

KIT: a project in Russia providing aid to youth and kids with developmental and physical disabilities

During the Northwest Washington Synod trip to our Russian Companion Synod in March 2017, Bishop Kirby Unti visited KIT (Klub of the Togliatti Initiative) and said this experience was the most meaningful of his whole trip, valuing congregational outreach with its clear mission to serve the entire community. “Overcoming all the things that normally divide us, here’s a church where all belong together.” During a dance performance by these young people, viewers were moved to tears: “invisible people had suddenly become visible”.

KIT was founded eight years ago through the initiative of Lutheran pastor Tatjana Zhivodjorova in Togliatti, Russia. She stated that almost the entire social environment in Russia is not equipped to deal with such disabilities. Physicians often pronounce such children to be “un-teachable”. If they are not deemed appropriate for a special school for the disabled, there is no possibility for any type of state supported education. Many mothers of such children are single parents, creating a bottomless pit both financially and in terms of stress. The State provides a monthly pension of approximately \$180 up to the age of 18, about \$150 over the age of 18, about the minimum cost of living in that area. The State has no plans for future education, support and care for these people. At KIT the focus is on challenging and supporting these youths, to the degree to which their abilities permit, to experience as much of an independent life-style as is possible. It is not always easy to transmit modern, western pedagogical ideas and methods. A lack of familiarity and preconceptions create skepticism. Through continuing education it has been possible to reduce this attitude, giving this church’s project a positive reputation in the city and the region, one reason why KIT is growing and flourishing. With aid from German partners KIT purchased a house, which also serves as the church, a building the congregation works to update. Professional support has come primarily from people experienced in work with the disabled in Germany. Thus KIT day care provides a workshop, daily life skills, a positive social environment, as well as art, drama and music activities. Through this work, favor and approval is gained as a church. KIT’s open manner of outreach, of helping people regardless of religious or other differences, helps to reduce prejudice among the people.

ARCHBISHOP DIETRICH BRAUER of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia writes that he fully supports the KIT PROJECT, highlighting that “... the congregation in Togliatti began this work with the handicapped from scratch, thanks to the congregation’s energy and to the efforts of Pastor Tatjana Zhivodyorova. With the aid of professional help from Germany it was possible to train local co-workers in pedagogical methods. This project also provides an indirect mission field. Prejudices against Lutherans/Protestants in our primarily orthodox country are reduced. From time to time the work of Pastor Tatjana is recognized by local TV newscasts, which draws attention to the congregation and the lived gospel. “

Eva Mader from Team Russia met with Pastor Tatjana in St. Petersburg in September 2017 and learned that training continues with sewing machines, financed through a two-year grant from Germany. Pastor Tatjana said it was very important for KIT to become as financially self-sufficient as possible, by selling hand-crafted and sewn items made by KIT-kids. It is their present goal to raise \$30,000 for the purchase of a plot of land with a “dacha” (cabin), where they can raise produce to be sold at the local market, making the kids more self-sufficient , integrating them more into the community, and making KIT less dependent on financial donations.

Because the Lutheran Synod in European Russia is our Companion Synod, an appeal is made to all congregations in our synod to donate to the KIT project.

**Please send donations to the NWWA Synod Office,
for “NW WA Synod Russia Fund”
account # 02-341-04272, marked KIT.**

THANK YOU!