

MISSIONS IN AND FROM LATVIA  
PARTICULARLY YOUTH WITH A MISSION  
DURING 1988 – 2008

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Kristina Ecis

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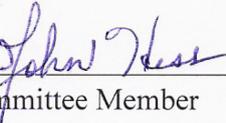


KRISTINA ECIS has successfully passed the thesis requirements for the completion of the Bachelor's Thesis.

Thesis Committee:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Advisor

Date: 13/07/09

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Member

Date: 31/07/09

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis will deal with missions development in Latvia. The tentative hypothesis is that despite complicated history the Church in Latvia has been active in missions movement and that missions agency Youth With A Mission in Latvia has played a major role missions mobilizing.

The primary questions for this thesis are

- to discover missions development in Latvia during the last years of Communism until present day;
- to explore establishment and growth of one particular international mission agency, Youth With A Mission (YWAM), - in Latvia and its influence on the Latvian Church and society;
- and to look for new strategies for missions in Latvia and from Latvia for the next ten years.

In the first part the thesis will give a brief historical background of Christianity in Latvia and history of missions movements from Latvia. It will discover the Church and missions movement during the initial years of independent Latvia. This thesis will present the initial thoughts on overseas missions and first mission trips from Latvia. The end of part one tells the story of founders of YWAM Latvia – Maris and Judite Dzelzs. The first part was mainly done by historical research using primary sources as books, newspapers and magazines of that time and secondary resources – work of others who have done some research on the subject of missions in Latvia.

The second part of the thesis was an investigative project of qualitative research that explored four areas – historical situation in Latvia starting in 1988, uniqueness of Latvia, written down history of YWAM Latvia and looking for new strategies for missions' movement. This part was mainly done using primary sources - interviewing people, doing analysis and recording findings.

Regarding the chosen time period, the last twenty years were taken due to radical changes that happened in Soviet Union starting in 1988, that led to the reestablishment of independent Latvia and facilitated church growth and mission development.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis will deal with the development of missions in Latvia during the last years of Communism until present day. It also will explore the development of one particular international missions agency, Youth With A Mission (YWAM), in Latvia and its influence on the Latvian Church and society. Historically, there has been little possibility for Latvians to develop a missions movement. Only now, it seems that it is time and possible for Latvians to join in fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Even though Latvians had few opportunities for missions work through the centuries, there are some elements of history that make Latvia unique. This research will also look at new strategies for missions in and from Latvia.

There are not many publications in Latvian, or in any other language, that discuss missions, for this period from 1988 to 2008. Therefore, it will be very important to research and record information about it, so that others could learn from this.

The main limitation is the lack of extensive publications on this topic, therefore, this will be an investigative project recording historical facts and looking for working strategies in the future. The scope of this thesis will be with respect to Latvia and this 20-year time span.

## WHY MISSIONS?

Around two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission for mission to a handful of His disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mat. 28:18-20). The death of Jesus and the resurrection that followed gave new understanding and a future for the people of God. What started with those few people has grown into millions of believers today.

. The Lord wants that all the nations would be brought back into fellowship with Him. Starting from the beginning, the first Christian generation was a missionary Church fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus. Some of the workers were full time ministers like Saul and Barnabas who were set apart with prayer for missionary endeavors (Acts 13:1-4). Even then it was understood that every Christian was a witness. Everywhere those early Christians went there was living faith and after a while, an expanding Christian community (Neill, 1990:21-22).

David Bosch gives following description on “mission”:

It referred to (a) the sending of missionaries to a designated territory, (b) the activities undertaken by such missionaries, (c) the geographical area where the missionaries were active, (d) the agency which dispatched the missionaries, (e) the non-Christian world of “mission field”, or (f) the center from which the missionaries operated on the “mission field”. In a slightly different context it could also refer to (g) a local congregation without a resident minister and still dependent on the support of an older, established church, or (h), a series of special services intended to deepen or spread the Christian faith, usually in a nominally Christian. If we attempt a more specifically theological synopsis of “mission” as the concept has traditionally been used, we note that it has been paraphrased as (a) propagation of the faith, (b) expansion of the right of God, (c) conversion of the heathen, and (d) the founding of new churches (Bosch, 1991:1).

The Lord has given a message of hope to His church. He wants the Church to share the good news about Jesus Christ and God’s rule with those who haven’t heard it yet. It is a message of hope for individuals, for families, for whole communities, for

nations (Fountain, 2004:21). This message has changed the lives of people and whole continents and therefore it is very vital that everyone hears.

Missions is crucial to this task. There is a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom the one is sent and the assignment. During the course of history the understanding of a “sender” has changed. Also the qualification of a “missionary”, or the one who is sent by the sender, has changed. The understanding of a “mission field” has a different meaning today than a hundred years ago. But the assignment is the same – to preach the Good News about Jesus and teach all that Jesus taught.

Missions is still relevant today in the world, including Latvia. The question answered in the next chapter is: How did Christianity come and develop in Latvia?

PART I. HISTORICAL RESEARCH OF THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS IN  
LATVIA

CHAPTER 1

HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY IN LATVIA

Latvia is a country of 2.3 million people living on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. Latvia has only been an independent nation for 38 years, in spite of the fact that its known written history goes back to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. The first independence was for twenty years - from 1920 (*de facto* since 1918), when the Soviet Russia signed a peace agreement with Latvia, until 1940 when the Soviet Union occupied Latvia. Then, after 50 years of occupation, Latvia regained its independence in 1991.

Christianization of Latvian Tribes

The first time Christianity was brought to the territory of Latvia was in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries from Scandinavia and Russia. By 1200A.D., German crusaders started their offensive. The Gospel was brought with the sword and fire and Latvian tribes resisted the invaders for almost 100 years. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Latvian tribes lost their land and independence, when Pope Innocent III declared the Baltic area to be an ecclesiastic state, *Terra Mariana* – subject to the Pope directly (Bruvers, 1992:8). The Latvian tribes adopted Christianity outwardly, but inwardly they continued to hold on to their own pagan religion.

The Reformation

In 1517, Martin Luther started the Reformation in Germany. This ushered in great political and social changes throughout Europe. Latvia was the first land outside of Germany that accepted the new reformed teaching. The first Lutheran teachings in Riga were recorded in 1522 (Balodis, 1991:64). Riga liked the Reformation because of political motives. This helped to get rid of one ruler – the archbishop. The Reformation had some very positive results on Latvian society. The craftsmen guilds were secularized, separated from the Church and made into trade unions (Bruvers, 1981:5). The Reformation facilitated the creation of the written language, and thus,

was the beginning of Latvian church literature (Balodis, 1991:67; Bruvers 1981:6). However, even then, with all the positive changes it brought, the Lutheran Reformation did not have any lasting impact on Latvians. It was still a German church; the church of the bosses, not of the people.

### The Moravian Movement

It was during the 1700's when many Latvians accepted Christianity as their own religion through the Moravian Movement simply called "the Congregations of the Brethren" (*Brāļu draudzes*) (Bruvers, 1982:11) and gave hope to the oppressed Latvian peasants. By 1743, there were at least 2700, possibly up to 4000 Latvian members in the Herrnhuter congregations (Feldmanis, 1992, Balodis 1991:115). Their influence was tremendous with drinking, stealing and crime diminishing, the brethren helping each other and a sense of responsibility growing (Balodis, 1991:115). The members of the Brethren church, or the Herrnhuters, also introduced singing. The first original Latvian songs were written during that time, and many songs were translated into Latvian, as well.

This was also when Latvian peasants first heard about the missions movement. The Bishop of the Moravian Church, Von Zinzendorf had a passion for missions to nations outside of Europe. Even the Latvian peasants, through their German brethren, could read the letters sent from the mission fields in the American colonies, Caribbean and South America (Feldmanis, 1992). Of course, during that time, Latvians could not go anywhere because they were serfs to German landlords and the Russian Empire.

There were a few instances that possibly influenced the Brethren Movement negatively, like spiritual exaltation, special ecstatic moments and some pietism (Feldmanis, 1992), but overall the Moravian Movement in Latvia was very positive and had strong and lasting influence on Latvians as a nation.

The official German Lutheran church leaders in Latvia did not like this movement, since there were more people in the Brethren meetings on Saturday nights than in official church services on Sundays. The Lutheran pastors and the landlords reported this to the Russian government and persecution began. But in spite of this, the Moravian Movement continued to nourish the Latvian collective soul through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From about 1850, a national awakening was beginning and the Moravian

Brethren movement gradually lost its role, eventually becoming integrated into the Lutheran Church (Bruvers, 1982:11; Balodis, 1991:115). The roots of this national awakening came from revolutions in the German Confederation in 1848. Large popular assemblies demanded freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. It also came from German Romanticism in literature called “Sturm und Drang” (“Storm and Stress”). Romanticism – admiring nature and history – later developed into nationalistic movement. In Latvia this nationalistic movement turned into an awakening and development of Latvian national culture, Latvian society and creating of Latvian national ideology (Balodis, 1991:126-127). Therefore it was revolutionary in spirit and antithetical to Christianity.

### Conversions to Orthodoxy

Even though Orthodoxy came from Russia to the Latvian territory in the 1200's and had converts from some of the Latvian tribes, it did not take root in Latvia until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Russian language and religion started to play a greater part in Latvian society after Latvia fully became part of the Russian Empire. In the 1840's many Latvians who were not happy with the official Lutheran Church were converting to Orthodoxy (Tervits, 1999:36). On one hand, for some Latvians, there was a search for spirituality that the Orthodox Church could offer. On the other hand that conversion was done mostly for pragmatic reasons – members of the Orthodox Church could get land for free and other benefits. In 1845 there was a famine in Latvia. Orthodox Bishop Filaret was agitating against the Lutheran church and German landlords. Latvians got the message: “With the faith of the Tsar to land and freedom” (Balodis, 1991:120). During that time around 113,000 people, or around 12% of all Lutherans, converted to Orthodoxy. Eventually, many Latvians found their hopes unfulfilled by Orthodoxy, as well, but these new members were not allowed to leave and return to Lutheranism. Some Lutheran pastors took the risk and accepted these Orthodox Latvians to Holy Communion or baptized their children, but this led to persecution of those pastors (Kļiploks, 1993:230). However, Latvians traditionally are not considered Orthodox. There is division, even today, between nationalities and denominations; Russians are predominately Orthodox, while most Latvians are Lutheran or Catholic.

## Old Believers

Today, Latvia is an ethnically diverse country with 1/3 of the population being Russian. Latvian-Russian relationships haven't been easy in the last 50 years, especially because of Soviet occupation. Where did these Russians come from? Russian merchants found themselves in Riga, due largely to the trade routes that followed the Daugava River bringing their practice of Orthodoxy with them. During the 1600s, the Russian Patriarch Nikon started implementing reforms in the Church.

After this, the Russian Church split up into two parts – the official orthodoxy which had accepted Nikon's revisions and the Old Believers section rejecting the reform. (Podmazovs, 2001:185)

The Old Believers were severely persecuted in Russia and, therefore, were fleeing to other parts of Europe; to Latvia, for example. The first Old Believers arrived in the territory of Latvia in 1659. German landlords gladly accepted these Russian believers, since many people had died during the Black Plague and they needed a workforce. (Podmazovs, 2001:63). During the time of the independent Latvian Republic (1920-1940), there were about 100,000 Old Believers. More than half of the Russians living in Latvia were in this category. Historically, though, Old Believers did not have a significant spiritual influence on Latvia. They did not participate in missions in the classic sense. Their communities were closed and they did not reach out to their Latvian neighbors (Barkans, 2007:14).

## Baptists

After the Moravian Movement died out, there still were Latvians who were looking for a serious relationship with God. They put a strong emphasis on the Bible and being baptized by immersion. The beginning of the Latvian Baptists, recorded with the baptism of F. Jakobsons in 1855, showed that the Baptist movement was birthed from the Latvian nation and not the work of foreign missionaries (Tervits, 1999:40). Bruvers mentions that the first six Latvians had already been baptized in 1850 (Bruvers, 1982:12). This Latvian Baptist stream has roots from German Baptists, started by Johann Gerhard Oncken in 1834 in Hamburg (Tervits, 1999: 41) and not with the German Mennonite church, as in Russia.

## The Church Before and During Independent Latvia

For the next seventy years the Church was developing, even though different denominations were experiencing limitations from the government. Latvia was a part of Russian Empire where the Orthodox Church had the status of the state church. Roman Catholic and Old Believers had great restrictions (Tervits, 1999:36). Since 1893, Baptist pastors were allowed to minister only in their own churches (Tervits, 1999:75).

The main influence and help for Latvian Baptists came from German churches and not so much from Russian Baptists. Latvian Baptists had strong ties with non-Russian speaking Baptists in the Russian Empire (Tervits, 1999:66). There was a Union that united German Baptists living in Russia, Estonian, Polish and Latvian Baptists (Tervits, 1999:76).

During the first Latvian Republic, the Church (all denominations included) experienced freedom and growth, but with the coming of the Soviet occupation, the Church suffered greatly.

### Church Status in Soviet Latvia before *glasnost* and *perestroika*

At the end of 1930's, the political situation in Europe was changing dramatically. Two leading powers, Germany with Hitler and the Soviet Union with Stalin, divided Europe based on their spheres of interest. Due to those political games, Latvia became part of the Soviet influence. On June 16, 1940 the Soviet Union sent an ultimatum to the Latvian government, to open the borders and let the Soviet Army come in freely or they would come with force. Surrendering to Soviet preponderance, the Latvian government accepted the ultimatum and Soviet Army occupied Latvia on June 17, 1940 (Balodis, 1991:275, 280-281). For fifty years the Soviet Union lied about the occupation saying that it was done by the free will and revolution of the Latvian people to join the wonderful and glorious Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was a regime of internal repression. The ideological basis for communism comes from teachings of Carl Marx. Today there are different Marxist theories, from very humanistic and democratic philosophers to totalitarian

Stalinists. And there was difference between the theories of Marx and practice of those in the Soviet Union.

“In theory, Marxism is supposed to benefit working people and enable them to gain economic control over their own lives. In reality, the bureaucratic rigidities of life under communism led to economic stagnation as well as loss of personal freedom” (Sire, 2004:78)

Marx himself was influenced by German materialist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach who asserted that religion is a human invention. Therefore, atheism was a major part of the communism ideology. For Marx, history meant history of class struggle (Sire, 2004:80). This was taken to the extreme in the Soviet Union through the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, which led to the killing of thousands of the “enemies of the state”.

“In October 1917 Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky took over a revolution that had been made by others, and from the beginning under Lenin they built a regime of repression... The Bolsheviks [the precursor to the Communist Party] were only a small percentage of the Russian people and made up only one-fourth of the constituent assembly which had been elected in November. When the assembly met for the first time in January 1918, the Bolshevik troops dispersed it by force. That was the first and last free election in Russia. Before the Leninists took over in October, Lenin wrote a book called *The Lessons of the Paris Commune*. There he analyzed why the Paris Commune was defeated in 1871. His principal conclusion was that the Commune had not killed enough of its enemies. When Lenin came to power he acted according to this analysis and set up all the machinery for oppression” (Schaeffer, 2005:126-127).

During fifty years of atheism in Latvia, church activities were officially restricted to Sunday morning church services and choir practices (Kelly, 2005:93). The Soviet ideology tried to separate the believers into their own small church groups so that they would not know what other brothers and sisters are hearing from God, praying and experiencing in fellowship. Everything in the Soviet system was geared toward destruction of the Church. Therefore the Church in Latvia (as in the rest of the Soviet Union) was on the defense and it was not able to maintain a vision for missions.

In spite of the Soviet repressions, ecumenical groups existed that, sought for God and for fellowship. This was one way to stand against the Soviet oppression. This still was very far from doing active missions work, but for that time, it was great step out of lethargy. One of those ecumenical groups prayed in 1971 for God to give the possibility again to have church services in the Dome Cathedral. At that time, it seemed impossible, but people continued to pray (Zure, 1989:5).

During those years, the Church faced a choice between two seemingly opposite principles – one of self-sacrifice, the other of survival. There were fearless witnesses of Christ who suffered prison and death. At the same time, there were those who collaborated with the State, rationalizing that their cooperation was the only way for the Church to survive. But this kind of survival came at a high price (Rubenis, 1997:9-10).

Due to the fact that Old Believers were not evangelizing anyone and that their activities were invisible to society, they did not experience as much persecution during Soviet times as other denominations (Barkans, 2007:14).

The Catholic Church experienced the most severe persecution in Latvia. Atheistic propaganda spread mostly in Catholic regions of Latvia, but notably the Catholic Church was able to withstand this persecution. The Catholic Seminary was closed in 1950, which left a great void in preparing new priests. The Soviet government even tried to hinder communication with the Vatican. Sometimes pure lies were used:

June 30, 1950 TASS published a Vatican decree that stated that parents of children that receive Communist or imperialist education will be excommunicated from the Church. The USSR Council of Religious Cults tried to convince Bishop P. Strods to refuse to fulfill this decree, without his knowing that it did not apply to Communist countries (Strods, 1996:301)

The Lutheran Church had a status of a State Church during the first Latvian Republic. This had some privileges, but when the occupation came, this denomination turned out to be the weakest. The statistics of closed churches are as follows – see Table 1.

Denomination	Amount of churches in Latvia by year:		
	1964	1974	1984
Catholic	179	178	179
Lutheran	260	212	204
Orthodox	112	90	87
Old Believers	74	69	67
Baptists	66	63	61
Adventists	25	23	23

Table 1

(Podmazovs, 2001:149).

Baptist churches experienced problems with legal issues. The State required that founders of a church should all be from the same village. That, of course, was done in order to shut the churches down (Tervits, 1999:176). To the outside, the government was showing that there was religious freedom in the Soviet Union, but the reality was different. Here are just some of restrictions put on Baptist churches (and others):

Baptists were not allowed to baptize by immersion youth younger than 18, and it was not allowed to have Sunday schools and youth meetings. Guests and visitors were not allowed to share from the pulpit. Youth (younger than 18) were not allowed to participate in choir, no solo singing or poetry reading during the services. Pastors were not allowed to take part in the practical/economical life of the church. They could not lead board meetings (Tervits, 1999:183).

Regarding Russian Baptists, the story begins with many who came to Latvia during Soviet occupation. It was the Soviet policy to bring Russians into former independent countries after many indigenous people were tried, killed, put in jails or exiled to prison camps in Siberia. The Russians realized that Latvians had a totally different language, culture, and even the way that they built relationships. The Russians were coming as workers, as people bringing help to Latvia. At least that is what they were told by the government. At the same time, Latvians felt that Russians were coming as occupants, looking for a better place economically. The relationships between the Latvians and Russians were strained. This mirrored in church life. Latvian and Russian Baptist churches were disassociated. Russian churches experienced difficulties with those brothers and sisters who came from other parts of the Soviet Union because of their different understanding of faith and upbringing. There were also differences in the understanding of church government (Church councils, Orgkomiteja – Latvian, объединение - Russian) (Tervits, 1999:207-208).

There still could be much more information shared with Latvian Christians about Russian church activities during those years. The same would apply vice versa, as not many Russians really know what was happening in Latvian churches at that time. It is important to notice that God was using both nationalities for missionary activities in this limited environment. If the enemy was not able to stop it, then he was interested in building walls between Christians. There has been so much misunderstanding and even hate from both sides – Latvian and Russian – that it takes time and some deeper knowledge of what the Lord was doing during Communist years to find common ground.

Overall, the State made any kind of other activities illegal, allowing only “religious rituals.” It was expected that churches would die out naturally because of elderly people and because of economic hardships that were put on congregations (Balodis, 1991:369).

The development of Christianity in Latvia had its ups and downs but did it develop missions movement?

## CHAPTER 2

### BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSIONS MOVEMENTS FROM LATVIA BEFORE 1988

Christianity was brought to Latvia with force from foreign oppressors and for a long time was considered a religion of foreigners. Because of this historic development of Christianity, it is important to ask the question “Was there even a missions movement from Latvia at all?” Missions is important and Jesus gave the Great Commission to all His Church, but did the Latvians consider that as their task as well?

#### Missionaries to Gambia and Tobago

In the middle of the 1600s, the Duke of Courland<sup>1</sup> Jacob Kettler established two colonies. The first one was in Africa at the Gambia River, the other one was in Tobago in the West Indies. Many of the settlers were Latvian Lutherans and they established their churches there as well. This is considered the first missions movement from Latvia even though those Latvian peasants from Courland did not go there exactly as missionaries, they merely brought their faith with them.

#### Latvians Immigrating to Russia

From the middle to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Latvians left Latvia for economic reasons. The Russian Empire offered them land in Southern Russia, in the Urals, Siberia and other places. These settlers also took their understanding about God with them and shared that with their Russian neighbors. Later in the 1930s, those Latvian colonies suffered severely during the persecution of Stalin (Stradiņš, 1992:220). Many of the Latvian settlers had become relatively affluent and were pronounced “kulaks” and class enemies to the poorer peasants. Many of them were killed and others moved to the northern regions of Russia. Because of atheistic ideology all church and evangelistic activities were shut down.

#### The Beginnings of Inland Missions

During the next two centuries, Latvians did not engage in mission work due to historical changes – wars, the Black Plague, etc. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>1</sup> a part of Latvia today

Lutheran churches were supporting missionaries sent out from German and Swedish mission societies. After World War I, churches were finally ready to share the Gospel and help in building a new independent Latvia.

The Latvian Inland Mission Society was founded on December 6, 1919 and was established by the Latvian Lutheran Church (Shaurums, 1920:21). Some of the goals of the new Inland Mission Society were to establish Christian shelters for homeless children and old people's homes, publishing a Christian newspaper/magazine, organizing custody of orphans, ministry to prostitutes and organizing family nights. Special emphasis was put on Sailors' Mission since Latvia had a long sea border with many ports (Bergs, 1920:21-23). Some of the same strategies are still in place today.

The members of the Baptist churches were also very active in Inland Missions. They had established a few missions in order to reach out to their own countrymen. One example of this was the Riga Street Mission, which was established by German, Latvian and Russian Baptist church members, in order to share the Gospel with the poor, the homeless and prostitutes. (Tervits, 1999:310).

#### Latvian Baptist Missionaries to China and India

Because there were no opportunities to obtain a missions education in Latvia, people who felt the Lord calling them to the mission field tried to get their education elsewhere in Europe. For example, Andrei Stanislavs went as a missionary to China in 1903 after graduating from seminary in Germany. Augusts Puķe was a missionary to China from 1917, working mainly among Russian speaking people.

Margrieta Vitande-Tahrina finished missions schools in Switzerland and Germany and went as a missionary to India in 1938. She was mainly serving in an orphanage there. There were a few more missionaries for shorter times, as well (Tervits, 1999:315-316).

#### Latvian Lutheran Mission to India – Missionary Anna Irbe

As previously mentioned, after World War I, the Latvian Lutheran Church was developing inland missions. But the focus also turned to missions outside of

Latvia. Since Latvia was just developing in this area, they decided to join the Administration of Swedish Church Mission in 1924. The first and most well known missionary ordained and sent was Anna Irbe, the daughter of the first Latvian Lutheran bishop Kārlis Irbe. She went to India in 1925 and established a missions station in Karunagarapuri, 20 km south of Coimbatore, in the state of Tamil-Nadu. The work was very successful, with Latvian churches sending financial support for this missions work. In 10 years' time, there was a church, school, hospital and a shelter for widows (Rubenis, 2007:42-43). Rev. Rāviņš wrote about the mission work of Anna Irbe:

True missions work is to love those people from a strange nation, to learn their language and writing, to feel their pain, lift them up from their destruction and troubles, to give education, clothing, food for the poor, to teach them to work, to heal their sicknesses; that is the everyday responsibility of a missionary to the nation to which he/she has come to preach the Good News of Christ (Rāviņš, 1990: 8).

All the ties between Latvia and India were broken when the Soviet Army troops came into Latvia in 1940.

### Latvians in Brazil and Bolivia

In the beginning of the 1920s, life in Latvia started to develop and it seemed that evil and hardships were gone and a bright future awaited everyone. But Rev. Charles W. Singer told about a revelation received by some:

I do not know in what way it was done but to several brethren God revealed that Latvia will be swallowed by the 'Red Dragon'. What that 'Red Dragon' really was no one knew! What they knew – 'Red Dragon' meant the Devil in the Bible. This warning first was whispered among the believers and God brought a very great fear among the Latvian Christians, especially among Baptists. Of one thing they were sure: that great disaster would come upon our native land Latvia. Some of the brethren who have visited Brazil suggested that the Latvian Baptists should leave the land before this disaster comes and go to Brazil (Bruvers, 1982:31).

After this revelation, several thousand Latvian Baptists went to Brazil and established a couple of colonies there. Even though these Baptists did not go as missionaries in the traditional sense, just as Courlanders a couple of centuries before, they took their faith with them and shared the Gospel with the local Brazilians. They

did not limit their work only to Brazil either, but extended their work to Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Bolivia (Bruvers, 1982:34).

One of the remarkable missions thrusts by those Latvians was to Bolivia. Some Latvian families that lived there felt from the Lord that they needed to reach out to the Chiquito Indians and Ayoreans. They were able to establish the Rincon Del Tigre mission with a school, a church, Ayorean village-camp, a clinic and workshops. This mission had great influence in the entire area.

The Church in Latvia is just discovering some of this ministry done by Latvians in Brazil and Bolivia. Fifty years of Communism didn't allow any contact with Christians there. The Latvian Church is just beginning to build relationships with brothers and sisters there. The distance between the two continents is great and it takes time to build new bridges.

#### Exiled Pastors in Siberia

Continuing from the revelation given to the Baptists, it soon became a reality that the 'Red Dragon' was the Soviet Union. It came and occupied Latvia first in 1940 and then again in 1944. Thousands of people were arrested, executed and exiled to Siberia. This included many pastors from the Lutheran Church and others. In 1944, after the second occupation there were only 95 Lutheran pastors left. Others were either executed or deported in 1940/41, while some escaped to the west. Out of those 95 remaining, 5 more pastors were killed and 35 were arrested and sent to the gulags in Siberia (Balodis, 1991:369).

But Ķiploks gave slightly different numbers. He said that during the first occupation of 1940/41, the Lutheran Church lost 12 pastors. Right after the second occupation 1944-1946 out of 124 pastors that were left in Latvia, 33 were tried, deported and/or killed. That is 26% of all pastors (Ķiploks, 1993:9-10). Even more persecution was conducted until Stalin's death in 1953. Apparently, there is a need to do more precise research on the number of persecuted pastors of all denominations during this time.

Wherever those pastors were sent, they tried to gather people together in camps to celebrate in worship services, for prayer and for Holy Communion (Valters,

2003:67, Kiploks 1993:189). These people also would not be called missionaries in the traditional understanding – being sent by their own free will by a church or missions agency to share the Message of Kingdom with people who haven't heard. But, wherever they were forcefully sent, they were bold and committed to God enough to share the Good News with others, even their captors.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the missions movement in Latvia flourished the best when there was political freedom in an independent country. The same time, even during the different foreign occupations, God could find faithful people who would share the Good News.

After 1988 Latvia experienced new period in its history – the Soviet Union started to fall apart and Latvia felt more religious freedom. The question to ask here: Did any foreign missionaries come and show what missions mean? Did they bring positive or negative example?

## CHAPTER 3

### BORDERS ARE OPEN – MISSIONARIES COME TO LATVIA

*Perestroika* and *glasnost* were two terms introduced by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. *Perestroika* referred to political and economic reforms; *glasnost* was associated with freedom of speech. At the same time, a Lutheran pastors' movement called "Rebirth and Reformation" was founded. An expanded plenary session of the Writers' Union was held in June of 1988. In October of the same year, the Popular Front of Latvia was established, but preceding this was a demonstration entitled "Par tiesisku valsti Latvijā" (For the Rule of Law in Latvia) in Riga where 120,000 people gathered from all over Latvia. This marked the new direction of Latvia in the Soviet Union and gave hope that one day Latvia could be an independent country again. Even though foreigners still had to obtain their visas in Soviet embassies and had to travel through Moscow, people could visit Latvia more freely. This included the first missionaries. Although a few missionaries had already been coming during the Soviet years, most of the time they were limited to Riga and to serving in churches. Open evangelism outside church walls was impossible.

According to newspaper articles from that time, it seems that the first open air meetings were held in Ogre and Mežaparks in Riga from June 17 -18, 1989. A larger group of missionaries from the west came during that time. This included American astronaut, General Charles Duke, American radio evangelist Jarl Peisti, and Russian evangelist Viktor Hamm from Germany. The articles also mention that some meetings happened in the "Church of the Cross" in Riga, a place of meetings for the Russian independent Baptist church led by Pastor Iosif Bondarenko (*Svētdienas Rīts*, 1989:7, Bondarenko, 2006:299).

Another group of missionaries came in August of 1989. This included Charles Kelly, John Henderer and Mike Parker, all who continued to be instrumental in missions in Latvia. They were serving together with Āgenskalns Latvian Baptist Church in Riga. Together with Latvian Baptist pastors Almers Ludviks and Ainars Baštiks, and the music group "Vārds & co", they had open air meetings at Arkadija Park in Riga (Tervits, 1999:176). This meeting gathered a rather large crowd of 600

people (Kelly, 2005:81-84). Finally, people who were held in darkness for such a long time could see the light of the Gospel!

Kelly writes about these meetings at Arkadija Park, but he does not mention that there were any other big meetings. From his perspective, these were the first. Most likely, this was not his fault since he was just visiting Latvia for couple weeks, but the Latvian pastors he was working with were convinced that nothing like this had ever happened before. The same is true from the Russian perspective. In his book, Bondarenko doesn't write anything about the Latvian Church in Latvia. He is surprised that they, the Russian community, ended up becoming immigrants in Latvia and that Latvia closed its border with Russia later in 1990s. (Bondarenko, 2006:289). Because of this lack of news coverage of each other's events, there was a kind of "Berlin Wall" between Latvians and Russian speaking people dividing them culturally and linguistically.

Kelly mentions this problem in his interview with journalist Gatis Lidums:

It is very painful to see that, so often, Latvian and Russian believers cannot understand each other. This is a mutual problem. I know, Latvia doesn't want Russia here, but the Russian people are different from the Russian government. The problem is complicated and I don't want to criticize, but still – unity among you could accomplish so much (Lidums, 1989:3).

Dr. Luis Palau came to Latvia from September 9-10, 1989 with his "Mission of Peace" (Tervits, 1999:208). Again, there were evangelistic meetings in Mežaparks and many people were open to the Gospel. In his interview with Viljams Šulcs, Dr. Palau gave his view of this problem...

In regards to Latvia, and I mean Latvians, not the immigrants of this land, my goal and hope was to speak to the Latvians directly (Šulcs, 1989:7).

This is interesting but maybe not wise. Instead of building relationships, this really built more walls. Later in the interview, Dr. Palau called Latvians to be careful and ask for God's wisdom and mercy toward Russians and other immigrants.

Another very important event was Operation Mobilization's M/V Logos II arriving in Latvia during the last week of August 1990. This was a great statement of

missions; a practical way to show that missions was important, and that all nationalities are called to be in missions, not only those from the “rich west.” This was also the first time that people could visit a foreign ship without visas and passports. This gave such feeling of freedom. People were so hungry for the Truth. The ship’s officers said that Riga was the first port they had ever been to where all of the books from the ship were sold. People were buying Bibles, English dictionaries, history books and anything else they could find (Šulcs, 1990:11). This is a very positive way that missions can reach into different spheres of society and use diverse approaches for evangelism. Operation Mobilization had good working relationships with local churches in Riga, at least with the Latvian churches, and there was a follow up strategy for those who made a decision to follow Christ during one of the meetings on the ship.

In 1994, four years after independence, there were 29 non-indigenous long-term protestant missionaries. Of course, this statistic does not include all of those who came on a short-term basis (Schindler, 1994:5). When the first long-term missionaries came to Latvia (as well as to other former Soviet republics) they were highly trusted. Some of them came because they had contacts with existing churches. Many of the missionaries came to serve this country and as a result, saw people saved and disciplined. Others came as “saviors” of Latvia, with the idea that the people had lived in caves during the Soviet years. One such bad example was recorded in an interview with evangelist Bob Conley in the newspaper “Bauskas Dzīve” (Life of Bauska). He was very strong in his views, stating that “Catholics and the Orthodox were sects, Baptists did not believe in healings and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and Lutherans prayed not using the name of Jesus” (Ušča, 1991:1). His opinions simply showed his ignorance of the religion and the culture of Latvia. These kinds of statements just created a negative reaction and consequently were rejected. One immediate reaction followed from the Lutheran Archbishop Kārlis Gailītis who asked a valid question: “Does Latvia need American prophets?” (Gailītis, 1991:2) The answer was and is no. Latvia needed missionaries who would come in humility ready to learn the history and the culture, to find out how the persecuted Church in Latvia survived and out of that then reach out to those who had not heard about Jesus.

The first missionaries brought many positive changes with them; they themselves were evangelizing, as well as teaching people that evangelism was possible and needed. For most Christians in Latvia, this was the first time they had ever seen missionaries, let alone discovered that missions existed. Al Akimoff was correct when he said that those first years after the Soviet Union fell apart was a time for great sowing (Akimoff, 1997:4-5). Real reaping came with patience and perseverance much later through church planting, teaching and discipleship.

In order to have a strong missions movement, to have people who are being sent, there is a need for the one who sends. What was happening in the Church in Latvia during those first years of independence? What were the trends of its development?

## CHAPTER 4

### RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH IN LATVIA

After suffering persecution during the Soviet years, churches in Latvia experienced a new wave and method of ministry. For so many years, the Church was defensive, suspicious, questioning anyone who came, and trying to preserve what was left of their freedom. But times were changing and the Church of Latvia needed to find, or rediscover, its role and purpose. After many years of oppression, the church could finally release their own publications, prepare TV and radio broadcasts, organize legal Sunday schools for children and develop youth programs. Pastors and youth groups could hold services in schools, hospitals, prisons and old people's homes (Rubenis, 1997:9). Congregations and pastors had to learn new methods of ministry.

The church suddenly became popular and it seemed that people began to trust the church. Society wanted to find fast and easy answers to their problems. Some of the evangelism of that time tried to offer quick-fixes, but sooner or later people found out that Jesus did not promise paradise here on earth.

Nevertheless, many Lutheran churches were established or reestablished. In 1992, there were 280 Lutheran congregations (Strods, 1996:357). The Lutheran church was able to reorganize their Theological Seminary into the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia in 1990 where all Lutheran pastors would now be trained. The Faculty of Theology experienced different influences of theological thought, conservative and liberal as well, but the Lutheran Church itself has stayed very conservative. It is hard to get an accurate count of Lutherans in Latvia, since many call themselves Lutheran but don't practice their faith. In 1988, the Lutheran church began organizing "Congregational Days" (Draudžu dienas). Only about 100 people, from various congregations, came for the first event, though only four years later the event reached its pinnacle with over 900 participants. People were able to listen to lectures, participate in small groups and share with others why they believed in Christ. Teaching on the "Godly Family," the "Righteousness of God" and the "Questions of Citizenship in God's Kingdom" were highlights of the event (Grīnbergs, 1991:14). It was a great way to cultivate missions within Latvia.

Unfortunately, this was the last big event of its kind for the next 15 years. While interest was great, it was hard to find organizers for such a major event.

The Old Believers were able to open their own theological school in 1989 (Podmazovs, 2001:158). This was a school not only for Latvian believers, but also those from Russia, Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine. Four new churches/congregations were established between 1996 and 1999. Statistically there has been some increase in these numbers during the past 20 years. In 1997, there were approximately 70,000 members of the Old Believers church (Rubenis, 1997:10). By 2007, the number grew to around 80,000. Riga's Grebenshchikov church, with 27,000 members, is the largest Old Believers congregation in the world (Barkans, 2007:15).

The Catholic Church also gained much greater freedom. Their theological seminary was never closed, but it still experienced great difficulties during the Soviet years. It was able to train priests from Latvia, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia beginning in 1987. The theological seminary in Riga had 101 students during the 1989/1990 school year (Strods, 1996:320). By 1992, the Catholic Church was able to reestablish seven congregations.

There were also many changes in the Baptist Union. The Baptist Theological Seminary was open in January 1991. During the period from 1991-1997, there were 18 new churches established. The Baptist Church was also beginning to receive foreign missionaries (Tervits, 1999:193-195). "Hope – 91" was an event organized by the Baptist Union in partnership with Bridge Builders International in May 1991, and probably the largest event regarding evangelism and missions. This was one of the first interdenominational and international events of this magnitude. As a result, partnerships developed between churches in Latvia and beyond (Reča, 2001:3). "Hope-91" was a week of evangelism for families, youth, children, as well as for the old and handicapped (Biķe, 1991:3). In addition, an interdenominational mini-school began which geared its curriculum toward Christians wanting to learn and serve others, including teaching on evangelism, music ministry, youth ministry, and prison ministry (Tervits, 1999:270). The first mini-school had more than 400 pastors and lay leaders from around Latvia. Every night the Sports Arena in Riga seating 4500 filled to capacity. The main theme for those evangelistic meetings was hope, something that was crucial for a nation that just got their freedom (Kelly, 2005:93). This event, as

well as many other evangelistic events, was a very important factor for church restoration and growth. There was also Hope-92 and Hope-94 with mini-schools for training.

The Russian Churches also experienced great growth through many different evangelistic events. This growth stunted because of hundreds of Russian believers who immigrated to the USA at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. Latvia had been more free and open toward spiritual things than other republics in the USSR during Soviet years and even right after independence, and this was still true. This openness made it possible to have the first congress of “Nations for Christ” in Riga in July 1992. There were approximately 1000 participants from all over the Soviet Union and some western countries. The theme for the congress was looking for possibilities in evangelism and missions in the nations of the former Soviet Union. (Bondarenko, 2006:310)

By 1999 the focus of the church in Latvia had, once again, turned inward to defining church programs and remodeling buildings. Therefore, there was a need to have another large evangelistic event, in effort to shake the church. Bridge Builders International invited Luis Palau to Latvia, as a part of “Hope – 99”. Almers Ludviks best described church life at that time in his address to 100 Christian leaders in preparation for the event:

The unity among believers in Latvia is less today than ten years ago, but it’s starting again in a different way. If we want revival, we need to have unity. If we want to have unity, we need to pray together, from different denominations and from different national backgrounds (Kelly, 2005:158).

There really was a change, as Baptists, Lutherans and Pentecostals organized “Hope-99”. This event took place simultaneously in 33 cities in September, 1999. It was jointly organized by Bridge Builders International, Partners Foundation and the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association and it involved 153 Latvian, Russian and international churches, and organizations, including Youth With A Mission (YWAM), from fourteen countries (Kelly, 2005:162). Even though some Lutheran pastors and lay people were not open to this type of evangelism, the archbishop was opening doors for a new type of evangelism and calling for discipleship. He was challenging

church members to be more active in their preaching and more open to receiving new believers (Vanags, 1999:4).

Of course, this was during the time when the nation was opening up. It had been spiritually hungry for 50 years, so people were ready to listen. Other spiritual movements were coming to Latvia as well, like Unification Church and Buddhists. That confused people, both traditional Christians and non-believers. Christians did not really know what to do with the new spiritual developments, and for non-believers it was difficult even to understand what was Christian and what was not. Klīve challenged church members to show hospitality and acceptance to those new believers that were getting saved through evangelistic efforts. He saw this as only key which would turn people away from seeking spirituality in other places (i.e. New Age) and which would welcome people to Christ (Klīve, 1991:5).

The Church was waking up from the lethargic sleep forced by atheism of Soviet Union. It was time of excitement and new opportunities. And few of those new opportunities were missions organizations. What were those? Who were the founders? How did those missions organizations develop?

## CHAPTER 5

### FIRST MISSIONS IN LATVIA

Historical situation was rapidly developing in the last years of the Soviet Union. The Church was ready to take more active role in society. Christians were reading the Bible about the early church preaching the Gospel and they understood that it is their responsibility too. Therefore the first missions organizations developed in Latvia.

#### Latvian Christian Mission

Latvian Christian Mission was established in December, 1988. This was the first mission of its kind to be established in the Soviet Union, and by June of 1989 it was still the only one (Svētdienas Rīts, 1989:7).

Latvian Christian Mission (LCM) was an interdenominational mercy ministry organization that had around 250 volunteers by April, 1989, mostly Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians from Baptist and Pentecostal churches (Prēdele, 1989:3). A few Latvians, like Maris Dzelzs, were also involved. One of the organizers of Latvian Christian Mission was Andrei Bondarenko, who also the vice-president for some time (Tervits, 1999:211).

The volunteers were serving in seven hospitals in Latvia and took care of orphans. LCM also had a working relationship with Disabled People's International (Svētdienas Rīts, 1989:7). In November of 1989, LCM organized a seminar geared toward missions and people working in hospitals and mental institutions. By that time there were other missions organized in the Soviet Union, but the difficulty still was that this type of work was illegal according the laws of the Soviet Union (Svētdienas Rīts, 1989:2).

When prison doors opened, LCM was the first ones to go in and preach the Good News. Some of the pastors and preachers who went to serve in a women's prison were Mikhail Kolesnichenko, Vasily Bondarenko, Vadim Kovalev, Andrei Bondarenko, Peter Samoilich and Ivan Parafinuk (Prēdele, 1989:3). Since Maris Dzelzs was involved and had been in prison himself, LCM through Maris worked

with the Talsi region police in organizing a rehabilitation center for former prisoners where they could receive spiritual and material help (Svētdienas Rīts, 1989:2).

Another area of ministry for LCM was receiving Bibles from Western Europe and distributing them to local churches (Svētdienas Rīts, 1989:7). This was before the Latvian Bible Society was established. They received Latvian Bibles for believers in Latvia and also Russian Bibles for transport to other places in the Soviet Union.

LCM doesn't have as many volunteers today, but it is still active in home missions to public school teachers, and in this way they are reaching out to children. Three times a year LCM organizes conferences called "Integrating Biblical Principles into Education", which gathers around 300 public school teachers from all over Latvia.

### Prison Fellowship

Other ministries came out of Latvian Christian Mission. One of those was in cooperation with International Prison Fellowship, which organized its first commission in the Soviet Union in Riga, in 1990. Maris Dzelzs was the first president of this newly established Prison Fellowship.

Right after the Soviet Union dissolved, Latvian Christian Mission was the first organization to start planned and purposeful ministry in women's prisons. Congregations also wanted to participate in missions and evangelism in prisons. Yet all of those efforts lacked coordination. Different denominations were doing different things. Sometimes it almost led to rivalry and competition. Prison Fellowship in Latvia was established to help Christians work together (Dzelzs, 1990:3). Prison Fellowship in Latvia also had some help and input from Prison Fellowship workers in Oregon (Kelly, 2005:89).

Ministry continued through Prison Fellowship, but after 10 years, it seemed that the government was ready to take over and enforced regulations in this area. Since 2002, there is an official regulation for chaplain service. According to this provision, chaplains can come from Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, Methodist, Baptist, Adventist, and Pentecostal churches, or from the Riga Jewish Community. Even though Prison Fellowship is not active in Latvia anymore there is

still interdenominational ministry happening in the area of inland missions to prisons through government regulations. According to this guideline, chaplains are funded by state and local government entities, as well as by churches (Ministru kabineta noteikumi, 2002:6).

#### International Tent Mission

International Tent Mission was established in 1991 in order to do the work of evangelism in Russia. Andrei Bondarenko was its president. Eighteen new churches were established in Russia during its 5 years of missions work (Tervits, 1999:211).

#### Latvian Christian Radio

Perhaps not considered a missions agency in the traditional sense, but Latvian Christian Radio has played a major role in evangelism, as well as teaching Christians and challenging them for missions. Latvian Christian Radio was established in 1993 by Talivaldis Talbergs (Tervits, 1999:306) and has served as an interdenominational ministry facilitating ecumenism in Latvia since then.

#### Salvation Army

Few organizations were ever reestablished which that had been active during the original independent Latvia (pre-1940) and then were closed down during the Soviet years. One of those that came back, though, was the Salvation Army. It was reestablished on November 18, 1990. The newspaper *Svētdienas Rīts* (Sunday Morning) records that by June of the next year, the Salvation Army in Latvia was the largest Salvation Army group in all of Eastern Europe (E.B., 1991:3).

Today the Salvation Army in Latvia is quite active in evangelism and social action in five of the municipal regions of Latvia.

#### Jaunatnes Kristīgā Savienība (Youth Christian Union; YMCA/YWCA)

YMCA/YWCA in Latvia was under the name of Youth Christian Union and was quite active in Latvia from 1920-1940. This organization was reestablished in September 1990 with the purpose of working with youth. This organization was

positioning itself as a Christian organization that would give spiritual values, as well as focus on sports and team work (Pūle, 1990:3).

Journalist Juris Tihonovs mentions that the Youth Christian Union's program is geared in three directions: Christian life (Sunday Schools, Bible studies, summer camps), healthy lifestyle (sports, wholesome foods), and cultural life (music groups, dances). He reports that this organization has 600 members (Tihonovs, 1991:2).

Even though the numbers are large and media coverage is quite good, this organization has not reached its potential, and today it doesn't play much of a role in the missions movement in Latvia.

### Latvian Bible Society

Like, Latvian Christian Radio, the Latvian Bible Society would not be considered a missions organization in the traditional sense, but after Latvia's independence there was a great need for Bibles in Latvia; thus it was vital to establish a Bible Society. The Latvian Bible Society was established on May 18, 1990. It was also an interdenominational effort that included Lutherans, Adventists, Catholics and Baptists. Russian speaking Old Believers and Orthodox were also included. In the beginning years of this ministry, the society served mainly as a means of distribution of Bibles that were imported from abroad (Zūre, 1990:3).

Immediately following Latvia's independence, there was such a great hunger for the Word of God that people were willing to pay a great deal of money just to get a Bible. At the same time, some people saw this as a great "business" venture; buying Bibles from churches received through the Bible Society and selling them to people who were not church members for a much higher price (Pūle, 1990:3). Today Bibles are freely available and the "business" side has ceased.

The Latvian Bible Society continues its work through developing new translations of the Latvian Bible, as well as publishing other Bible study materials.

### Gideons' Mission

The Gideons' Mission in Latvia was established in February of 1991. It was a protestant mission, involving lay people. The goal was to distribute the Word of God

in army, hospitals, prisons, hotels, schools and universities. Most founders were Russians, but it included also two Latvian brothers (Lauva, 1991:15)

### Other Initiatives

There are many other ministries and organizations that were started a bit later in Latvia. This would include the Lutheran Hour Ministries (Luterāņu stunda) and mission “Pakāpieni” (Stair Steps) which were both established in 1992. Agape Latvia, which is a part of Campus Crusade for Christ, was established in 1994, even though they had their first initiatives in Latvia starting in 1990. The first ever public showing of the Jesus film was on December 14, 1990. Even then, Agape Latvia was trying to work together with different denominations, but the main person who joined Agape Latvia effort, was the Lutheran pastor Alvis Sauka. The Navigators also came to Latvia in 1993. Another group that had a huge impact on the whole of the former Soviet Union, was a ministry called “Book of Life”. This ministry partnered with Youth With A Mission in Russia and also in Latvia. They gave thousands of copies of the “Book of Life” to use in schools and other places of ministry. This opened many doors for ministry. In 1994 Charles Kelley established “Bridge Builders International” that helped build partnerships between churches in the USA and Latvia. Their Latvian affiliate “Nodibinājums Partneri” was established in 1998 in Riga.

### Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Latvia

The earliest reference of YWAM in a publication is found in Baptist magazine “Baptistu Draudzēm” in March 1991. It tells about a YWAM team from Norway serving in Murmansk, Russia. The name “Youth With A Mission” is so unusual for the Latvian ear that it is translated in very peculiar way – “Jaunieši ar uzdevumu” (Baptistu Draudzem, 1991, No 2:22).

The next reference is about a King’s Kids team from the USA coming to Latvia and ministering in Liepaja. This team came directly from the Olympic outreach in Barcelona. They had open air meetings at the main square in Liepaja, where just few years back there was a statue of Lenin. It is a very positive article about children and youth doing missions. The name of organization in Latvian though is still unusual – “Jaunatne ar sūtību” (Brikmanis, 1992:30-31).

The first full time Discipleship Training School (DTS) was advertised in the Baptist Magazine “Baptistu Draudzēm”. The name of organization is not translated and used simply as “YWAM”. The information tells about the DTS, what will happen there and how to apply. The goal for the DTS is for each student to get to know God and the Bible better, strengthen personal relationship with Jesus through worship and intercession, in order to be trained for evangelism, training and mercy ministry (Mamis, 1993:33).

During the first full time DTS YWAM Latvia held a “GO Festival” in Talsi, July 1993. That was a missions conference and it attracted around 400 young people from all over Latvia. There were international teachers and speakers, musicians and dancers. It was a powerful time that helped to inspire a number of people to think differently. Outreach teams from different countries participated in this event. That included a King’s Kids from Belarus, Ukrainian/American singer and a lot of Latvian musicians.

In summer of 1993 YWAM’s mercy ship “Anastasis” visited Lithuania. On board of that ship for more than a year then was a Latvian lady Iveta Klints. She had been trained in Solåsen center in Sweden starting spring of 1992. After that Klints joined the M/VAnastasis. Klints has never been on staff with YWAM Latvia, but in her article she mentions that Maris Dzelzs is leading YWAM work in Latvia (Klints, 1993:29-30).

In June 25, 1994 YWAM Latvia organized March for Jesus. YWA M Latvia staff Normunds Priednieks in his article invites people to come for this event. This was the first time when so many people openly went out in the streets to celebrate Jesus (Priednieks, 1994:15). The Baptist article after the celebration is controversial. It is still very far away from the ecumenism. New Christian movements that used dance and movements in worship received the majority of criticism. Also criticized were those who had left the traditional churches and established new ones. On the positive side it mentioned that this March was very much on time and needed (Bikis, 1994:31-32).

Starting September 1994 YWAM Latvia organized its second DTS. In that school there were 20 students, ages 17 to 37, mostly from Latvia, but also four

Americans. The goal of that school was to prepare a group of missionaries to serve in Latvia and other places. Students were preparing to go on outreach in three teams: to Perm, Russia; to Murmansk, Russia; Latgale, Latvia and Belarus (Klevinska, 1995:30).

In July of 1995 M/V “Anastasis” visited the Latvian port Ventspils. By that time YWAM Latvia had been developing and running, so the “Anastasis” could help in the evangelism efforts. YWAM Latvia with help of Mercy Ships organized the welcome of the ship. There were some problems to obtain all the necessary permits initially, but with the help of the Ministry of Welfare and Ventspils city council the ministry of the “Anastasis” became possible. The author of the article expresses joy that members of Baptist churches were serving as translators during the three week ministry (Lauva, 1995:197). The local Ventspils newspaper also gave a positive report about the ministry of the “Anastasis” crew (Jucevičs, 1995:2).

By 1998 some of the Baptist pastors’ attitudes had changed. Pastor Šķuburs in his article is very negative about YWAM Latvia and in general. First he is very much against any interdenominational movements, not just YWAM. YWAM is accused as being too much influenced by charismatic tendencies, taking people away from churches and hidden working against churches, and unacceptable behavior in public meetings. Šķuburs has misunderstood YWAM’s working with churches and states that YWAM is an alternative to a church (Šķuburs, 1998: 594). If the pastor was thinking missions’ movement, then yes – YWAM was an alternative for people who wanted to be active in missions. If the pastor was thinking that YWAM staff became members of YWAM “church”, then he was very mistaken.

This was the last article in the official Baptist magazine “Baptistu Draudzēm” or later “Baptistu Vēstnesis”. This quite negative attitude towards YWAM in Baptist circles continued for 5-7 years, and only in the last years the attitude has changed. This, of course, doesn’t include all pastors. There always were Baptist pastors who supported YWAM and wanted to work together.

YWAM ministry in Latvia became more and more active. That can be seen through different publications in newspapers and magazines. The Pukis family from

YWAM Latvia started active ministry in Liepaja in 1998. They were leading Family Ministries, teaching on family values and organizing Family Camps (Pūķe, 1998:4-5).

In July of 1998 YWAM organized Jesus' Festival in Liepaja. That was also five years celebration of YWAM in Latvia. In the program were seminars, performances and concerts on streets in Liepaja and on stage in "Pūt Vējiņi". It was a missions' project as well that included missionaries from USA, Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Norway. Loren Cunningham, the founder of YWAM, was the main speaker (Pastore, 1998:1; Beluza, 1998:5).

One major ministry of YWAM Latvia has been work with addicts. It started with the first few people who got saved at the end of 1990s. They came to do DTS and then challenged Judite Dzelza to start camps for addicts called, "Way to Freedom". Judite has been very instrumental in helping people to get free from addictions (Alberte, 2005:4). These camps have been running once or twice a year since 2000 (Mierkalne, 2006:5). At the end of 2005 Judite Dzelza was awarded the prize "Latvia's Pride" for her self-sacrificial service to addicted people (Mierkalne, 2005:4). The goal was never to work for a prize, but to show these people that there is a possibility for a different way. People during those camps could get new hope and experience God working (Dubrovskis, 2006: 6; Ķergalvis, 2006:7). God had really blessed this ministry and it continues till today.

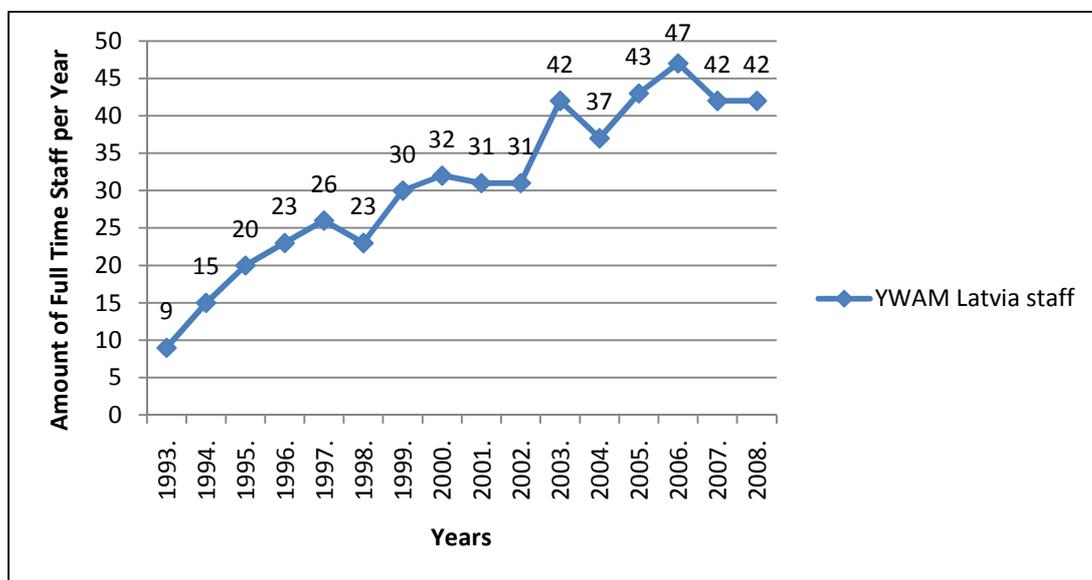
In the last few years there have been more publications about areas of training. Musicians for Missions seminar in 2006 attracted many musicians who were quite influential in the Latvian Christian music world (Ultimate Shockwave, 2008:57-58). Missionaries Larry and Elsie Dannhauer and Joseph Watson were teaching in Jelgava (Pranka- Jankovska, 2007:8). YWAM Latvia staff helped with leading the Alpha course in Valdemarpils (Briede, 2008:6). It also had been helping in organizing Missions Days for the last four years. Missions Days was an interdenominational event for missions' mobilization (Konovalčika, 2009:2, 7).

YWAM Latvia has been successfully continuing ministry in all three areas of calling – evangelism, training and mercy ministry. YWAM is well known to train their new converts through DTS and other training possibilities (Vīndedze, 1999:35, 53). Latvian Christian Radio has been publishing a magazine "Tikšanās" ("Meeting")

since 2000. This is not a YWAM magazine, but almost in every issue there could be found a reference to YWAM. It could be either about someone from YWAM staff, or someone who had done an outreach with YWAM, or someone who had gotten saved through YWAM ministry. There are so many references that those are not given here. It just shows that YWAM Latvia has been influential in its ministry. In the last 20 years YWAM Latvia has started to change the mindset of the Church regarding missions.

The majority of international Christian missions organizations started their ministry at the beginning of 1990's in the capital city Riga. YWAM did it in a different way. Initial YWAM development happened in Talsi that is 130 km (80 miles) from Riga. Part of that was connected with the founders' place of residence and the building that they got. But that also was connected with purpose of serving out in the country while everyone else is concentrated in the capital city.

Later starting 1995 it developed through the training base in Valdemarpils. Since 2005 there are three operating locations for YWAM Latvia: Valdemarpils, Liepaja and Riga. The full time staff numbers show continuous growth with some years when it went on decrease. See Fig. 1



**Fig. 1**

Legally YWAM had been registered on May 17, 2004 first as a religious organization. At the end of 1990s the law of religious organizations was changed and

YWAM had to re-register as a church. There were not any legal limitations to YWAM's ministry, but being registered as a church created some complications.

Many different missions organizations were developed in late 1980s and beginning of 1990s. Most of those organizations are still active today. Some have moved to Russia due to Latvia joining European Union and closing border with Russia. Majority of first missions organizations were focused to serving in Latvia, but there were believers who were thinking broader than just Latvia. What were the influences for thinking of overseas missions?

## CHAPTER 6

### FIRST THOUGHTS ON OVERSEAS MISSIONS

#### Lausanne Congress in Manila 1989

As the Soviet Union was crumbling, Christian leaders had the chance to participate in Lausanne II Congress in Manila in July 1989. Out of the sixty eight person Soviet delegation, there were at least four Latvians: Baptist Pastor Almers Ludviks, Lutheran Pastor Jānis Vanags, Viljams Šulcs and Gunta Jukumsone. There were also some Russian brothers from Latvia. This was an opportunity to share with the rest of the world about the former religious persecution in the Soviet Union.

As a result, Viljams, with his wife Dana, started the mission “Pakāpieni” (Stair Steps) geared towards helping families in need and single pregnant women who did not have a place to go. This was their attempt at dealing with abortion and the state of the family in Latvia.

Rev. Vanags became the archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, and is still in this office today. He has been very influential in upholding the missions movement in the Lutheran Church.

Rev. Ludviks has been involved in organizing major evangelistic crusades such as “Hope ‘91”, “Hope ‘92”, “Hope ‘99” and others. He started leading the first mission trips to Turkmenistan. Seeds planted have been quite fruitful. Janis Vanags wrote:

We discovered the world with different eyes; we understood that more than 2 billion people have never heard about Jesus Christ. We turned our attention to the Great Commission – to bring the Gospel to all nations. We tried to reevaluate our lives and repent from the things that were hindering us, not only to bring the Good News to others, but to also live out the message ourselves. (Vanags, 1989:5)

#### Solåsen - Swedish Missions Training Center

In the 1980s, the former president of the Slavic-Swedish Mission, Ingemar Martinson, founded a training center in the south of Sweden in the city of Solåsen. This center was also a contact place for churches from East and West. Five to six

times a year, he conducted week-long seminars for youth from Eastern Europe. This training was done quietly already during Soviet years, not creating suspicions from the Soviet government. It has given birth to many new ministries in Eastern Europe, including some in Latvia (Kelly, 2005:122). After the borders opened much wider, encouraged by Lausanne II, a much bigger group went to Solåsen in 1990. There were 19 people from various churches in Latvia. Lutheran Pastor Guntis Dišlers commented on his training, that it was shocking to find out that 53 nations had not yet received the Good News. Therefore, they were receiving training in missions, as well (Dišlers, 1990:4).

Ingemar Martinson has played a much greater role in missions from Latvia. Solåsen has been just one way. In 1992, Ingemar challenged Latvians to use the Russian language they had to learn during the Soviet years and go as missionaries to other former Soviet republics. In 1990, he challenged the Russian Christians of Latvia to go and evangelize Siberia and not to just leave and go to the USA (Kelly, 2005:122-123). He has also influenced Maris and Judite Dzelzs, who received training in Solåsen and later established Youth With A Mission in Latvia.

The Manila Congress and center in Solåsen as well as other foreign missionaries were challenging Christians in Latvia to go beyond the borders and serve other nations also. Independence gave more possibilities to travel and share the Good News. Where did the first missionaries go? To where were the first missions trips set?

## CHAPTER 7

### FIRST MISSION TRIPS FROM LATVIA

The first mission trips that Latvians went to were to area of the former Soviet Union. That is due to knowledge of the Russian language and easier access to travel than other countries. What were those places?

#### Nizhnyaya Bulanka, Krasnoyarsk Kray, Siberia

There was an early Latvian community in Siberia. The first settlers went in the 1860s. While the first ones went because they were exiled from Latvia, the next wave came during World War I and others went to search for land to farm. The village of Nizhnyaya Bulanka is almost 300 km (180 mi) south of Krasnoyarsk in Siberia and was established by the Latvian Lutheran Church sometime during the Russian Empire. The pastor who was there in the 1930s was arrested then and the church was destroyed and turned into a club.

After the independence of Latvia, it was possible for Christians to go and share the Gospel again. The first pastors who went were Normunds Kamergrauzis and Aida Predele in 1990. The Latvian language teacher, Juris Zalans, also went there to serve. Even the oldest people in Nizhnyaya Bulanka had not seen a church or a pastor, but they were very open to the Gospel. A few people were even baptized during this first mission trip (Predele, 1990:4-5).

Short-term mission trips continued next year with some students from the Faculty of Theology of Latvian University. They were visiting and ministering in Nizhnyaya Bulanka, Augshbebri, Verkhniy Suetuk, Karatuzskoye and Motorskhoye. Latvians were serving not only in the Latvian villages, but in Estonian and Finnish villages, as well (Jugbārde, 1991:8).

Maybe this was not a permanent mission, but this definitely brought up some of the first ideas for missions. On the other hand, these mission trips were mostly done by theologians, pastors and students, which did not facilitate a lay missions movement.

### Trip to India 1990

In July of 1990 two people, theology student Austris Rāviņš and film director Marika Vidiņa, went on a mission trip to India. They went for a short trip to serve at the mission station Karunagarapuri 20 km south of Coimbatore, in the Tamil-Nadu state established by Latvian missionary Anna Irbe (Rāviņš, 1990:8). During this trip they did some historical research, made a movie about the mission station, as well as shared in the churches there.

### Volga Mission

In 1990, Latvian Christian Mission organized the Volga Mission. The leader of that event was evangelist Bondarenko. For a couple months, the group ministered in Sizran, Saransk and Kuibyshev. Since it was still early in the *perestroika* years, the group experienced some difficulties with local authorities there, for example, they said that evangelism had been forbidden by law since 1924. Missionaries shared at culture houses, prisons and hospitals (*Svētdienas Rīts*, 1990:3).

### Mission to Turkmenistan

Aigars Līkums, a member of Matthews Baptist Church in Riga, went as a “tent maker” missionary to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. He had first been sent there to serve his military time under the Soviet army. Through that God really put that nation on his heart and he moved there in the early 1990s.

Rev. Ludviks knew about Līkums. He was ready to take a team to Turkmenistan after hearing Ingemar Martinson’s challenge to go to the Muslim nations of Soviet Union. The first mission trip to Turkmenistan was in August of 1993. The first team was made up of three Latvians – Almers Ludviks, pastor of Āgenskalns Baptist Church, Ainars Baštiks, pastor of Matthews Baptist Church, and Raimonds Locs (then a seminary student, now an army chaplain) and three foreigners. This trip was successful and a greater seed for missions was planted in Rev. Almers heart.

With the support of Āgenskalns Baptist Church, this mission to Turkmenistan continued for four more years. A church was planted in Ashgabat, along with a few

more small groups outside of the capital city. The church in Riga was able to raise finances to support this new church, as well as send people on short-term trips. (Kelly, 2005:122-130)

### Mission to Bashkortostan

In 2000, Lutheran Archbishop Vanags challenged Latvians to go as missionaries to their own people in Russia. The Latvian Embassy in Russia invited two people to go and serve in Archlatish village, Arkhangel'skoye Region, Bashkortostan, Russia. Lutheran pastor Sarmīte Fišere and Latvian language teacher Katrīna Zīle were open to this challenge and committed to ministry there for nine months from September, 2000 until May 2001 (Stalte, 2000:5).

Even though Latvians had lived there for more than 100 years, they still were not welcome there. Bashkortostan is a Muslim country and the Christian faith of Latvians is foreign to them. Muslims consider the parish house as an “unclean place.” Life is very difficult there and people are very poor (Stalte, 2000:4). The main difficulty for the missionaries was that people were poor spiritually and lived in hopelessness. It seemed that nobody even needed the Bible or any other book in Latvian (Fišere, 2001:6). But in the end, a Sunday school was established with 27 children, Latvian classes were taught at the local school and church services were conducted with around 40 people in attendance. The attaché of the Latvian Embassy in Russia Vlasova admitted that Zīle was very good Latvian language teacher, but her missions' activities in a Muslim community could become dangerous for herself and that was not the teacher's responsibility (Driķe, 2001:5). The missionary influence did not only stay within the Archlatish village, but reached out to other villages, as well. Missionaries mentioned that after some time of ministry, the statue of Lenin finally disappeared from the school, and people's homes become cleaner and nicer (Fišere, 2001:6).

Diaries published in the newspaper Svētdienas Rīts show that YWAM had been involved quite actively with this trip even though Fišere and Zīle were not YWAM missionaries. Zīle had done her Discipleship Training School in 1996, but she was not on staff. In spite of this, YWAM supplied Fišere and Zīle with Russian Bibles and with a laptop computer. Later, YWAM also sent some humanitarian aid

and some YWAM staff donated a car for them to travel to Bashkortostan (Fišere, 2000:5, 6).

At the same time, people in the Baptist church also started mission trips to Bashkortostan. Their idea of going to Bashkortostan was birthed at the Tilža Evangelistic Training Center in 1999, but it took two years to prepare. The first trip, organized by Bridge Builders International, was very international. On this first team in 2001 there were two Latvians (Pastor Pēteris Eisāns and Armands Avotiņš, a student in Tilža), Vladimir Andriječ (a Ukrainian pastor ministering in Riga), two Americans and one Swedish lady. This team geared their mission efforts toward reaching the Bashkirs. Even though this team was not looking to serve Latvians in Bashkortostan they unexpectedly met Fišere and Zīle in one of the villages.

Since that first trip, several groups of pastors and lay ministers have returned to Bashkortostan under Pēteris Eisans' leadership (Kelly, 2005:193-196).

These mission trips, done by a local church and not by a missions' organization, have probably been the most successful in raising missions awareness in the Latvian people.

#### Other Initiatives

Iosif Bondarenko, with his church and brothers from Russia, organized a missions campaign "Christ For the Nations of Siberia" in 1991. This group used the ship "Tobol" and went on the Irtysh and Oba Rivers to visit many towns and villages and share the Gospel with those who had never heard before. There were other missions activities in later years as well (Бондаренко, 2006:308).

In 1992, together with the American ministry "International Crusade," a group of five Latvians from Mersrags Baptist Church went to serve and participate in missions work in the Voronezh and Nizhniynovgorod area in Russia (Pallo, 1992:28; Tervits, 1999:305).

In 1992, the Billy Graham Association organized a major evangelism campaign in Moscow called "Возрождение-92" (Revival). 50 – 60 people from Lutheran, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Latvia took part in this event as part of the choir, as well as counselors (Lapsa, 1992:16).

## Missions' Outreaches Organized By YWAM Latvia

Since its inception, YWAM Latvia has had dual focus – serving to local people in Latvia and sending teams ministering abroad.

The first DTS in 1993 had two outreach teams. One team went to serve in Perm, Russia. That was something very unusual and challenging for Latvians to go to Russia. The other team did ministry in the Talsi region and then in the Jekabpils region.

In summer of 1994 YWAM Latvia welcomed a King's Kids team from Sweden. That was a sports team that used soccer as a means of meeting other youth and sharing God's love with them. This team did successful evangelism together with the YWAM Latvia staff. The team ministered in Vecumnieki, Bauska region, Jekabpils and Ogre (Ekvals, 1994:1; Dravnieks, 1994:1).

The second DTS (1994-1995) had three outreach teams. YWAM continued to invest in Perm, Russia. At the same time they were looking for some new locations and the Lord showed them Murmansk, Russia. The third team went part of the time to Belarus and the other half was in Latvia (Klevinska, 1995:30).

During the third DTS (1995-1996) YWAM Latvia pioneered an outreach going to a western country – France. They also continued to invest in Russia and Latvia.

Till approximately 2003 there are not many publications about YWAM Latvia outreaches. After 2003, there was much more written about different Latvians doing missions through YWAM abroad. See Appendix 1 for specific references.

The third major area concerned mercy ministry. YWAM Latvia has been very active in sharing the Good News through practical help and distributing humanitarian aid. Starting February 2000 once every year YWAM Latvia organized an International Mercy Ministry Project in one of the towns of Latvia:

- Kolka in 2000,
- Liepaja in 2001,
- Līvāni in 2002,
- Valdemārpils in 2003,

- Kuldīga in 2004 (Poriņa, 2005:4),
- Talsi in 2005,
- Līvāni in 2006,
- Dagda in 2007 (Vjaterē, 2007: 2),
- Balvi in 2008 and
- Rezekne in 2009 (Sestdienas Grozs, 2009: 1)

Other mercy ministry activities involved Missions Adventures from Norway. Teams of youth came to serve in different small villages and reach out to people with their love (Bērzs, 2005:3). A King's Kids team from Korea did some mercy ministry in Sabile and Kandava, and also shared the Gospel (Zariņš, 2006: 5).

YWAM Latvia sent outreach teams serving abroad and in Latvia. It also received outreach teams from other countries. A Family DTS team from Denmark in 2007 served in Cesvaine (Graudiņa, 2007:4) and in Jelgava (Pranka-Jankovska, 2007:8). In 2008 youth from four churches in Stockholm came to Latvia to serve in Saldus together with Latvian DTS students (Kēpulis, 2008:5). A YWAM Latvia DTS team served in different regions of Latvia, including Padure (Hencenberga, 2008:5).

There were quite a lot of missions activities organized by different organizations, including YWAM. The next chapter will explore who were the founders of YWAM Latvia and how did they become the founders.

## CHAPTER 8

### MARIS AND JUDITE DZELZS – FOUNDERS OF YOUTH WITH A MISSION LATVIA

Maris Dzelzs was born in Riga in 1959. His father left the family when Maris was only one month old and the family returned to Talsi. When Maris was ten, his mother passed away. Maris grew up in his grandparents' care. They were godly people and members of the Talsi Baptist Church.

Maris grew up on stories of his grandfather Ernests Mellers. He told about a country that used to be free. His home situation was quite strict. His grandparents did not believe in TV or other “worldly things.” Maris was taken to church in a time where there was no youth work and Sunday schools were not allowed. Everything connected with children was forbidden in church. This small Baptist church tried to obey the law, so Maris had to sit with all the adults without much understanding of what was happening in the service.

Maris had a difficult time in school because of Christianity. His grandparents were Christians and Maris was not part of the youth communist organization, called the Pioneers. He wanted to be part of them and could not understand why his grandfather did not want him to be.

From the age of 10 or 12, Maris began to feel that he wanted to be free. Free from the church where he could not understand anything, and free from the restrictions put on him by his grandparents. When he was 16, he felt he was old enough to be free and ran away from home. He met some young men and realized that he had been growing up in a “green-house”. Maris did not smoke, nor use alcohol or drugs. These young men were part of a street gang, which everyone feared; but they feared no one. This looked like a very exciting lifestyle to Maris. He wanted to be part of them, so he joined this gang and soon began smoking, doing drugs, drinking alcohol and causing violence. The gang was involved with crime, so Maris was involved with it, too. At the age of 16, Maris was arrested for the first time, and was sentenced to one year in jail.

After serving this first sentence, Maris' authority in the crime world had grown and he formed his own gang. This freedom was short lived and after four or five months, he was tried and put in jail for four years. This time it was maximum security prison. Four years was a long time, but that did not change Maris.

However life in outside of prison still was not real freedom, mainly because of the regulations put on him. Maris was limited to stay only in Talsi, had to be home every night and could not even come close to stores that sold liquor. That life was too boring for Maris and after a couple of months, he ended up in jail again. By the time he was 25, Maris had spent seven years in jail. There was something wrong with this picture. It brought depression to Maris life. Maris, who so badly wanted to be free, realized that he was looking for the wrong type of freedom, the criminal freedom that takes a person to imprisonment. This situation forced him to think. By that time, some of his friends had committed suicide which caused even more depression.

All this time Maris' grandfather was still praying for him. Every place he went, whether to a church service or a Bible study, he would ask for prayer for Maris. He even asked some of the youth from his church to write letters to Maris, since he was getting out of jail again. One Christian girl wrote a letter.

Judite was born in Talsi in 1963. Her family was also members of the Talsi Baptist Church, and Judite attended church with her parents. She knew Ernests Mellers and had heard about Maris, but did not know him personally. She was very active in church life, singing in the choir and played piano in church since she was 10 years old. Judite responded to Mr. Mellers request to write to Maris. He had wanted someone, other than himself, to write and tell Maris that he was wasting his life. So, Judite wrote a letter to Maris, explaining that it was possible to live life in a different way.

Maris was shocked to receive that letter; not what she wrote, but that someone had written at all. After getting out of jail in December 1982, Maris went to visit Judite. He showed up at Judite's door late at night, with a big bottle of vodka, as a sign of courtesy to the family, but had also brought some nasty looking friends along with him. Maris and Judite sat and talked; Maris trying to convince Judite that there was no God, but Judite standing strong.

Maris liked Judite and he started to go to church, though he was drunk most of the time. He would even say that he came to church from a bar, and then went back again after church. He still hadn't really changed and was just playing around. He was arrested again, but was released. He began to feel he was really going nowhere.

Maris proposed to Judite and she said "yes". It was not that she was not thinking or was not aware of how Maris lived. It was even going against Scripture. But deep down in Judite's inner being, the Holy Spirit was giving her assurance to marry him. They got married in May 1983, and the reaction was very negative from everyone; not only from people in church, but also from relatives on both sides. The pastor of the Baptist Church refused to marry them, as well.

In December 1983, there were evangelistic meetings in church. Maris saw people there and realized that most of them believed what they said. This made Maris wonder. "What if it's all true? What if there is a God?" Maris decided to pray this prayer: "God, I am not sure if you can hear me or not, and really I am not even sure if you exist. But if you do, if what these people are saying is true, could you please show yourself to be real to me?" This was a major turning point in Maris' life. During the next 6 months, Maris got a hold of some good Christian literature which was illegal at the time. He even started to read the Bible. But he continued in his old way of life.

By the end of 1984, Maris was sure that there was something out there. He knew that there is a God and so he felt worse than ever before. He knew that he was going straight to hell. On Christmas Day of 1984, Maris prayed the prayer of salvation and entrusted his life to God who completely changed Maris' life.

Maris' grandfather was the first person who was surprised to hear this news.. He had prayed for Maris for many years, but when Maris was saved, it was difficult for him to believe. The pastor also was not convinced right away, but Maris was baptized six months later (Dzelzs, 1991: 22-23, Dzelzs, 2005).

As active as Maris had been in the criminal world, he was now just as active in the kingdom of God. He became an evangelist in the Baptist Church, running evangelistic meetings around the area. Maris was involved in different Christian organizations and he reached out to youth and many people got saved through him. But he was not confined to just the Baptist Church in his evangelism methods and

understanding, and the leaders of the Baptist Union were not very happy about that (Tervits, 1999:304).

In 1990 Maris and some other Baptist youth leaders were sent to Amsterdam for a Youth Missions Congress. This helped Maris see a larger missions vision.

Maris had seen the light of God and had experienced a change in his life. Because of this, he wanted to be more active and share with anyone who would listen. Maris began serving with Latvian Christian Mission right from its inception. Once the prisons opened up, Maris was one of the first to serve in them. His past helped him to find common ground with prisoners. In 1990 Prison Fellowship was established in Latvia, and Maris became its first president.

He was very active and bold during the Barricades' time and fought for Latvian independence in January, 1991. The time of the Barricades was very important one week in fighting for Latvian independence. Soviet Army troops had occupied TV station and government building of Lithuanian capital Vilnius. On the morning of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 13 people were killed in Vilnius by Soviet tanks. The Latvian government immediately called for non-violent resistance and asked Latvian nation to come and guard the strategic places in Riga – the government, TV station, radio building. Farmers from country came with heavy trucks and tractors and built the barricades. The time was very unstable, and no one knew what would happen. On the evening of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1991, Maris shared the Gospel on national television, giving people hope of the Gospel (Dzelzs, 1991:20; Tervits, 1999:192). Another very special event was visiting Soviet military police men, called the Black Berets at their base. Those men had been used to suppress Latvian resistance and to bring fear that the Soviet Union could bring in even more military in Latvia. Maris and his friend, Vadim Kovalev, the president of Latvian Christian Mission, went to look for the Black Berets' base in Riga. They simply felt from the Lord that those men also needed to hear about the love of God and the Good News about Jesus. Maris and Vadim found the base and were able to get inside and share. They had three meetings with the men and gave out Bibles, New Testaments and tracts in Russian. The Black Berets were actually very open to talk with them (Dzelzs, 1991:20-21). On next Sunday evening, January 20, the Black Berets received orders to attack and five

people were killed in Riga, but Latvian people did not give in and the struggle for independence continued.

Maris and Judite were invited to go to the Solåsen Training Center in Sweden two times: the first time they received training on evangelism, the second time for a family seminar. It was very interesting for them to be together with people from different nationalities and denominations. After returning from Sweden, they felt something like this training center was needed in Latvia. This idea came sometime around 1988 or 1989. Around that time they also had the opportunity to exchange their new car, a “Moskvich”, for a building in Ārlava, near Valdemarpils in the Talsi region. They got the building without really seeing it, but they saw potential there to have some kind of spiritual center with training possibilities. They had no idea what all God had in store for them in the future.

Maris Dzelzs was a part of Latvian Christian Mission. It united many active ministers of the Gospel at that time, which eventually served as a springboard for the development of Youth With A Mission in Latvia. Service in Latvian Christian Mission (LCM) also gave Maris a lot of contacts all over the former Soviet Union, as well as some from the West that became essential later in the ministry of YWAM.

PART II. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS IN  
LATVIA AFTER 1988

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

This qualitative research explored four different areas about Latvia and Latvia's involvement in missions. Due to years of Communism in Latvia and the radical changes that followed, there is not much written about missions during this period. Therefore, the main strategy was to interview people who were involved in the specified period and therefore would have knowledge in this field.

The Research Problem

The research fulfilled the following 3-fold task:

To research and gain understanding of the historical situation of Latvia regarding missions during the last years of Communism and the first years of Latvia's independence, including the development of Youth With A Mission Latvia, to develop strategies for missions for the next 10 years, and to have a written record of missions from the last twenty years of Latvian history.

Research Areas and Interview Questions

The research inquiry was guided by four research areas. For each of those areas, a set of interview questions was designed to allow for exploration.

Research Area One

The historical situation regarding missions during the final years of Communism and first years after independence, as well as the first missions organizations and mission movements.

Interview Questions:

1. What do you feel were the key elements of church life at the end of 1980s?
2. What were the first signs of interest in missions?

3. What knowledge do you have of the development of different missions movements in Latvia?

#### Research Area Two

The Uniqueness of Latvia.

Interview Questions:

1. Have you seen historically (in last 20 years) that Latvia is unique? If yes, in what areas?
2. What knowledge do you have of missions organizations/movements which were born in Latvia (while still a part of the Soviet Union)?

#### Research Area Three

The history of YWAM Latvia. Due to the involvement of different people in this research, separate sets of interview questions were developed for YWAM staff, and for those who are not YWAM staff. This helped to get information that is more accurate for the research.

Interview Questions for YWAM staff:

1. How was YWAM Latvia started? Who were the key people?
2. What do you consider the strong points/successes in the beginning years of YWAM Latvia?
3. What could have been done differently?

Interview Questions for non-YWAMers:

1. When was the first time you heard of YWAM Latvia? Was it positive or negative? Why? Has anything changed since then?
2. What role has YWAM played in the church in Latvia?
3. What could have been done differently?

## Research Area Four

New strategies for the next 10 years.

Interview Questions:

1. What should be the new strategies/next steps for missions in Latvia?
2. What could/should be YWAM Latvia's place in this missions movement?

### Sources

The sources for this study consisted of people who have been, or are, influential in the missions' movement in Latvia. They were those whose names could be found in publications about different missions campaigns in Latvia, or those who have been directly involved in helping establish YWAM in Latvia.

Overall 21 people were interviewed.

By nationality the group was as follows:

- 8 Latvians,
- 4 Russian speaking people who have lived in Latvia for more than 15 years,
- 9 foreigners (including 2 Latvians who have lived in the USA for most of their life, and two people who have lived in Latvia for 10 years or more).

Out of the group, 10 people were YWAM staff, in Latvia or internationally, and 11 people were not YWAM staff.

Of the Latvians and Russian speakers living in Latvia, all but one is a leader in some capacity in Latvia, e.g. bishops, pastors, Christian leaders. Their denomination affiliation is Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal or independent charismatic. There were no people interviewed from the Orthodox or Old Believers because those two denominations have not been involved in missions movement in Latvia at all. Catholic representatives were not interviewed due to their different view of missions and different ways of organizing the church and missions.

## CHAPTER 2

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – RESEARCH AREA No 1: HISTORICAL SITUATION IN LATVIA STARTING IN 1988

Regarding the historical situation and key elements of church life in the last years of Communism and the first years of independence, there are three quite different perceptions. These views differ according to the three groups represented in this research – Latvians, Russian speaking people living in Latvia and foreigners, who were coming to Latvia at that time.

#### Elements of Church Life from the Latvian Perspective

Latvians are the people group that lived in this land through the entire Soviet occupation and maintained church life and activities through those difficult years. The main church activities at that time were church services and Bible studies, led by a pastor without any discussions following the study (S 14). Some churches had youth gatherings. The Lutheran church concentrated on preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments (S 8). One good thing about the Lutheran Church is that in smaller locations, a church was always in the middle of town. The church doors were open and people came into the church. The Holy Spirit was the main missionary (S 18). But overall there was not any real active missions thinking in the Lutheran Church because of the Soviet occupation (S 8).

Baptist churches were also very much inward focused. Some churches in bigger cities were more active, but there still was not any notion about going out. At that time, if a church tried to have more activities than just the regular worship service this would attract the attention of the KGB (S 10). There was more activity with inland missions, or the idea of bigger churches helping smaller churches. For example, there were youth from Venstspils going to help a church in Piltene, so that they could maintain the congregation and survive (S 10).

The pastor influenced a lot of things regarding church life and missions. If the pastor was open, if he was thinking about missions, then the church would follow. In one case, Pastor Janis Vanags of Saldus had good relationships with the local

intelligentsia. He put up announcements that there would be lectures on Christianity and the Bible, and around 70 people came. Later those people, one by one, came to church and got baptized. During this time church membership multiplied six times (S 18). Pastors became public figures and it was not difficult for them to do missions or evangelism work. Pastor Vanags, as well as others had the chance to reach people through national television – initially through programs on classical style paintings and sculptures (S 18). There were opportunities available and those individuals readily used them.

The ministry in churches continued as it was. People were still sleeping in the pews and had not awakened yet. There were a few pastors and leaders, as mentioned above, who were ahead of their time, but in general churches only started to take advantage of this new opportunity in the 1990s (S 17).

The Body of Christ in Latvia, from the Latvian perspective, was not ready to use this new freedom that was given to them. There was no church structure that was able to accept and integrate new believers into the church, nor were there enough leaders prepared. And even the leadership preparation, that was taking place, was not dynamic enough to fulfill the needs of that time (S 17). Nobody could really take responsibility for this situation. The church had been like an animal kept in a cage for 50 years. When the cage is opened and freedom availed to it, the animal will look outside and say, “No, thank you.” The same happened with the church (S 13).

There was also still a lot of denominational division. Maybe there were some small ideas of ecumenism, but it was very weak at that time (S 15).

Some positive changes, however, only began in the 1990s. This was a time of great excitement. While during the end of the 1980s most additions to churches were in the form of people who were somehow already connected to church, like relatives of the church members, in the 1990s, most people who joined congregations were total strangers to church (S 15). These new believers urged the churches to go out and evangelize more, and they wanted to know how to do that, as well (S 18). The Soviet occupation had destroyed not only church buildings, but the whole understanding of what church life was, let alone how was it organized. People started to go out, sometimes more successfully, sometimes less, but people learned what it meant to go out and evangelize (S 13).

Therefore the Latvian church can be thankful to those foreign missionaries who encouraged it and organized missions' organizations in Latvia and evangelism outside the church walls. Some of these organizations were - Norwegian Mission Behind the Iron Curtain, Scripture Union and Norwegian Mission to the East, which helped the Lutheran Church, and Bridge Builders International, which helped the Baptist Church.

New church movements came to Latvia in the 1990s. Most of those were charismatic movements and according to traditional church society, they were a negative influence. But one Latvian leader could see some positive things in those movements:

“New structure is more dynamic and is easier to adapt to a new situation. They were able to create a small group infrastructure that was further developed in those new churches. That helped to integrate the new believers who came to the Lord. That was positive in compared to the churches that went through the Soviet times. Those churches had to be reformed first and only then were they ready to take on new things.” (S 17)

At the end of 1980s, the overall opinion of Latvian leaders' of what church life should resemble was merely that of simple services and Bible studies, still sleeping and not really using the new opportunities the times afforded. Some individuals were ahead of their time in their thinking regarding evangelism and missions, but the main awakening happened only in the 1990s.

#### Elements of Church Life from the Russian Speaking Leaders' Perspective

Latvian and Russian church leaders in Latvia lived in two different worlds during the 1970s and 1980s. As the Latvian Church was merely trying to maintain their church services and even church structures, the Russian Church was learning all about persecutions from the KGB because they were more active in their evangelism efforts during the Soviet era.

In 1987 many political and religious prisoners were released, but KGB were still interrogating people in different places and times. For some time, Russian churches in Riga were forced to operate “underground.” During those times, people met in homes rather than in a church building. Sometimes, if the KGB would find those illegal meetings, people would have to pay fines. Then the restrictions increased

and they were not allowed to meet in any building for a couple years. For example, the church “Word of Truth” had to meet outside on the street for one year in 1988. But the church was growing, and many youth were coming. In order to have meetings somewhere, the Philadelphia Church in Oslo donated a tent to them. For three years that church met in a tent with approximately 1000 people attending (S 19).

Russian pastors were also more active in Latvian Christian Mission (LCM). Through Swedish and Finnish contacts, they were able to receive their first shipments of Bibles in 1988. After meeting those contacts, one of the Scandinavian pastors was surprised that, despite the Communist occupation, the Church in Latvia had multiplied much more than the “free” churches of the west (S 3).

When it was possible, Russian churches rented facilities from Latvian Lutheran churches in Riga, like the Church of the Cross, the Church of St. Paul, and Golgotha Baptist Church (S 3, S 19).

The Celebration of 1000 years of the Baptism of Russia, marking the anniversary of the christening of Russian Tzar Vladimir in 988 AD, was one event that had totally skipped the mind of the Latvian church, but was very meaningful for the Russian Church. The Russian Church saw that as an opportunity to widely share the Gospel to the public. There were many evangelistic meetings in Russian churches. Alexey Ledyayev, pastor of “Word of Truth” church organized an event in the Sports Palace in Riga in the fall of 1988. This was the first open evangelistic event in the whole of the Soviet Union. There were four meetings with around 7000 people in attendance. Through this, Pastor Alexey inspired other churches. After this event, there were many other evangelistic meetings all over Latvia (S 3, S 19).

This was the time when people were committed to follow Christ, even at a high cost. There was no time to “play church” or for political games. Each word could cost one’s life (S 20). And even though Latvians had been looking at Russians and Russian speakers as occupants, when the time came to vote at a referendum for Latvian independence, the majority of Russian speaking pastors preached the need to vote for independence (S 19).

Overall, the Russian speaking leaders’ perception on church life at the end of the 1980s was that it was vital and full of life, using every opportunity the Lord would

give. This clearly shows the huge gap between the two communities, even though both were serving the same Lord and living in the same country.

### Elements of Church Life from the Foreigners' Perspective

Many of the thoughts and observations of the foreigners depend on what they saw and where they went. If they went to Latvian churches, they had one observation. If their contacts were with Russian speaking churches, their perspective was different. There were foreigners that came to Latvia without any knowledge of the Latvian or Russian languages. Their feelings and understanding of that time comes from observation, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the translation they received. Two of the people interviewed could understand Latvian, but were not very good in Russian. And two others spoke Russian, but could not understand Latvian at all. Their perception came through the language, as well as their observations and translation they received at the time or the language they did not understand.

Foreigners who came in the end of 1980s felt that Latvian congregations were very conservative and very strict, even very limited in their activities (S 11). They were not very spiritually open and were more formal and rigid (S 9). There was more religiosity than freedom of the Spirit. At the same time, people wanted to do something. There was a sense of freedom, and people were warm towards foreign missionaries. Although they appreciated them, they were not comfortable with what they were bringing (S 9, S 1). Cheryl Harrison was on one of the teams that came in 1990 during the Song Festival. She tells about her experience:

We were connected into a Lutheran congregation who were not quite on the same page with us in the sense of preparation. We were hoping to do much more evangelistic outreach. Their idea was to take us around to show different churches, museums, sports halls and other things. We did not fit in but we prayed a lot. As far as outreach success on some level we didn't feel we were able to accomplish what we planned and wanted to do, but as for long term success I definitely received the call from the Lord to return to Latvia long term (Interview with Cheryl Harrison, February 2, 2009).

Another missionary had a very different experience in a Lutheran church, where Latvians were asking someone to come who would be spiritual, could cast out demons and not just bring theory or academic knowledge. They wanted someone with

hands on experience so that they could experience the same thing (S 7). In general, Latvian people were very positive towards traditional churches. There was not even a big need to go out and do evangelism, as people were coming into traditional churches on their own (S 16).

Missionaries who connected with Russian churches felt more freedom in the Spirit. There was less formality there, and at one particular Russian church, there was so much yelling and screaming that the missionaries themselves felt uncomfortable (S 9). The Russian Church understood that there were people outside who needed to hear the Gospel and they were evangelizing, but the other churches (traditional Latvian) were just simply rejoicing over the new freedom (S 16).

On one hand, there was a new unity between believers, due to of their common past and “underground” mentality (S 7). But churches still were not working together. They were still very much separated (S 6).

Foreign missionaries could feel the excitement in the air. Anything was possible (S 4). And on one hand Latvia was more advanced in freedom than other countries in Eastern Europe, e.g. doing drama and using music (S 6). The people were ready to do things they have not done before.

The foreigners’ perceptions of the times and church life generally matched the understanding that the local people were feeling. Sometimes there were misunderstandings of language or culture, but overall, the missionary presence was needed and welcomed, in order to move the church in Latvia forward to fulfilling God’s given plan.

### First Signs of Missions

At the end of the Soviet years, Christians were rejoicing in their new found freedom and for the majority of them, missions was a totally strange concept. But, here again, there is a difference in the thinking between Latvian and Russian speaking churches.

For Latvians, doing something in a different town or country was something unimaginable (S 16). Throughout the years of Communism, the church was crippled and people were just starting to breathe after independence. There was no concept of

sending people out into missions. The idea of missions was not even a part of most people's worldview. Members of traditional churches believed that the priority was to get the church in Latvia on its feet (S 1). When the first foreign missionaries came to Latvia, they did not see any big shifts towards missions. However, one reason they came was hopefully to inspire that (S 6, S 9). Sometimes, though, their expectations were higher than what was actually possible. One missionary said:

We wanted them to start running, literally jogging, but they were still learning how to walk (S 9).

Many issues concerning missions depended on the pastor. If a pastor was on fire, if he had heard about missions, he would inspire his people. But the opposite was also true. There were pastors who were against missions and viewed it as something brought from the West (S 1, S 10, S 17 and S 18).

No one thought much about overseas missions until the mid-1990s. There were a few reasons this change happened. One initiative came from the two leaders who went to the Lausanne II Congress in Manila; Almers Ludviks and Janis Vanags. Archbishop Vanags shared his experience:

Lausanne II was a major event. First, it was a missions' event that encouraged and inspired us to see what was happening in the world and what people were doing. It also showed the ecumenical aspect. A majority of the evangelical denominations were there. I personally thought that there was something very serious and positive happening (Interview with Janis Vanags, March 12, 2009).

Lausanne II provided vision for missions as well as international contacts. In the beginning of the 1990s, Rev. Almers Ludviks started to organize mission trips to Turkmenistan. There were 7 mission' trips between 1993 and 1998 (S 10). That influenced other Baptist pastors and eventually led to creating the Tilža Evangelist Training Center. Mission trips to Bashkortostan originated out of Tilža, but there still was no strategy to adopt a city or nation (S 17).

Another reason for change was the youth in Latvia. Youth were very eager to get to know people from outside their own country and they were excited about the new possibilities. The feeling of adventure and letting loose was probably some motivation but God could use this potential (S 1, S 11).

The third reason for the change toward missions was foreign missionaries. Ingemar Martinson from Sweden challenged Latvians to go to Russian speaking formerly Soviet countries (S 10). Missionaries from Norway influenced missions thinking in the Lutheran Church (S 12, S 18). Anna Freivalds was one of those missionaries. Because of her contacts she was able to share in churches of different denominations (S 14).

Evangelism was something that people understood, for the most part, and realized that it was needed, in order to get more people into church. Many were eager to take part (S 15). There was great interest in evangelism. It was like the people had been kept hungry, and in this case spiritual hunger and all they wanted to do was eat. But after they had their fill, they may have had food and not eaten it because they could get it if they wanted (S 13). But there was still little understanding about missions, even in the middle of the 1990s. People asked the traditional question, “Why do you need to go overseas? There are so many things that needed to be done in Latvia.” There were Swedish missionaries that challenged Latvians to go to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Latvia was serving as a base for western missions’ effort to the east (S 10).

Russian speaking churches had a slightly different philosophy concerning missions. During Soviet times and right after, they were not confined to Latvian borders. The Soviet Union was huge. Russian speaking people could travel much more easily between Russia and Latvia. Missionaries could not be sent openly, but when someone wanted to go, they just went.

Missionary service at that time was chaotic. People were evangelizing, they were preaching, going into schools and universities. People were kicked out of there for doing that and there were persecutions (S 19).

In Russian speaking churches, there was huge interest in missions work, but going officially was forbidden. A Bible school was opened in Jelgava in 1990 with the goal of training people from all over the Soviet Union in missions. The people who came to this school were all on fire to do something for God. The “Missionary Spirit” was there. There were Latvians at the school as well, but they were just a small part of the student body. After finishing this school, students went all over the Soviet Union to plant churches (S 20).

The situation has improved in the recent years. However, in the last 20 years there has not been a great and purposeful interest in missions. It still has not been taught (S 17). There have been separate initiatives, like YWAM, short-term trips to Turkmenistan & Bashkortostan and Missions Days which have been great steps. Only in the last few years has the Church been developing any missions thinking, but it still cannot be considered “developed” nor is there a strategy.

### Missions Movements Developed in Latvia

The majority of the people interviewed knew about Latvian Christian Mission. This included Latvians, Russian speakers and foreigners as well. This shows that LCM has built a solid foundation for missions movement. LCM was established in 1988. After it was registered in Latvia, satellite missions were opened in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Russia (S 3, S 14, S 15). Three times a year LCM invites public school teachers for conferences to get more training on how to bring Christian principles into education (S 9).

Soon after that, the Gideons and Prison Fellowship were established through LCM. YWAM Latvia was also technically established through LCM (S 3, S 9, S 12, S 13, S 15).

Calvary Mission helped open the first Bible school in the Soviet Union in Jelgava in 1990. In 1993 Rick Renner came with his teaching and television ministry. Nikolai Shevchuk opened the “New Life” Bible school in Daugavpils (S 7, S 19). Latvian Christian Radio was established in Riga (S 13, S 14). Other movements and organizations were also mentioned: Pakapieni, Agape, Tent Mission, the Norwegian mission establishing St. Gregory Ministry School in Saldus, Russian Baptists participated in missions work in Karaosta, Liepaja, Latvian Baptists going to Bashkortostan, the “Word of Life” movement, Morning Star Church and Cēsis Baptist Church sending people on short term missions trips to Russia, Lutherans going to Latvian villages in Bashkortostan, The Scripture Union, International Bible Institute and Blue Cross working with addicts.

Bridge Builders International and Charles Kelly have a special place in the missions’ movement in Latvia. Rev. Kelly mobilized many churches in the USA to come and help Latvia. They really were building bridges between the two nations and

helped many churches, mainly the Latvian Baptist church, to establish sister church relationships with those in the USA (S 6, S 9).

The establishment of the Latvian Evangelical Alliance (LEA) has been the latest effort in missions movement (S 10). LEA is trying to bring efforts together so that there is more strategy and understanding of what each missions organization and church is doing in the area of missions.

In the last several years Missions Days has also been a more cross-denominational effort (S 1).

It is very important to understand the historical situation, in order to understand what happened or did not happen in the area of missions in Latvia. There were definitely two different communities, Latvian speaking and Russian speaking, that were not even connected. The Communist years had destroyed the Church and robbed it of its understanding of the Great Commission. Initially, all missions movements in Latvia came from individual initiatives. But those who were active were able to involve others and quite a few missions organizations were established, some originally from Latvia and others transplanted from the West. Latvia played a huge role in the missions movement in the former Soviet Union. The next chapter will explore the uniqueness of Latvia and why Latvia was able to play this huge role in missions movement.

## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – RESEARCH AREA No 2: THE UNIQUENESS OF LATVIA

The objective for this area was to discover some of the elements that made Latvia unique in the area of missions development. The difference in responses this time was not as great and divided between the nationalities of the people interviewed as last time. The responses can be separated into four major groups. The uniqueness of Latvia is shown in the character of the Latvian people, the geographical location of Latvia, the historical setting and the life of the Body of Christ historically and today. One area alone may not prove Latvia to be unique, but the blend of those four topics determined the path of missions to develop in Latvia in the way that it did.

#### The Character of the Latvian People

A few main characteristics were noticed. One major characteristic is creativity in different areas. Latvians have a strong calling to be creative. There is creativity in music, dance and singing. It is a God-given gift to the nation of Latvia that has been hidden for some time due to different foreign occupations of the country, but one that needs to be revealed & shown to the nations. There is no other nation that has as many folk songs in their language as Latvia does. There is no other country that can gather so many people for a Song and Dance Festival as Latvia can every 5 years (S 11). There may be Latvians who don't like singing, but they still like to listen to music. Latvia is not the most creative country in the world, but there is a very high value given to creativity in society. Creativity, music especially, had helped people survive the Imperial Russian occupation in the 1850s and the deportations to Siberia in the 1940s, as a result of the Soviet invasion. This gift of creativity in music is not just an individual gift, but a national one. This nation may not have a Nobel Prize recipient or an Academy Awards winner, but there are many talented musicians, artists and writers in this small nation. This creativity is seen in hospitality and in the ability to create a beautiful environment. It has been used in missions already (S 1, S 4, S 7, S 9, S 11, S 12, S 14, S 16, S 21).

Latvians tend to be more individualistic, which has helped to foster more ideas. This dynamic has inspired creativity in doing things differently because they

did not want to do things the way others were doing them (S 1, S 6). This individuality is also connected with what people call “Latvian Pride.” Without that “Pride” and readiness to stand up for themselves throughout all the occupations, there would not be the language, the nation, and the beautiful Latvian national anthem “God, Bless Latvia” (S15). At the same time, Latvians are a very patient nation, perhaps too patient (S 14).

Latvians are also hard working, even after the Soviet years where all work ethics were destroyed. This means there is something solid there (S 2, S 12).

Considering all that Latvia has been through in the last 50-60 years, the Latvian nation is showing real tenacity of spirit, real perseverance, not giving up due to hardship or seeming impossibilities. The nation has been through a nightmare and is still able to be courageous, daring to live on the edge, daring to go and do things, even during the Soviet era. This is also seen today as Latvia is more conservative in holding to Biblical values when compared with other Western European countries (S 7, S 9, S 11, S 12).

Latvians are not a Slavic nation. They are more Scandinavian, with a measured temper but solid. Latvians are more reserved. This may not be the best catalyst for evangelism and missions, but Latvians are eager and teachable (S 4, S 16). Being a Baltic nation, Latvia has always had a more Western outlook and Western connections. Latvians have been able to maintain their identity while still being open and accepting of other nationalities (S 3, S 6, S 21). Latvians may not have been very happy with Russian speaking people coming to Latvia, but there has been a mutual blessing. Latvians have blessed Russians by allowing them to come or by not forcing them to leave. Latvians have been very open and welcoming. Russian speaking people have been thankful for the possibility to find a place and fellowship in Latvia, and they have been praying for Latvia. God has blessed that and has given the possibility to have open movement and action. That is one of the reasons why Latvia has played a great role in spreading the Gospel throughout the Soviet Union (S 6, S 19).

A few characteristics that have hindered the missions movement are self-pity and inferiority, the feeling that Latvians are small, that they cannot do anything or that they do not have initiative. Latvia is unique with all kinds of beliefs. It is very difficult

to find a person who doesn't believe in something, be it belief in the birch tree, the sun, secret words, cultic or holy places, or belief in Jesus (S 13, S 17).

### Geographical Location of Latvia

The geographical situation of Latvia has been both its blessing and curse. It is located in the crossroads between the East and West, between the North and South. Because of this, Latvia is very open to many things, in a positive way, but also in a negative one. Latvians have tried to keep their identity, but at the same time, have accepted things from other nations. That is the problem of Latvia, as it is in a very desirable place. This location has created great synergy in the whole culture and history. The East and West merge in Latvia (S 1, S 10, S 16, S 21).

Latvia had an atmosphere where Christianity could prosper. There was much more freedom than in other former Soviet countries and there was not much persecution. Even when Latvia was part of the Soviet Union, God blessed it with more freedom and possibilities than other Soviet lands. Latvia served as a gateway to all of the Soviet Union. A lot of underground literature was printed in Latvia and then later sent to the rest of the Soviet republics (S 19).

Geographically, Latvia served as a platform for all ministry in the former Soviet Union. Literature and Bibles were transported from Latvia, worship services from Riga were broadcast on TV to all of Russia (S 3). Latvia was less frozen spiritually than other Soviet republics. The first missions' organization was registered in Latvia and from that, others were developed elsewhere farther East (S 20). Latvia was like a transaction point or land of transit, since it was like a base for missionary efforts to former Soviet Republics (S 19, S 20). Nothing like this happened in Lithuania or Estonia.

Scandinavians and missionaries of other nationalities needed some kind of connection to the East. They needed someone with language and understanding of Russian culture. Latvians could provide that (S 1, S 10). Many generations of Latvians could speak the Russian language. In this way, Latvia served as a gateway from the West to the East. So many nationalities lived in Latvia, that Latvians had learned to accept and appreciate it. Latvia can still serve as a bridge or gateway

between the East and West in the future. And, to have many languages and cultures in one country can help to develop a great spiritual inheritance (S 20).

Lithuania and Estonia have similar geographical locations; thus location alone is not the only defining factor of uniqueness.

### Historical Setting

Latvians suffer with feelings of inferiority and being small, but God has been very faithful to this nation. The Holy Scripture was translated into the Latvian language more than 300 years ago. The Latvian language was among the first 50 languages into which the Bible was translated (S 17). The Bible translation was sponsored by the Swedish king Charles XI (Karl XI) in 1680s. Sweden ruled over Latvia for 70 years, and here is an overall Swedish and Scandinavian historical influence in Latvia (S 7). People came to Latvia from all over Europe. Latvia played a major role even during the time of the Lutheran Reformation (S 20). Heavy historical background for Latvia comes from the time of Soviet revolution in 1917. Latvian soldiers helped to save that revolution (S 21) by guarding Lenin at Soviet government headquarters in St. Petersburg. In the 1920s William Fetler led a revival, and during that time, a lot of literature was printed, published and was sent to Russia (S 19). Through the centuries, Latvia has been developing into a place where many different denominations can grow and thrive.

Historically being one of the Baltic nations close and connected to the West, Latvia was brought into the Soviet Union much later than many other countries. This time delay and the fact that Latvia had its own national identity helped the country to escape complete “Sovietization” (S 6). It is unique that Latvia even exists today as a nation, and as an independent nation, when much greater nations have disappeared from the map (S 15). When Latvia was still part of the Soviet Union, God granted this place more freedom and possibilities (S 19). Some things just cannot be explained as to why they happened, and such is the case with Latvia and her freedoms. Each nation has a role to play in God’s plan. Latvia has been a land of transit for many centuries. People came here to minister or to get trained, and they received clearer vision for future (S 20).

The historical setting has definitely played a role in the way that the first missions of the Soviet Union developed in Latvia, and it adds a facet to the uniqueness of Latvia in missions history.

### Church Life and Its Influences Today

Objectively, the denominational distribution of Latvia is a very unusual thing. It is not common that three major denominations are in even amounts in any one country, but that is the reality in Latvia. The Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches each have an even amount of the population as their members. In Estonia it is more Lutheran and in Lithuania it is more Catholic (S 18). This has created a positive situation and unusual ecumenical networking. Today Latvian Christian leaders have much stronger and informal ecumenical contacts than in other countries (S 18). Rev. Vanags writes about this ecumenical dialogue:

Even though it feels natural for us, friendly relationships between different denominations in Latvia are unusual. The times of Soviet enslavement taught us that we are on the same side. Cooperation in restoring the place of the Church in independent Latvia helped in the development of mutual friendships and trust. Therefore, here, a dialogue has more advantages than in other places in Europe. We should use this potential (Vanags, 2009:4).

During the Soviet years the Lord spoke to his Church that Latvia would be a hiding place for His people, and it happened. Many people from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and other Soviet republics came to Latvia to find spiritual refuge. Those Christians were on fire. Yes, there were still persecutions, but because Latvia was hospitable and accepted those people who came from all over the Soviet empire, Latvia still could experience the blessing of that. Even today, Latvia is a tool in God's hand. Latvia's role is not finished yet, and will still be a great instrument for revival (S 19).

The Latvian character, geographical and historical setting and Church life in Latvia predetermined the establishment of the first missions movement in the Soviet Union. Latvia was the place where the first missions organization in the Soviet Union, Latvian Christian Mission, was established. The first legal shipments of Bibles for the whole Soviet Union came through Latvia. Latvia was the first place where the gates of prisons opened for Christian witness. Prison Fellowship from Latvia served prisons

from the west to the east of Soviet Union. The first Christian TV programs were broadcast from Riga. Rick Renner started his ministry in Latvia first, and only after that did he continue ministry into Russia and Ukraine. The Tent Mission established by Andrey Bondarenko in Latvia, also served in Russia and other places. The first YWAM base in the former Soviet Union was established in Valdemarpils, Latvia. The first YWAM base in the Eastern Europe to use YWAM's videoconferencing tool GENESIS was Valdemarpils.

It is clearly shown that Latvia has unique place in missions movement in the former Soviet Union. Therefore the next chapter will explore how YWAM Latvia was established and who were the helpers and influencers to see YWAM Latvia expand.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – RESEARCH AREA No 3: HISTORY OF YWAM LATVIA

Various people and events helped develop YWAM in Latvia. Different short-term YWAM teams came to Latvia in the middle of the 1980s. One place that sent teams was Amsterdam (S 1). Unfortunately, there are no contacts or information about any teams from that time.

#### Anna Freivalds

Anna Freivalds was an obvious pioneer in this area. Those who knew the beginnings of YWAM Latvia mentioned her name 6 times. Anna, a Latvian born in Russia in 1918, grew up in independent Latvia. She was 26 when the second occupation of Latvia was imminent, and she escaped to the West. For the next 50 years, Anna lived in the USA and continued to pray for Latvia.

Anna attended YWAM's Discipleship Training School (DTS) in 1989 and started her ministry in Finland. Anna really wanted to go to Latvia and urged YWAM Slavic Ministries leader, Al Akimoff, to move into this area. But at that time, YWAM did not have any contacts in Latvia. Anna went to Riga for the first time in 1989, as a part of a team from Finland and was accompanied by another Latvian lady who was looking for her relatives in Riga. At that time, Anna did not know anyone in Riga. She just had the name and a phone number of Arnis Silis. She did not even know who this man was. It turned out that he was a pastor at Golgotha Baptist Church and during their first evening in Riga, Anna and the other Latvian lady decided to attend his church. Over the next four days, Anna, and the other lady visited five churches, including Matthews Baptist Church in Riga and a youth group in Ogre. They did not even have time to visit the lady's relatives. At Golgotha Church, Anna met a Latvian girl named Simona (Turkina) Ivanovska who, with her grandmother, became Anna's strongest contact in Latvia (S 5).

Anna started to go to Latvia regularly and meet people and shared quite openly that she was a missionary. Because she was an older lady, 70 years old at that time, people in Latvia and the government did not feel threatened by her. People were

delighted by her and accepted her. Anna tried to stay in contact with the Lutheran Church and the Baptist Church, and she met many key people during her visits (S 6).

Through Arnis Silis, Anna was able to meet the president of Latvian Christian Mission, Vadim Kovalev. At that time, LCM was active in ministry and was also interested in training others. Anna was able to offer YWAM training to LCM, and she was able to be a bridge for LCM to Al Akimoff from Slavic Ministries and Peter Iliyn, YWAM Salem Base Leader. Anna came back to Finland and was very excited to share about the openness toward YWAM in Latvia with Al (S 5).

Anna also met Maris Dzelzs through LCM. She had a heart for training and this was on Maris's heart, as well (S 15). By that time, the Dzelzs family already owned the building in the Talsi region, knowing that it would be a house for missions (S 13).

Anna Freivalds is part of the very foundations of YWAM Latvia. Her excitement, ability to reach out to people, life experience and heart of a prayer warrior was vital for the development of YWAM Latvia.

#### Al Akimoff and Slavic Ministries

YWAM Slavic Ministries was a name of YWAM's ministry to Eastern Europe before Eastern Europe opened up. At the time this ministry was recruiting, training and directing teams from YWAM, churches, and universities, and channeled those teams to countries all across the eleven time zones. They introduced people to countries people had never heard about.

YWAM Slavic Ministries had many contacts and a lot of activities going on in Estonia during this time. The first evening DTSS took place in the mid 1980s at Oleviste Church in Tallinn. There was a connection between Finland and Estonia, but no one had any contacts in Latvia (S 6).

After Anna Freivalds returned to Finland from Latvia in 1989, she really challenged Al to go to Riga. A month or so later Al fulfilled her request (S 6).

1990 was the year of the Latvian Song Festival. The nation was open and many groups from churches and YWAM schools came to do outreaches; many through Slavic Ministries (S 5). In 1990, a musical called "If My People" by Jimmy

and Carol Owens was staged (S 1). This musical toured through St. Petersburg, Tallinn and Riga. Through setting up the tour Al Akimoff met people from LCM, like Peter Samoilich, Vadim Kovalev and Maris Dzelzs. Good working relationships with LCM developed out of these meetings (S 6, S 1).

Al Akimoff came to the YWAM base in Grimerud, Norway in late 1991 and advocated for Latvia. God had spoken to the leaders in Grimerud that they were to work and invest in Belarus, but Al tried to change their plans to focus on Latvia. The Norwegian leaders were convinced that the Lord had spoken “Belarus” to them, so that they did not change their focus. However, they did not feel a contradiction; thus were open to a partnership with Latvians (S 7).

Slavic Ministries brought many people to study in YWAM bases around the world. Many came to Salem where it was based. Salem YWAM base was used as a base of operation, particularly for training.

Without the help and support of Al Akimoff and YWAM Slavic Ministries, the development of YWAM Latvia as a ministry would have been very difficult (S 16).

#### Peter Iliyn and the YWAM Base in Salem, Oregon

Peter Iliyn was very instrumental in training Maris Dzelzs to become a leader. Peter developed a good relationship between YWAM Latvia and the USA, which greatly helped YWAM Latvia (S 4).

Peter Iliyn came to Latvia for the first time in 1990 with the “If My People” tour. He came with Russian speaking people group from San Francisco (California), Oregon and Canada, who were the cast for the musical. It was well received (S 3).

Training was on Peter’s heart and he saw the need for Latvian people to receive training. The YWAM base in Salem, Oregon had already trained quite a few Latvians for missions. The first Latvians to go to Salem were Simona (Turkina) Ivanovska and Miervaldis Zeltiņš in 1991. Simona then helped pioneer YWAM Latvia as long term staff. After his training, Miervaldis started his own mission adventure by translating and publishing books in Latvian. The Dzelzs family completed a DTS and School of Intercession, Worship and Spiritual Warfare

(SOIWSW) in Salem in the time between Fall 1992 and Spring of 1993. Kristina (Kalna) Ecis did the SOIWSW school in 1994. Ineta (Krautmane) Lansdowne also completed a DTS in Fall 1994, as did Santa (Pūpolberga) Lozinska Fall 1996.

One of the strategies of YWAM Slavic Ministries and the YWAM Salem base was to develop training to equip new Latvian believers. This led to the first Weekend DTS in Mazirbe. People could find out what YWAM was and what to expect if they would want to do something like this (S 15).

One very good and helpful thing was that Peter Iliyn and Al Akimoff could speak Russian. That made communication with Latvians much easier, since people were not able to learn foreign languages during the Soviet occupation (S 15).

#### The First Weekend DTS in Mazirbe, 1991

Latvian Christian Mission, along with Vadim Kovalev and Maris Dzelzs, prepared for the first Weekend DTS in Mazirbe. This was initiated by Slavic Ministries and YWAM Salem. Peter Iliyn really caught the vision to get volunteers and the best teachers to come (S 5). Jim Dikih was the leader of this school (S 1). Some of the other staff members were Debbie Dikih and Jim and Sophie Bechtel. Anna Freivalds and Simona (Turkina) Ivanovska were translators. Judite Dzelzs also played a large part in the formation of YWAM Latvia (S 9).

The school ran from June 7<sup>th</sup> to August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1991 in Mazirbe, Latvia. The first weekend went so well, that the following weekend there were almost twice as many students (S 5). On the average there were around 100 eager attendees.

Some of the speakers were Peter Iliyn, Jim Dikih, Bruce Stepanick, Joy Dawson, Steve Smith, Al Akimoff, Jo O'Conner and Matt Rawlins (S 5).

Peter Iliyn was the speaker for the first two weekends. This was the formation of the foundations of YWAM Latvia. By design, there were at least 5 different denominations present – Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox and some Charismatics. One of the Foundational Values of YWAM is that YWAM should be interdenominational. However, some people said that it would be physically impossible to have that kind of school and they would have to close it down. The

leaders agreed that the school would never work, if people created it. But if the Lord created it, then it would work (S 9).

Here is a story told by Peter Iliyn about that first week and some of the foundations of YWAM Latvia:

It was during one of my lectures that someone came up to me at the break and said that someone is sick and asked if we could pray for him. So, we had a time of prayer. Of course, they were all speaking in Latvian and I did not know that one of the Charismatics was freaking out in tongues. I thought it was Latvian. He was rebuking demons and all that weird stuff. So then I prayed and everything was cool. And then I kept lecturing. And one of the Baptist kids raises his hand and says, - "Can I ask a question to this guy?" I said, - "Sure". So he asks him quite straightly, - "What was all this in that weird language?" That's how the whole thing came up. Judite was apparently listening; she freaked out and called Maris who was coming from somewhere. She was saying that this whole thing is falling apart, because everything is in tongues and blah, blah... He was driving to the school to basically shut us down. I let them argue a bit and finally I stopped them. And I said, - "Let me explain to you how we are to be running this school." They began accusing each other. The charismatic said, - "You are of the devil because you don't speak in tongues." The Baptist said, - "You are of the devil because you speak in tongues." I stopped them and said, "By the way both of you are wrong. Here is the way we will operate this school." I told the Baptist, - "Young man, the Bible speaks about the tongues, Paul speaks of that." To the Charismatic I said, - "The Bible says that the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. And if there are people who don't understand the whole aspect of tongues, and if you can do it, praise God, go and speak in tongues, but do that in your closet, because you can control it, because there are people who don't understand that. Don't do that publicly, that's not a big thing." So, basically I brought peace. And Maris, when he arrived and heard it, I was able to bring peace. After that, the school continued and eventually finished which was quite amazing. That is our foundation. That's some of my memories of the very beginnings of the YWAM work in Latvia (Interview with Peter Iliyn, February 12, 2009).

#### Maris Dzelzs Becomes the Leader of YWAM Latvia

Maris Dzelzs was very active in the Latvian Christian Mission. There were many things that were new to him, but he was growing a great deal (S 19). YWAM leaders from YWAM Salem and from Slavic Ministries were praying for a person to

build the work in Latvia. There were many things happening in Latvia, but up to this point, most of the work was done from outside of Latvia.

At that time, around 1991, while helping with the Weekend DTS, Maris said that he was feeling the Lord calling him to work with YWAM. It was a bit difficult with the relationships with Vadim, because all initial YWAM contacts were through Vadim and LCM. But Vadim was a very gracious person. He was very open to Maris starting YWAM ministry in Latvia. There were a number of things that Slavic Ministries, YWAM Salem and LCM had to work out legally, like some property issues (S 6, S 9).

After LCM released Maris to become YWAM Latvia's leader, he and his family were able to go to YWAM Salem and receive the training needed for ministry. Maris needed discipleship in many areas. Peter Iliyn took the time and had interest in this family and he discipled Maris by caring for his family. This discipleship was quite successful, as Maris later became a role model as a father and was an incredible example to his kids (S 9).

#### Further Training at YWAM Latvia

The second Weekend DTS was held in 1992, again in Mazirbe. The school leaders were Jeff and Gwen Fleming. There were, again, close to 100 participants from different denominations and nationalities, including Latvians and Russian speaking people.

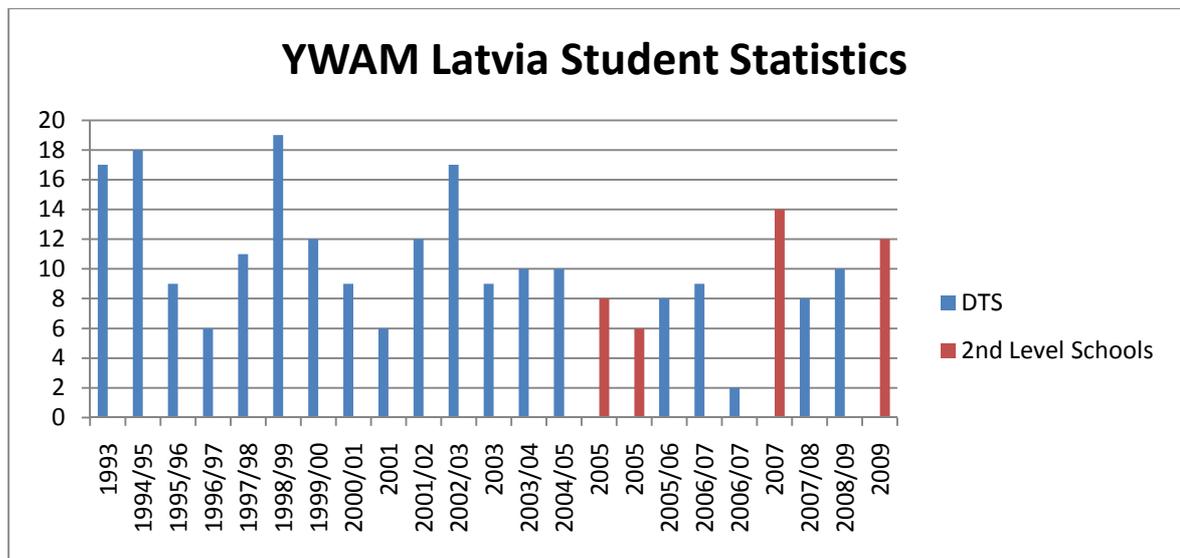
The first full-time DTS took place from June 6<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1993 in a rented kindergarten in Talsi. Maris was the school leader. The staff included Judite Dzelzs and Simona (Turkina) Ivanovska from Latvia, Anna Freivalds, a Latvian from the US, and two Americans: Cheryl Harrison and Ellen Rode. Twenty-three students started this full-time school and 17 graduated after the outreach. This DTS had two outreach teams; one to Perm, Russia, the other ministered in the Talsi and Jekabpils regions of Latvia.

The second full-time DTS ran from September 1994 to March 1995 in "Koka Māja" in Talsi. "Koka Māja" (Wooden House) was a house in Talsi, that YWAM started to rent at the end of 1993 and for the next four to five years it was YWAM Latvia headquarters. Twenty students started this school and 18 graduated after the

outreach. There were some problems with finding a school leader for this DTS, but at the end the school was led by Johan Smith from South Africa. There were three outreach teams: one to Murmansk, Russia, a second to Perm, Russia, and a third to Minsk, Belarus (which also did some ministry in Latvia).

The house that Maris had traded for his car back in 1990 needed major renovations, in order for it to become an operating training center. Finally, in Fall of 1995, the DTS was able to move in. Every year since that time there has been at least one DTS at the base in Valdemarpils. In 2003 there was a second DTS besides the regular one. This was a Multipoint DTS using video-conferencing technology called GENESIS. The total number of DTS graduates trained in Latvia since 1993 is 202.

Since 2005, YWAM Latvia has also been offering YWAM’s University of the Nations second level schools. Since that time 40 students have finished second level schools, including the School of Music in Missions, the Bible Core Course and Foundations of Counseling Ministry (see Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2**

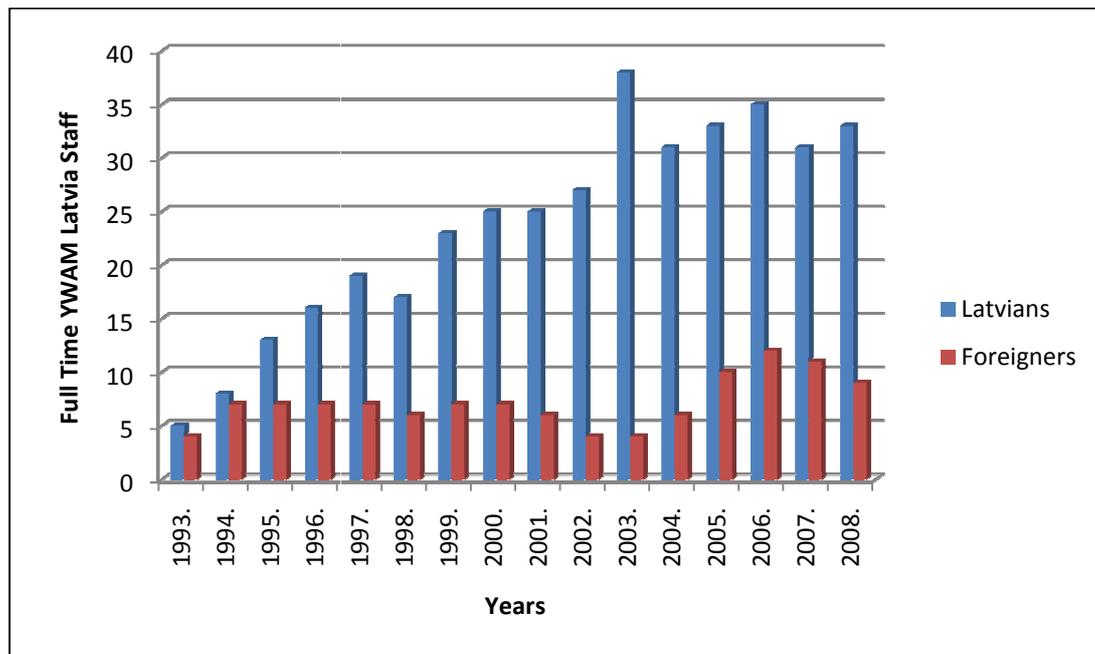
Success Points at the Beginning Years of YWAM Latvia

The first and main strength was Maris Dzelzs’ personality. He was able to see possibilities and was not afraid to take risks. He was like a dynamo in his personality and relationships. He was able to get people involved and somehow even keep them. With Maris as leader everything was possible. He was willing to do anything that would further the Gospel. Maris Dzelzs was very able leader. He had a great network

of different people (S 1, S 4, S 6, S 14). Maris Dzelzs was also very good at communicating and going to international YWAM gatherings to speak up for Latvia, to mobilize and to recruit (S 7).

Maris’ personality then influenced other staff as well. Others also were able to step out and make something out of nothing (S 6). There was no-nonsense, the calling was clear – be the light everywhere in the darkness. The heart attitude of YWAM Latvia leaders was one major key of success (S 4).

Having mostly Latvians on staff was a success. Then it was not some outside thing. The work was done culturally sensitive most of the time (S 1). Latvian individuality and sense of identity and care for their people had a lot to do with establishing YWAM in Latvia (S 6). See Fig. 3.



**Fig. 3**

The initial years of the 1990s were the time for new beginnings. A new dynamic was taking place, new openness, and spiritual hunger among people, so there was no lack of opportunity. There were opportunities to do whatever for the Gospel and wherever. YWAM Latvia seized this time (S 6). YWAM used different kind of evangelistic efforts, not afraid to reach out to the outcasts of the society (S 4, S 7), not being afraid to go out to the hurting (S 9). They were willing to go beyond themselves, not being afraid to step out and do new things and to express their

creativity of spirit. The leader Maris had tremendous vision and there was tremendous possibility. They always have had a vision for their country (S 9). There was a moment of risk of being not understood, but YWAM Latvia staff were not afraid to jump into it and they did not stop (S 15). They had very strong evangelistic and outward focus (S 1, S 11).

One very strategic area that helped to establish YWAM in Latvia was training and particularly Discipleship Training Schools (DTS). DTSs helped to disciple young people, encouraged them to go out and preach the Gospel and do new things in new ways (S 1, S 11, S 15, S 16). The DTSs gave the human resources needed for YWAM Latvia to develop. Right from the beginning staff and students were blessed with very good speakers. Those were people with influence and that gave good foundations for the ministry. There has not been a break in running the DTSs (S 15). Part of this success is connected with the building – having a permanent base where to train missionaries. That was very important and decisive factor. This base was the first permanent YWAM base in former Soviet Union (S 7). Twelve years after the first full time DTS there was the first University of the Nations second level school in Latvia. It was a core course for Biblical studies (it was called School of Biblical Studies Core Course then, Bible Core Course now). This development was slower than YWAM Latvia had expected, but the staff were persevering in this area and it slowly brings results (S 16).

Mercy ministry and social projects over the years have been very successful in sharing the Gospel (S 11, S 16). Distributing humanitarian aid together with discipleship and training gave good results, challenging people to search for God and His principles (S 16). YWAM Latvia's prison ministry has played an important part in Mercy Ministry (S 14).

Other successful areas have been working with children and youth through the King's Kids program and other camps (S 1); teaching churches in Latvia about the whole area of worship (S 11); uniting churches and sharing about missions (S 16).

The last and the most important success or strong point for the development of YWAM Latvia has been God's grace and His plan (S 14).



God from some kind of evangelism event organized by YWAM (S 17, S 20). YWAM has been a radical movement that has influenced the Church in areas of evangelism and interdenominational dialogue since YWAM has worked with all Christian denominations (S 21). YWAM, an interdenominational organization itself, helped to challenge local churches to start working together (S 2).

YWAM Latvia also has played a role in church planting (S 3) and working with kids and youth.

YWAM Latvia has definitely played a very important role in the Body of Christ in Latvia and there is possibility for more growth and influence.

### Areas of Improvement

A Latvian saying goes like this: After war everybody is smart. The same applies to the founding of YWAM Latvia. There were some weak areas and things that could have been done differently. This study could help in pioneering new ministries, even though the times will be different.

The main strength as well as main weakness came from Maris Dzelzs personality. He was a visionary, everything was possible for him. At the same time there was no structure for accountability for him. There was a lack of accountability, input and real leadership from outside both regionally and internationally. Some of the outside leaders were concerned if they had done the right thing putting Maris in leadership. The concern was if Maris was given too much at one time. They tried to work with Maris in a number of areas and tried to get involved with a lot of different things and leadership, but the feeling was that he was like a free bird (S 1, S 6).

Another weakness was having mostly Latvian staff, including in leadership. Latvians all came from Soviet upbringing and dysfunction, and there was a need for more input and training from outside. This also could have been helped by having a bit broader leadership team, release of other more mature leaders, especially from other parts of the world. More leadership training could have improved the beginning years of YWAM. There should have been more oversight from the overall leadership structure in YWAM (S 1, S 4, S 9).

One more area of improvement is connected with the possibilities of that time. People were on fire, ready to do things. Time was dynamic and everyone at YWAM Latvia was trying to do a lot of new things. In this kind of pioneering situation most of the time people don't think of the ideal possible situation (S 16). People got hurt and some even left. There was need for more input from outside through staff training and development (S 1, S 7). That would have helped to establish more solid spiritual and moral foundations. There were questions on moral issues and family issues, and training in those areas would have been very beneficial (S 4, S 9). Some things probably went too fast, but that was connected with the time (S 11).

With this also comes lack of pastoral care. This has been the weak point. There were many young Christians who needed care (S 14, S 16). The leadership tried to establish that and some people even came to fill this area, but they were not the right people and that did not work out.

In a pioneering situation such as of YWAM Latvia some of the internal structures for leadership, team building, administrative capacity and general staff development were missing. YWAM internationally as a parachurch organization is not very strong in structures. The same showed in Latvia. For staff of the beginning years it was more "sink or swim." Some of the staff always missed structure, since for them it was difficult to serve without clearly defined structure. On the other hand missing structures made the adventure possible (S 7, S 14).

There were some problems with foreign missionaries coming in the initial years. Those missionaries made many promises that were never fulfilled. They came with their projects, did their projects and left. That created some tension with the pastors of local churches and made YWAM ministry in Latvia more complicated (S 21).

A major weakness and area for improvement is networking and relationships with local churches. Maris Dzelzs knew a lot of people from different churches, but still he was not able to work together with churches. One of YWAM's Foundational Values is valuing the local church, but the bridge to different churches could be much stronger. Some churches felt offended by YWAM's activities. Sometimes YWAM Latvia leaders trusted all the visitors they had too much and that maybe scared some churches away (S 11, S 15). Even though YWAM went to churches, somewhere along

the way the working together with churches was lost (S 3). Since this organization was outside of church, some considered it as a competition (S 10). Some pastors who sent their people for training were afraid they would lose them. And true, some people joined YWAM staff (S 19, S 20). There could have been more communication with each pastor about each staff joining from their church. At the end it was the responsibility for each individual person. There were persons who got on fire emotionally and then went back to his or her home church and saw that on average people in their church were not so deeply committed to missions. That caused either an internal break or a return back to YWAM to get emotionally charged once again (S 10). No matter how good debriefing was done after the DTS, some of those emotional people caused problems in relationships with the local church.

The last area of improvement or something that maybe needed to be done differently mentioned by the research audience was relationship with the Russian Christians. In the beginning the main contact and beginnings of YWAM in Latvia had many Russian speaking people. Maris and others had real vision for Latvians, but the Russian work did not develop. A lot of active Russian Christians emigrated to the West in the beginning of 1990s, but still there probably was a possibility to build up something more (S 3, S 6). YWAM Latvia had from time to time a Russian person on staff and even ran two trilingual DTSs – Latvian, English and Russian and one bilingual Russian-English DTS, but that was not so much as a permanent ministry and that did not expand.

Overall maybe there were mistakes and weaknesses, but that has not been the main thing. Some of these areas mentioned would have enhanced the ministry, but for the most part, the work has been positive (S 15, S 19). It would be good to take these mentioned areas into consideration when pioneering a new place or a nation.

YWAM Latvia had been established more than 15 years ago and some strategies that were successful in the early years are not successful today due historic, economic and philosophical changes in society. YWAM and the Church in general needs new strategies for missions in order to reach out and the next chapter deals with it.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – RESEARCH AREA No 4: NEW STRATEGIES

#### New Strategies for Missions in Latvia

Through talking to research respondents some of new strategies came out very clearly no matter if they were locals or foreigners. Other strategies differed depending on being foreigner or local, or being a Baptist or Lutheran, or being a Latvian or Russian.

#### Strategies for Training Individuals

Seven respondents (foreigners, Latvians and Russians) saw that in order to develop missions thinking in Latvia an individual is very important. People need their perception about missions changed. They need more stories, challenges and opportunities. And through that comes involvement in missions. People will not come through cheap tricks, but those who will make their decision for missions, will come on fire and devoted (S 1, S 16).

The main target group should be youth, but also the older generations should not be neglected. Youth are used to traveling now. They will go and see things anyway, but they need to be influenced strategically where they go and what they see. The youth have a will and willingness to go and do things, especially those things that people say is impossible (S 16).

In order to stir people for missions there is need to teach and preach about it and give possibilities for short term missions. Training gives much greater perspective and new vision (S 3, S 16).

Following the overall situation in the world today there is need to redefine the definition of a missionary from one that leaves home and goes to a far and distant land, to one who is blessing nations and communities (S 17). People need to understand that they each are a missionary in the place where they are. Thus teaching on spheres of influence is essential. Individuals need to think deeper and broader how a person's worldview affects things around them. The thinking should not just be reaching individuals, though it is very important, but how to affect a whole nation; how to be strategic and release people in all different spheres and training them for

that. This also could be called “inland mission” (S 6, S 15). Missions should not be just services happening in church, but individuals reaching out to serve their city (S 17). This kind of missions’ work is just starting (S 15). The challenge is question about commitment of an individual (S 20). Missions is “competing” with many other things that a young (or not so young) person may decide to do.

### Strategies for Local Church in Missions

Seven respondents (foreigners, Latvians and Russians) tied new strategies for missions with a local church and its activities and support. The local church needs to see their part in missions. That is connected with teaching. The church is very weak still in speaking up about missions – what it means to go out, what does it mean missions today, how will it look today and tomorrow (S 1, S 11).

With the new times a local church needs to change their DNA. Churches in Latvia still are very inward focused. This needs to be changed. Church needs to change their structure as well. Most churches still have their activities only on Sundays with maybe one event during the week (S 17). It should not be so centralized in order to be more flexible and able to draw people for fellowship. Churches need to evaluate what is really important during this time of crisis. Financially missions will not be easy and churches need to evaluate that as well. Thinking about vision and possibilities will be essential. Inland missions will be very essential and churches need to think how to help people morally(S 10).

Some denominations have some strategies for their inland missions’ effort. The Catholic Church is building new churches all over Latvia, keeping in mind one very specific Latvian need – Latvians prefer to worship in a special prayer place (church building) rather than just in some kind of rented culture house or sports hall. The Lutheran Church has set its mission strategy to strengthen church life and prepare pastors better that they would think in missions’ terminology. It is also challenging the congregations to adopt a missions’ project or place. And the Lutheran Church is working to bring people back to churches (S 8, S 18). Russian churches are very open to missions, but missions is strictly done through the church, not through parachurch organizations, like YWAM (S 20).

### Strategies for Going – East and West

Future missions' strategies definitely involve missionaries from Latvia going out. This was acknowledged by six Latvian and Russian respondents. For the foreigners this strategy did not seem important.

Because of Latvia's 50 year history with Soviet Union, going east will still be a very important direction. Nobody will be really surprised if Latvians will go to Africa. But people will be surprised if Latvians go to Siberia to those people who were mocking them yesterday. There are restrictions in Russia established by the Orthodox Church, but mission work is still possible there (S 3, S 10, S 19).

The other possibility that is just open since the last five years – unhindered travel through the European Union. This opens a huge, but a very complicated mission field – post-Christian Europe. Muslim people are coming to Europe and Latvians can be used by the Holy Spirit to reach those (S 19).

Latvians can be found in many different countries, so they need to be challenged for missions. The direction could be both ways – east and west – since we serve as a bridge (S 14, S 15, S 20). With this comes very important warning and encouragement to learn the languages. Latvia is a small nation, and in order to go on missions, as a minimum should be knowledge of English and Russian (S 20).

The key would be short term trips to give the taste of missions (S 1). Potentially that will lead to multiplication of long term missionaries in countries outside Latvia.

### Ministry to Latvians Abroad

Latvian Lutheran respondents mentioned mission strategy to reach out to Latvians living abroad.

There are old Latvian communities in Siberia and Bashkortostan. Going to these locations though is more of a sentimental project. The people there are quite old. Young people there do not consider themselves Latvian anymore (S 18).

There is the mission station in India established by Anna Irbe and the Latvian Lutheran Church wants to continue to support that as well (S 18).

The economic situation has forced many Latvians to emigrate to other countries. Therefore there is great opportunity to reach out to them and establish new churches there. The Latvian Lutheran Church has established churches in Ireland, Norway and in St. Petersburg, Russia (S 8, S 18).

#### Strategy for Missions – Financial Responsibility of Church

Foreigners, Latvians and Russians mentioned that the Latvian Church should take financial responsibility for missions. In the last 20 years missions mostly has been supported by foreigners. This raises the question about teaching in the churches. When people are involved financially, they also will be involved in missions spiritually and emotionally.

The Church also needs to come up with legal ways for people to receive support for missions in Latvia. It also needs to support individual missionaries, not just with bare minimum, but also consider pensions, social security, medical and other areas (S 1, S 11, S 15, S 16, S 20).

Some churches are already supporting their missionaries, but that depends on each church and each pastor and his commitment to missions.

#### Inland Missions – Home Groups and Care for an Individual

In Latvia the time for great evangelistic campaigns has ceased. The time has changed. There should be much more attention to an individual person. Missionaries should be trained to speak personally and individually (S 13, S 21).

The best way how to reach out to an individual would be home groups. In smaller groups there is possibility for growth, individual care and training for ministry. Home groups should become the highest priority of the Church. This could apply to traditional churches that have services on Sundays, and also for new non-formal groups (S 2, S 14, S 21). This strategy was also mentioned by foreigners, Latvians and Russians.

Home group meetings also will facilitate church planting that is still needed in Latvia. In Latvia there are around 1000 churches registered. There could be an additional 1000 churches planted in Latvia.

## Openness to New Things

There is a need to look beyond what happened in the past. There were strategies that worked for 15 or 20 years (S 9). The challenge is to think outside of the box and do radically new things. Many businesses will go bankrupt because of financial crisis, but then this gives a possibility for new business opportunities. If the Church will be able to grasp it the missions will develop much better than before. Many things will depend on how close to God will be His people, because all the guidance comes from God (S 9, S 10, S 13).

Christian groups – local church and missions’ organizations – need to think how to use this time effectively. One of the new strategies includes using new technologies for evangelism. Many people use mass media and internet and Christians need to know how to use that effectively (S 13, S 20).

Because of Latvia’s uniqueness Latvia will be able to set the tone for strategies throughout in Europe. The major area is worship (S 9).

## Other Strategies

A few of the strategies mentioned by the respondents of the research clearly divided between foreigners and locals. This difference, possibly, comes from different view on the society in Latvia and its needs.

Foreigners mentioned following strategies for missions:

- Latvians serving as bridge builders for international teams serving in Latvia and going from Latvia to other places – east in west (S 7).
- Create bigger and fresher interdenominational events, similar to Missions Days (S 1).
- Concentrate more efforts to teachers’ conferences to touch the whole sphere of education (S 6).
- Influencing society through sharing about human trafficking and other similar issues (S 6).
- Strategies for missions should be multi-national (S 9).

Locals mentioned following strategies:

- Alpha Course has been very positive experience in the past few years and it seems that it will work in near future (S 18, S 21).
- Protestant lay movement “Via de Cristo” that encourages and trains lay people for ministry and missions (S 18).
- St. Gregory Ministry School in Saldus in the last two years has been developing missionary training strategy (S 8).
- Different churches and different organizations should work together in order to evangelize Latvia. There are so many villages that don’t have a church and don’t have Christian presence (S 3, S 21).

The main strategy though should be pray and ask God, what He wants Latvian Christians to do, and then work from that (S 10, S 12). Others did not mention this but meant it. Without God any missions’ strategy is futile.

#### New Strategies of Ministry for YWAM Latvia

The responses to the question about new strategies and place for YWAM Latvia in missions’ movement in Latvia were quite diverse. Five areas were mentioned more than twice, others just once or twice.

##### *Mobilization for Missions*

The majority of respondents recognized YWAM’s investment in missions’ mobilization in Latvia. Latvians through YWAM Latvia have been doing missions for 15 years and that gives foundation for challenging others (S 11). If in the beginning years missions and YWAM was something weird, then today YWAM has gained some good reputation and could serve as teachers, promoters and challengers for missions (S 15). It is very important that the work continues (S 10, S 20), sharing the gospel and training others to do it. YWAM could be the one helping to define what is missions, including “tent-maker” missions, as well as open doors to east and west through the YWAM network world wide (S 6, S 16).

YWAM’s calling has to do with something that the churches cannot do themselves. It needs to create, uphold and form this missions’ vision and continue that (S 10, S17). YWAM needs to be very strong in missions sending and provide opportunities for people for short term missions in Latvia and abroad. (S 1, S 7, S 11,

S 12, S 13, S 16, S 20). YWAM Latvia should not be doing missions alone, but involve others.

In missions movement YWAM can take leading role in Latvia (S 3, S 9). There are missionaries in Latvia and from Latvia, but as an organization, YWAM has a structure, networks and resources to take a leading role in missions' mobilization and upholding missions in Latvia.

### *Training*

The whole area of training comes in with mobilizing for missions. YWAM needs to continue to equip and train for missions' opportunities, including children, youth, adults, short and long term outreaches. There is need to develop more training schools and equip people for service (S 1, S 4, S 11, S 14, S 16). People need to be ready to do maximum evangelism, so YWAM needs to prepare people for sending them out (S 13, S 14).

Training also would involve leadership training (S 4). YWAM has content to offer for leaders in different spheres of influence, not only the Church. YWAM schools need to focus not only to church and missions in traditional sense, but reaching out to all spheres of society.

### *Encourage Local Church*

YWAM will not do missions alone. It needs the local church. Local churches still need encouragement regarding missions (S 1). YWAM needs to network with different denominations and needs to be available serving churches in their ministry and be their sending arm (S 4, S6). This way YWAM can be very strategic. Pastors would want to see YWAM more working with churches so that they even know what YWAM Latvia can offer (S 18, S 20, S 21).

### *Working with Youth*

Working with youth is already in the name of the organization and that is a very important strategy. In the last 5-10 years YWAM Latvia has not been very active in specifically targeting youth, so this ministry needs to be revived. There was King's Kids ministry (S3). Just now YWAM Latvia is developing Missions Adventures – giving missions' experience for youth. Ministry to children and youth gives good

foundations for missions and they will be the next potential DTS students and missionaries (S 8, S 12, S 16, S 17). YWAM needs to reestablish camps and other activities for children and youth since that is very important.

#### *Events on Missions*

YWAM being an interdenominational missions' organization has the authority to speak up and challenge to missions. One way to do that could be organizing GO Festivals and missions' conferences. YWAM could bring the world to the Church and the Church to the world (S 1, S 6). YWAM cares more than just for one organization and it is interdenominational therefore it can be and should be a statesman in the Body of Christ. Organizing different types of events on missions will be a real bridge builder for that understanding and challenge (S 9, S 21). Something like this was done in the initial years of YWAM Latvia, but it could have a new quality now.

#### *Church Planting*

Church planting is time consuming and requires a lot of resources and commitment, but this is another very important area for missions' strategy for YWAM (S 3, S 4). Today's society redefines what it means to have a "church," and most of the time it is still the traditional view. That is one reason why many young people are not attracted to the traditional churches. Young people of this generation live with a need for community and communication, where they can express themselves and also be heard. The traditional churches still put a lot of emphasis on traditions and music styles from centuries ago and it is not geared toward a community. YWAM needs to work with youth more and therefore the church planting would be a tool that would help those youth to find a place for worship and fellowship.

#### *Using New Technologies*

People still think that missions is for hyperactive Christians. YWAM needs to develop video and audio resources to use in Sunday schools for kids, small groups for adults and church presentations. There are many technologies – podcasts, internet, radio, video and other media – that can be used to help promote missions. YWAM needs to work on sharing stories that encourages local believers (S 1, S 17).

### *Other Strategies*

Other strategies that were mentioned only once:

- The Church in Latvia needs to take on the responsibility for their missionaries when they go out. YWAM Latvia needs to come in and do more teaching on this area (S 11).
- YWAM Latvia should be more strategic in setting long-term strategies in adopting and targeting some missions' places or people groups (S 1).
- YWAM Latvia could provide moral and spiritual support for those missionaries ready to go out and help with re-entry when they return (S 11).
- YWAM needs to start working more with Russian speaking people in Latvia. There is huge Russian population in Latvia with a majority of them unreached (S 7).
- Continue work with the outcasts – drug addicts and alcoholics (S 12).
- YWAM Latvia needs to trust the Lord and listen to Him to be on the cutting edge, going ahead and making it possible for others to get involved (S 1).

All of these strategies are good and needed. The main strategy though should be listening on God and obeying Him. The founding leader of YWAM Latvia is with the Lord, but the new leaders still need to hear from God and continue ministry.

The Lord will give strategies that initially may not be like the usual things in YWAM, but if it is given by God, it will be the right strategy for the right time. In the foundations of YWAM Latvia there was a man who was radical and wild for God. Leaders and staff need to be radical and obedient. They need to ask for new radical strategies and seek for open doors (S 9, S 15, S 19). It should not just be work, but waiting on guidance from the Holy Spirit (S 3).

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

World missions movement is vital for the Christian Church in any country that takes seriously the Great Commission of Jesus Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Matthew 28:19). The Latvian Church has its role to play in God’s plan. This research showed that despite all historical complications Latvians had been active in missions.

In last twenty years of Latvia’s independence the Church in Latvia has made great steps forward in missions thinking. YWAM Latvia has had major influence in missions mobilizing, challenging local churches to missions and teaching about it. Due to YWAM’s pioneering ministry in Latvia, the missions movement is developing, and more and more Latvian Christians will go out to the nations as missionaries.

YWAM Latvia has had a lasting influence on Latvian society in general. Thousands of people have received humanitarian aid - clothes and food. More than 250 people have participated in the “Way to Freedom” camps. More than a hundred people have been set free from their addictions. There are more than 20 people who have found a place to stay and serve after being released from jail. Through children and youth camps many young people have found God and set their life course to serve God in many areas of society.

In spite of the complicated history of Latvia, it is a unique place for the Christian Church. Due to unique historical factors (many occupations from different rulers), the diverse ethnic makeup of Latvia (Latvians not being the only one large nationality in Latvia) and the three main Christian denominations (Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox) having equal amount believers, Latvia has served as a strategic place to launch the first missions movement in the Soviet Union. The same development facilitated the successful growth of YWAM in Latvia.

This paper recorded the development of missions’ movement in the last 20 years. The research is a careful record of what happened during this given time period, but it is not exhaustive. There still are possibilities of further study. The research provides a bibliography that could be used for that.

This thesis has recorded the history of YWAM Latvia. Since this is the first written study it has great significance in keeping remembrance of what God has done through the founders and first initiatives. This shows what was at the foundations of YWAM Latvia. This research will help others to understand YWAM Latvia better.

This research also provides ideas for new strategies for missions coming from a diverse group of people interested in the future of Latvia. Therefore it is a noteworthy contribution to the Body of Christ in Latvia.

To God be the glory! Soli Deo Gloria!

## APPENDIX 1

### MEDIA COVERING OF LATVIAN MISSIONARIES GOING ABROAD THROUGH YWAM AND FOREIGNERS SERVING IN LATVIA

After 2003, there was much more written about different Latvians doing missions through YWAM abroad. For example, journalist Liepiņš gave the story about Monika Gruzīte from Kuldīga, who did YWAM training in Norway and went on outreach to Tanzania (Liepiņš, 2003:7).

Journalist Brūvere shared about Baiba Sondore from Talsi, who did her DTS in Belgium and outreach in Marocco, and then served as a YWAM volunteer in Thailand (Brūvere, 2005:4). She also told about YWAM Latvia staff Kaspars and Evelyn Apinis who did their outreach in Uganda (Brūvere, 2005:5).

Journalist Lina-Fisenko told about Līna Leitāne from Riga who went as a YWAM volunteer to New Zealand, Chile and Argentina (Lina-Fisenko, 2007:9).

Journalist Lietiņa wrote about Linda Seļava from Kuldīga who did her DTS in Australia and outreach in Malaysia (Lietiņa, 2007:39-41).

Journalist Mertena told about Ieva Grīnfelde from Talsi who did missions' outreach in Mexico and was preparing for a DTS in USA (Mertena, 2007:4).

Journalist Mierkalne shared about Laura Dzelza from Valdemarpils who had done many outreaches, but particularly about Afghanistan (Mierkalne, 2008:6).

There also was information about different outreaches done in Latvia through YWAM. For example, journalist Skolniece wrote about a DTS team doing outreach in Bērzgals (Skolniece, 2005:2).

Journalists Liepiņa and Leine wrote about a King's Kids team from Orlando, Florida that did outreach in different places in Latvia – Talsi, Sabile, Liepāja, and Aizpute (Liepiņa, 2006: 2; Leine, 2006: 7). This team also involved YWAM Latvia staff serving alongside the youth from the States.

Journalist Elsiņa mentions YWAM twice. The DTS had their short one week outreach in Madona, in November of 2006 (Elsiņa, 2006:4) and then one DTS team did their outreach in Madona serving children and youth (Elsiņa, 2007: 4).

## DESCRIPTION OF REFERENCES AND SOURCES

This thesis is based on two different primary sources. The majority of research was done through interviewing different persons involved in missions in Latvia. The people that were interviewed are mentioned in the thesis as a subject number, e.g. S 14. All interviews were kept anonymous.

The other part was done researching publications found about the topic. There is a very limited amount of books published about missions in Latvia. All the books that came to the author's attention or were mentioned by the research population were researched. Those were secondary resources. Only books in Latvian, Russian and English were explored. Due to the shortness of the time for this project there was no possibility to look for possible books in other languages, since that would involve problems with translation.

As primary sources there were two main periodicals used. One was a newspaper published by the Latvian Lutheran Church. The other was Baptist Magazine "Baptistu Draudzēm" that later changed its name to "Baptistu Vēstnesis." Those two publications were the most consistent – both started to publish at the end of 1980s or beginning of 1990s. It gave the possibility to continuously follow the development of the Church and missions.

The Catholic Church has a different church structure and therefore different views of missions and national church. Therefore the information was not researched in Latvian Catholic literature. The same applies to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Some of the newspaper articles about YWAM ministry were found at YWAM Latvia archives.

Finally, the author used the Latvian public library internet system "ALISE" doing a search on "Jaunatne ar Misiju" (YWAM Latvia). The system gave 42 different articles. Most of those were used in this research.

Overall the references and sources are quite complete to be used for the research of the subject.

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