

Smolensk Trip Report

We came, we worshipped, we delivered, we worked, we contributed, we shared, we returned. That is the essence of our trip last week to Smolensk to help with the construction of the new church camp of the Smolensk Baptist Church in frozen Russia.

In New York Ed and Nancy McLean, Ash Pipkin and I met Dave Gazzetta from the Church of the Cross in Omaha and travelled together to Moscow and thence, with Ellen Smith, to Smolensk. Working with Dave and getting to know him was one of the joys of the trip.

For work, we built and installed temporary windows for all the window openings in the basement and first floor of the main camp building -over 30 openings in all, sealed tightly for winter, preserving the interior of the building until permanent windows can be installed next year. This was relatively unskilled work, in which we all could participate, and freed up the more skilled members of the church for tasks that require more skill. It took most of the week, but we also helped a little with plastering walls in the caretaker house, cleaning up the site, and moving furniture and equipment. I believe this contribution more than satisfied the main purpose of the trip.

Sunday we worshipped and then delivered and sorted seven large duffels and suitcases packed with the generous outpourings of your contributions - children's vitamins, cold medicines, pain relievers, fish oil and the like, bountiful toothbrushes and tooth paste, fabulous craft supplies, bible stories, socks galore, knit goods and much more. Our thanks to all who contributed.

We were treated like royalty - had dinner in the homes of Pastor Victor of the central church and Pastor Leonid of the Gnozdovo church - were treated to huge mid-day meals at the work site prepared by people from three different churches in the oblast (state) - saw the ancient city walls and the cathedral - and enjoyed the fellowship of the people of the church throughout the week.

The camp has made great progress. The caretaker house is structurally complete, with a roof that will withstand the winter, sealed windows, electricity, plumbing, running water, working toilet, a functioning temporary kitchen, and plaster on many walls. The basement and first floor of the main building are structurally complete and work on the second floor is progressing. More brick work and trusses are needed to make it ready for a roof, but they still hope to have the roof on before the end of the month.

White Memorial is the major funding source for this whole project. Thanks again to everyone who has contributed directly or indirectly to the funds we have provided.

The weather was fairly constant the whole week - with lows in the mid twenties and highs ranging from the high twenties to the mid thirties. Snow all day Friday, with about a four inch accumulation, but by then we were working inside the camp building.

For pictures of the state of the camp as of Friday the 6th, go to:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/tomandrews9538/DropBox?authkey=Gv1sRgCLjiuZ2p1JP14gE#5401818040311180658>

Thank again to everyone for your support and encouragement. I have come back satisfied, grateful, amazed and humbled.

Tom Andrews