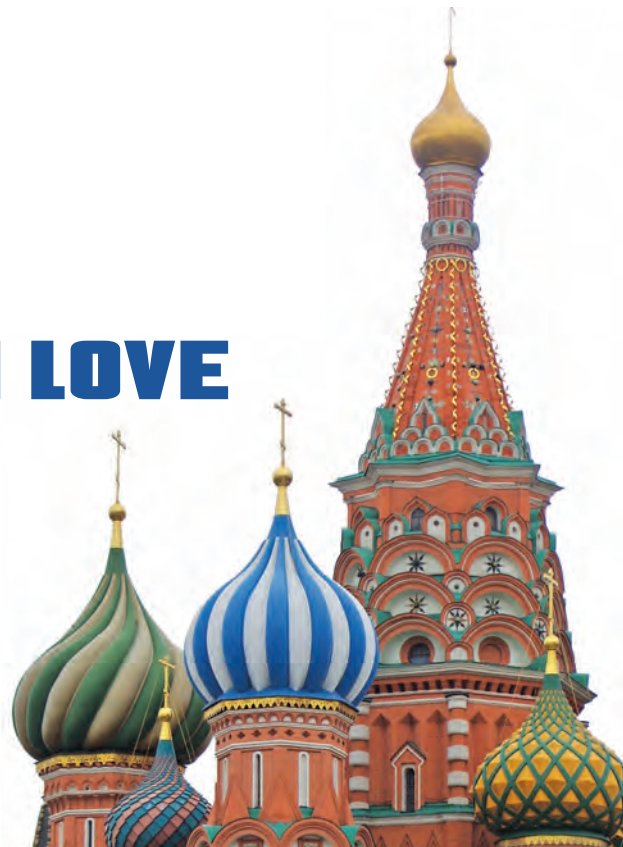


FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

by Joy Dougherty

"We knew when we first saw Sasha's picture," declared Cartherine Carr, "he was going to be our child," marking the beginning of the love story that united a little Russian orphan boy with his adoptive parents, Rev. Timothy and Catherine Carr, of Trinity Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio.



Why adopt a child from Russia? Catherine shared, "My dad, Rev. Otto Brillinger, has been traveling to Kazakhstan for the last 18 or so years, visiting orphanages as a part of his [volunteer] mission work. Pastor Carr and I always looked at the pictures he brought back and made the decision to adopt when our youngest son, Michael, went to college.

Pastor Carr continued, "A member of Trinity was on the board of Friends of Russian Orphans (FORO) and knew its founder and director, Lisa Wurster," he said. "After learning more about the organization, we invited Lisa to Trinity one Sunday to talk about Journeys of Joy, projects of FORO that brought Russian children to America for short visits.

The first year, the Carrs were the only Trinity family to host a child, but several other families helped by providing bedding, feeding the children, supervising VBS, and spending the night at the church in case a need arose. "Sasha (Alexander), a seven-year-old little boy, was specifically chosen for us by Lisa Wurster," Catherine related. "Our entire family came to meet him. After he returned to Russia, we sent several packages of clothing, books, and candy to the orphanage for Sasha. My dad also helped by calling and talking with the social worker and director in Russian. We missed Sasha very much and looked forward to seeing him again."

Then the trips to Russia began. The Carrs made four in all, at considerable cost. Catherine explained that everything was done

at the last minute. "When given the right to travel, you had two weeks to prepare the trip. When you applied for a visa, you had to have it expedited, which was hundreds of dollars more. Purchasing airline tickets within two weeks of a flight cost more as well. We cashed in our retirement savings and took out a loan as a part of the home study and adoption process," she said.



Sasha with Pastor Tim and Catherine (2012)

The Carrs' first trip to Russia took place in January 2012, after their home study was completed and their dossier submitted. They took a plane to Kotlas (a remote city in the Arkhangelsk region) that operates only at night three times a week. Upon their arrival, they spent the night in a modest hotel and traveled the next day an hour and a half to Sasha's orphanage, located in the tiny town of Solvychegodsk.

Once at the orphanage, the Carrs devoured a delicious meal provided by the people there. After their first good meal in over a day, they were taken to a room where the children were waiting. Although Sasha was glad to see them, it took a while for him to "warm up" because it had been six months since their initial visit. While on a tour of the facility, "My heart went out to one little five-year-old girl, Galina, who was available for adoption at the time; and she really took to me as well," said Catherine.

After spending four hours with Sasha, their time was up. "It was such a long journey for only a few hours with him, but it was worth it," Catherine stated. They had traveled three days to see Sasha and then made the three-day trip home.

After much thought and prayer, and on the advice of many, three months later the Carrs made a second trip to Russia. They decided to adopt little Galina as well as Sasha. They would be brother and sister. "Our little Galina bonded so well with us. She even let Papa [Pastor Carr] carry her around when we went to see the older children. I knew this was going to be the most awesome thing for all of us — to be able to have two little ones who would play together and be best friends. It would be just like our other children when they were younger."

They learned that Galina had an older brother in the orphanage, and after meeting him, they knew they would adopt

him too. They were ecstatic! "It was hard to believe this was happening, but we believed that God would make it all work out if He really wanted us to do this."

One week after their return home, however, they received a phone call informing them they could not have either Galina nor her brother because their mother still had limited rights. "It was like death in some ways, and it was also a relief in some ways," said Catherine wistfully. "We wondered how Sasha would take it all, and our three adult children [Eric, Ana, and Michael] were concerned that all of this was becoming too much for us." As in all things, they trusted the Lord to guide them as they proceeded with the process of adopting Sasha.

There were many time-consuming tasks in the entire adoption process, including the notarization by U.S. attorneys of a myriad of documents and the coordination with the adoption agency in Russia: securing a translator, arranging for a person from Child Protective Services to accompany them, obtaining permission to travel, renting ground transportation, and hiring drivers to shuttle them everywhere.

Court day finally arrived on the Carrs' third trip to Russia, September 25, 2012. "Sasha knew what was happening and was ready for a great day," declared Catherine. "When the judge entered the courtroom, we gave our speeches, and he asked us many questions about how we would care for our Sasha. After two hours, our petition to adopt Sasha was granted. That evening, we celebrated with our friends before beginning the long trip home again."

Pastor Carr traveled to Russia again two months later, this time to bring Sasha home. Although Catherine wanted to make the trip as well, she decided against it since only one parent was needed to bring a child home, and it would have cost several thousand dollars more for her to go. It was a selfless decision since she yearned to be with her new son on his long-awaited trip "home."

November 10, 2012, was the much-anticipated day when Sasha arrived in the United States with his father. "The minute his feet touched ground in New York City, he was an American citizen," Pastor Carr said proudly. The document that actually says that is very important to Sasha, and it is framed and hanging in our family room for all to see."

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Current Mission Grants Highlighted This Issue

Student Scholarship for MOST Ministries Mission Trips — \$20,000

It is important to introduce and instill a mission-minded spirit in students who are the future leaders of the LCMS. They will strengthen their own faith and be encouraged to reach out in their own communities and throughout the world through mission work. An LWML grant will enable MOST Ministries to provide financial resources to introduce young people to the needs and realities of God's love all over the world through the experiences of short term mission trips.

Lutheran Children's Books for Southeast Asia — \$72,000

In the Buddhist nations of Southeast Asia, Christian parents are eager to teach their children about the love of God in Christ. Lutheran missionaries and church leaders in this part of the world have a deep need for Lutheran materials printed in the native language of the people they serve. Lutheran Heritage Foundation, through this LWML grant, is able to fulfill its mission of translating and publishing Lutheran material for the mission field.



Mission GRANTS

Mission Goal: \$1,830,000.00 | 2013–2015

1. Training K-9 Comfort Dogs for LCMS Chaplains.....\$30,000
- 2. Lutheran Children's Books for Southeast Asia\$72,000
3. Training Indigenous Pastors and Deaconesses – Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana\$100,000
- 4. Rebuilding Nord Est Haiti Lutheran School.....\$100,000
5. Jesus Our Savior Lutheran Schools, Winnebago Tribe, Nebraska\$58,553
- 6. I CAN — Serving At-Risk Children With Learning Needs.....\$99,000
- 7. Bible Story Books in Sign Language and Written Text\$100,000
8. Native American Outreach Training Center – Fairbanks, Alaska\$95,000
9. Strengthening and Expanding Campus Ministry\$100,000
- 10. Worship for Shut-Ins.....\$80,000
11. Preparing Leaders for a Diverse World – Concordia College, Selma, Alabama\$50,000
- 12. Voice of Care Ministry to the Developmentally Challenged.....\$50,600
- 13. Christ-Centered Tutoring Through Rebecca's Garden of Hope (RGOH).....\$100,000
14. Student Scholarships for MOST Ministries Mission Trips\$20,000
15. Building Homes and Hope in Haiti.....\$100,000
- 16. Support for Lutheran Public Radio\$40,000
17. Christian Education Support for Children – India\$85,000
- 18. Mission Outreach at St. Paul Community Lutheran Church – Pontiac, Michigan\$65,559

KEY: ● – grant paid in full
○ – grant partially paid

Check the latest updates for mites received and grants funded at www.lwml.org.



For 30-plus years, the **Our Savior Lutheran Church** quilters in **Eagle River, Wisconsin**, have been contributing handmade quilts to the Lutheran World Relief (LWR). In 2013 they assembled and sent 170 quilts. In addition, they collected and assembled 20 baby layettes and sewed 50 school book bags, which were filled with school supplies to be mailed with the quilts. LWR distributes the quilts, layettes, and book bags to refugees and others in need.

Top: Pictured, left to right, are Loise Pietz, Cheri Generotzke, Donna Liedke, and Joanne Abens. Missing from the picture are Pat Hasenberg, Eunice Ball, Carolyn Gleisner, and Nancy Atwater.
Bottom: Standing in front of the assembled baby layettes are Jessica and Naomi Kadlec. The can between them contained over \$400 in loose change received for the LWML mite project.



Correction

The Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) biennial conference, "Christ-Centered Women," featuring speakers past LWML President Ida Mall, Monique Nunes, and Sharla Fritz, will be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March (not May) 14–16, 2014; the WLI's Schools for Speakers and Writers will precede the conference on March 12–14. For more information visit the WLI website at www.acui.org/wli/.

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An equally memorable day for Sasha was his Baptism by his father, at Trinity, on Thanksgiving Day. His grandfather, Rev. Otto Brillinger, translated everything into Russian for Sasha, who was baptized Alexander Simeon Carr. It was a very moving service for all who attended — a real celebration!"

"Sasha's Baptismal certificate is his other important document," declared Pastor Carr. "It, too, is framed and hangs on his bedroom wall. He calls both of them his 'documents,' and they are big, important things to him."

"Sasha never says 'I don't want to go to church,'" declared Pastor Carr. "He knows and prays the Lord's Prayer every night, and we are working on the Ten Commandments. He says the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24–26) with his mom and dad and also hums portions of the liturgy. I'm a liturgical kind of guy, so I am very proud that he is doing all of this."

Some unexpected news came a few months later: In the spring of 2013, Pastor Carr was diagnosed with stage three rectal cancer. He was told he would need to begin chemotherapy and radiation, followed by surgery, because the cancer had spread to the liver. Although he is currently undergoing more chemotherapy, he still conducts services at Trinity, preach-

es his wonderful sermons, and gives members of the congregations his famous hugs — sometimes while wearing a surgical mask. Sasha is always by his father's side, as he greets his parishioners or is running around the narthex, giving hugs to others.

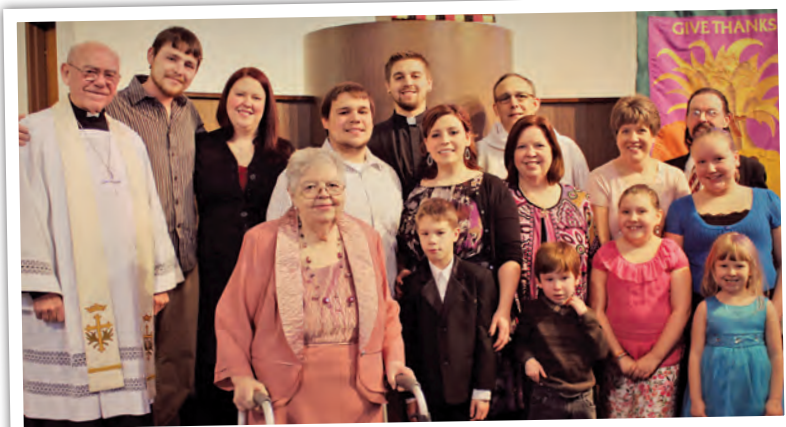
Pastor Carr says, "His level of faith, for one who had no Christian faith before he came to the United States, is astounding. When we were in Walmart one day, he suddenly looked up at me and said, 'Dad, don't worry if you die because then you'll be with Jesus.' I said, 'You know, you're right. I'm not going to worry.'"

"It has been a life-changing experience for us," says Catherine, "a time of growth and change for our whole family, while adapting to raising an energetic ten-year-old child who is both a blessing and a challenge in so many ways at the same time."

Our prayer at Trinity is that our loving Lord will continue to watch over, guide, and bless this wonderful family and give them the strength and courage to face whatever lies ahead for them.

Update: On Christmas Eve 2014, while preaching the Good News of Christ's birth during the Candlelight Service, Pastor Carr told us his good news — his cancer is in remission! The entire congregation that filled the nave to capacity applauded loudly and thankfully. **Q**

Pastor Tim and Catherine Carr have been active in LWML for many years in Indiana, Texas, Iowa, and now in Ohio. Pastor Carr, the Bible study leader for LWML Ohio District 2012 Convention and the pastoral counselor for the Toledo Zone, promotes and gives the LWML at Trinity, Toledo, his full support!



Extended family, including maternal grandfather, Rev. Otto Brillinger, and maternal grandmother gather for Sasha's Baptism in November 2012