

III. Youth In Missions

History, Overview, and Purpose

Youth In Missions really began at Our Savior as *Youth To Russia*. In the summer of 2002, a representative of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF) approached Pastor Thoma (at that time Deacon Thoma) with the opportunity to assist in evaluating a set of children's materials to be presented to orphan children in a small Bible camp setting in Tihkovitsi, Russia. Once the details began to unfold, it became possible for Pastor Thoma to take along several high school students to participate in the work. It was here that *YIM* germinated and was born.

After successfully completing the task put forth from LHF (and knowing that LHF planned to discontinue the work), Thoma and the high school participants pursued the opportunity to continue holding similar Bible camps for the orphan children in connection with the service of a local pastor of the Ingrian-Lutheran Church, Arvo Soitu. This continued for six years until the door for service was abruptly closed.

In the Autumn of 2007, Russian President Putin began giving civil and political powers to the already persecutory Russian Orthodox Church and by the summer of 2008 it had become apparent that the *Youth To Russia* project (already being carefully monitored by local Orthodox officials) would be forced to withdraw for reasons of safety. Up until that time, the faithful people of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church continued to send Thoma and the high school youth to deliver the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the orphan children in this particular region of Russia by holding these camps. During those years, the *Youth To Russia* project transformed into the *YIM* program which has now grown to include local (Michigan) service opportunities, as well as summer-time national service opportunities within the continental United States.

The door for service in Russia may have been closed, but the work continues elsewhere (Acts 16:6-10). At this point in history, the international face of *YIM* now seeks to use the experience, program, and materials which took shape and grew from our work in Russia and to now serve in similar venues throughout the world. Specifically, the project described in this handbook is well suited for (but not limited to) work with orphans within the context of Bible camps. At these camps, children are brought from local orphanages to stay at the camp for several days. The project serves children of varying ages, typically 5 to 16 years old.

The purpose of *Youth In Missions* is:

- 1) to provide opportunities for bringing the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to a specific segment of a population within a society determined to be in great spiritual need, while at the same time working to build a self-supporting structure within local churches to continue meeting the need long-term.
- 2) to provide the opportunity for Lutheran congregations in America to be involved "first hand" in helping those in need in our neighborhoods, country, and world.
- 3) to offer high school students the opportunity to experience the field of Christian mission in an extraordinary and tangible way.

- 4) to be a means by which the Holy Spirit has opportunity to convince participating high school youth to consider pursuing careers as church professionals (i.e. Lutheran day school teacher, deaconess, pastor or missionary).
- 5) to help foster the ability of Christian high school youth to clearly confess the hope that is within them in the mission field of everyday life, that is, their vocation in life no matter which field of study or career they pursue.

Subscription to Youth In Missions

By participating in the *YIM* projects of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hartland, Michigan or by becoming a ***partner church*** desirous of participation in furthering such work, you are subscribing whole-heartedly to the confession of “mission” as stated in this handbook and the desire of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church to offer an organized opportunity to serve faithfully through a Gospel-centered, Word and Sacrament mission firmly rooted in the Lutheran Confessions. You are resolving to do the same while working closely with the lesson materials provided which have written, tested, and formalized in this guide in order that the relationships and underpinning groundwork formed with our counterparts at local, national, and international project sites will continue to be fruitful, cohesive and uncompromised by less-than-faithful doctrine or worship practices.