

## Summer 2013: *Developing the Congregational Singing Ministry*

Dear friends,

I would like to express my gratitude to all of you and to let you know what our last few months—May, June and July—were filled with.

**In May** the Institute of Theology and Christian Ministry in St. Petersburg had its annual Conference, and we got to help the Institute with conducting of the event. It was a great joy for us that the Conference was able to take place, and that we had such a wonderful opportunity to share the songs for congregational singing that were written and translated in the last few years.

**At the end of June** we participated in the annual camp “*BalChYoCa*” (**Baltic Christian Youth Camp**) that takes place in Estonia. For the last three years we've been leading daily singing lessons for kids during which we were learning new songs with them, reviewing the ones they already knew, and trying to cultivate their love of singing about God and about Christ. When we just started these lessons three years ago, it was rather difficult to involve young people in this activity—it was something unusual and seemed absurd to them: “We are here to do what? To sing? To do warm ups? Boys and girls are going to be divided into parts?”, etc.

But little by little these lessons became a regular part of our camp schedule, and if three years ago at the beginning of the session you would see no one in the hall, this year, most of the kids were there five minutes prior to the beginning. It was also so heart-warming to hear one child or another humming “*o-o-o heaven in in my heart*” or “*Now go in peace, now go in love from the Father above...*” on the way to the beach. Some of our songs were translated into Estonian, and that greatly encouraged us. Even though all of the participants understand English pretty well, singing in ones own mother tongue touches a person's heart on a deeper level. The following songs: *The Lord is Risen from the Grave*, *The Lam of God*, and *Holy, Holy, Holy* are already translated into Estonian. We hope that this is just the beginning...

We believe that what little we are able to do for this young people now, will be the very seeds of love that God will one day grow in their hearts. May He be praised!

**The last week of July—the annual Singing School.** 58 people from 20 cities all over Russia, Ukraine and Belarus participated in the Singing School this year. We were especially glad to see that a lot of our participants were teenagers and adolescence. For the whole week these young people were immersed in the atmosphere of friendship, acceptance and love which was created in our worship to God.

We started a new class this year—a class for those brothers who lead singing in their congregations. Due to this class both teachers and students were able to understand and learn a lot of things. We are hoping to keep this class next year. This year we had a wonderful team of instructors: Sergei Besedin, Brad Cawyer, Leena Zhigulina, Luka Klimanova, and a new teacher from St. Petersburg, Galina Kabanova. This was the second year Andrew Noes worked as the School administrator, and he did a great job! He was able to find an excellent place outside of Kiev, and we liked this place so much that we decided to have the next years Singing School at the same place, and at the same time — July 20-26, 2014.

One of the main goals of the Singing School is to promote our students' love of the congregational singing and to teach them the basics of singing from the sheet. For us teachers, the greatest moment is when we see that our students have learned to do something they couldn't do before coming. We are glad to see that those brothers and sisters who were students at the singing School five to six years ago are active in the life of their congregation participating not only in the singing ministry, but in the other ones also.

I would like to thank all of you again for understanding the significant of this work by supporting us financially. I also thank God for blessing us with joy of participating in His work—spreading the Good News in this world, and I invite you to join us in giving thanks to Him. We are praying that our labor serves for God's glory and for the unity of the church. May God bless each person who is working for His glory!

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