

Karen Leftwich

From: GDPAYTON@aol.com
Sent: Friday, September 03, 2010 4:58 PM
To: dan@fpcmissoula.org; brian@fpcmissoula.org; pajarito@cyberport.net; chinook.pres@gmail.com; Tim.sunrise@sofast.net; jmmalone11@yahoo.com; dranson@centurytel.net; revdanl@fpcwhitefish.org; webmaster@fpcwhitefish.org; craig@millwoodpc.org; sheryl@presbyinw.org; kayandsylvia@gmail.com
Subject: PCUSA update from Gary Payton, mission coworker

Dear Friends in Christ,

The 1st of September marks an extraordinary day of transition from summer to autumn in much of the former communist world. Across republics of the former Soviet Union and in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, children begin the new school year filled with the hope and anxiety which children everywhere face on the first day of school.

As I watched the evening news from Moscow, I was struck yet again by the celebration of Knowledge Day or First Bell across the expanse of Russia. Scrubbed children's faces, new backpacks, balloons, and flowers for teachers. It is a holiday atmosphere for millions of students, teachers, and parents.

This day of transition flooded my mind with thoughts of our own Presbyterian mission transitions in the year ahead.

Al, Ellen, and Emma Smith flew back to the States from Moscow a few days ago to begin many months of home assignment. Based in Green Bay, Wisconsin the Smiths will take time to reenergize from the demands of rigorous years in Russia and weeks of record high temperatures and fouled air from forest fires this summer. Both Al and Ellen will visit churches, participate in the Russian Mission Network meeting in Denver, continue to guide critical mission engagement with partners by phone and email, and prepare for a return to Europe next year.

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/smith-alan-and-ellen/>

Bob, Stacy, Rachel, Naomi, and Bethany Bronkema continue their active service with the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy. The parsonage apartment was rehab'ed this summer, the girls are back in school, and MPC's extraordinary ministries of outreach move into another church program year. In mid-2011, the Bronkemas conclude their service in Moscow. After five years, Bob will seek a new call and MPC will seek a new pastor. Indeed, transitions are ahead!

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/bronkema-robert-and-stacy/>

In St. Petersburg, Joe and Hannah Kang have begun their final academic year at the Novosaratovka Theological Seminary of our Lutheran partner. Fresh from a summer break with family in California, the Kangs are focused on the school year ahead. Following ten years of mission service in Malawi and ten years in Russia, Joe and Hannah will retire in 2011, returning to the United States. We will likely be looking for Presbyterian theological professors for short term teaching assignments in Russia, so spread the word and let me know!

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/kang-joseph-and-hannah/>

And, fitting for the 1st of September, Garth Moller, director of the Kargel & Baedeker School in St. Petersburg, opened the doors for a new year of education for almost 50 students. This 18th year in the school's life sees many challenges ahead. What is most needed is sponsorship/scholarships for dozens of children whose parents are unable to pay fully the modest tuition. Write to me (gdpayton@aol.com) or Presbyterian volunteer Sam Naylor (samnaylor8888@lycos.com) if you or your congregation feel called to support a child. The need is great. Prayer and gifts are needed if the ministry of this school is to survive.

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/moller-garth/>

As the school year began in Poland, Doug and Liz Searles received a group from Iowa to begin a mission trip with partners in the Evangelical Reformed Church. The Searles, based in the central city of Lodz, will be on home assignment in the States next June to December. As the first ever mission co-workers assigned jointly to Poland from the PCUSA,

the United Church of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ, we are always seeking new ways for individuals and congregations to connect. Folks of Polish-American heritage are a natural for such first-time mission connections. Let me know, or write the Searles (theseearles@gmail.com) if you see possibilities.

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/missionconnections/searles-doug-liz/>

Me? This is a time of transition for me as well. On a personal level, the death of my father, Dean Payton, earlier this year slowed my pace while I took time to grieve and reflect on a life well lived. The intervening months, I add joyfully, have been filled with wonderful weeks with family, especially with our first (and so far only) two year old grandchild, Alec.

My mission responsibilities have for many years focused on Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland and our Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran, or Reformed partners. In this journey, I have been humbled by the call to come alongside historic churches so woefully oppressed during the communist era. So, I am pleased to share that I have been asked to add our church-to-church relationships in Armenia to my portfolio. I look forward with great enthusiasm to my first trip in 2011 to Yerevan and other cities to meet with leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Armenian Evangelical Church.

Even as I prepare for this expanded role, I am excited about my upcoming visit to Russia and Poland in November. This 20th trip to the region will allow me to meet once again with church partners and my mission colleagues in both countries.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he boldly shared his enthusiasm for meeting with believers in Rome, "For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you - or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." I feel that same enthusiasm for my upcoming visits to Russia, Poland, and Armenia, but years of experience have taught me that the greater gift will not be conversations about mission programs, but rather the joy of mutual encouragement in Christ's love.

May the Peace of Christ be with you this day,
Gary

Gary Payton
Regional Liaison for Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, and Poland
World Mission
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)