The Academic Conference “Breaks and Links” Addressed 120 Years of Methodism in Russia

The international academic conference “Breaks and Links: Past, Present, and Future of Russian Methodism” sponsored by the Russia United Methodist Theological Seminary, United Methodist Church in Eurasia, and the General Board of Higher Education in Ministry of the United Methodist Church was held October 1-3, 2009, at the Moscow Methodist House.

This conference, the first academic conference ever dedicated to study of Russian Methodism proper, represents an important step in the development of this area of Methodist history. Reports at the conference addressed the past of the Russian Methodism from more than solely an academic approach. The purpose of reconstructing the historical memory and identity of Methodism in Russia in the past was to strengthen the foundation of the present and future Russian Methodist identity.

The conference was held in conjunction with celebration of the 120th anniversary of Methodism in Russia. Scholars delivered their presentations in person and through video presentations. Some papers were read out loud in the absence of the authors. Bishop Hans Växby delivered his greetings to the conference. Dr. Hank Pieterse represented the General Board of Higher Education in Ministry.

The following presentations evoked particular interest:

- “From the Line to the Plain: Methodism and Orthodoxy in Russia” (Dr. Sergei V. Nikolaev)
- “Lessons of Early Russian Methodism and Their Importance for the Present and Future of the Church in Russia” (Dr. S T Kimbrough, Jr.)
- “The Pastors of Russian Methodism in Harbin, Manchuria, 1923-“ (Dr. Dana L. Robert)
- “Orthodoxy and Methodism in Russia” (Fr. Avgustin (Nikitin))
- “Methodism: Liberal Protestant Confession on Russian Soil” (Dr. M.A. Zherebyatiev)
- “Revival of the Spirit of Revival: The Place of Methodism in Russia” (Dr. E.A. Stepanova)

The last day of the conference opened with a dynamic discussion among the participants and the panel members Dr. Sergei V. Nikolaev, Fr. Augusting (Nikitin), and Dr. Elena A. Stepanova regarding the past, present, and future of Russian Methodism.

The exciting conclusion of the conference was an announcement by Dr. Nikolaev, presenting the concept of the Digital Archive of Russian Methodist History, a joint project of the Boston School of Theology (Boston, MA) and the Russia United Methodist Theological Seminary (Moscow, Russia). Great interest was raised by the first item of the future Digital Archive: a photo album in the form of the pastor’s Annual Report to the Missions Director by the Russian Methodist Pastor Konstantin Egoroff, who was ordained by Bishop Ainsworth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for mission work in Kharbin in 1926. This unique document was kindly made available by Dr. Dana L. Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission from Boston School of Theology out of her own collection of documents on early Russian Methodism.
The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry provided funds for publishing selected presentations from this conference in two separate volumes: in Russian and in English.

The conference owes its success in large part to the work of the organizing committee, which included the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism and President of the Russian seminary Dr. Sergei Nikolaev, Assistants to the President Yelena Menyailova and Viktor Fomin, seminary librarian Dmitri Morev, and other seminary staff.

After the Academic Conference, an Ecumenical Celebration of the 120th anniversary of Methodism in Russia was held. Representatives of different denominations in Russia as well as United Methodist international representatives extended their greetings and congratulations. The event concluded with an inspiring music festival organized by Pastor Ludmila Garbuzova. It touched the hearts of all the participants.

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Pictures by Sergei Pugachev