist church in Lithuania was restarted in 1995 after being closed while a republic of the former Soviet Union. This year, in 2011, the United Methodist

Church of Lithuania celebrated it's 110 year anniversary of ministry and the 100 year anniversary of the church building in Kaunas.

While administration of the district, signing payroll sheets, overseeing contracts and other paperwork does consume time, there are plenty of ministry opportunities. In the pastor's meetings this fall, Bill has been leading a discussion on the renewal of the church in a ever changing 21st century. How can we as the 10 Methodist churches in Lithuania be a light in the community we serve, not simply repeating the same thing we have always done, but giving answers to the questions non-churched people have about God?

Church conferences will start up after the New Year, so every weekend for 2 months Bill will visit a different church in the conference for the churches yearly "state of the church" meeting, where ministry and financial aspects of the church are reviewed.

Helen is the Director for Diaconal ministries for Lithuania, overseeing and consulting with the diaconal work done in the district. One of the highlights this fall for Helen was to be with the "Food Bank" project, an initiative launched by the government in collaboration with humanitarian aid organizations, both religious and non-religious.



Organizations can apply to join, where they are assigned to a shop one weekend before Christmas and before Easter to collect products which in turn will pass it on to those who do not have the opportunity to buy a little extra for the holidays. People who come into the store to shop, shop a little extra and give it to the organization that has been assigned the shop. The Methodist Church in Kaunas was awarded one of the city's supermarket stores and we collected food for about 8,000 dollars - which will go to the poor at Christmas!

We wish all of you the Peace of Christ in this Christmas Season and His Joy in the coming New Year.

Blessings,

Helen and Bill Lovelace

You can also read our blog at <http://www.umcumc.blogspot.com>.