

# **Historical record with reasons for autonomy request for Eurasia UMC**

## **January 16, 2023**

### **HISTORICAL RECORD**

Methodist church in Eurasia begins its history from 1889. Thanks to ministers Karl Lindbergh, Hjalmar Salmi, and George Simons, Methodist church actively grew in Saint Petersburg. In the beginning of 20th century Methodism also developed in the Far East region. Due to suppression of religious organizations in the USSR Methodist church was forced to discontinue its activity by the end of 1920s.

Methodist church restarted its ministry and mission in Russia in 1990 during the period of perestroika and glasnost. In the beginning of 1990s the Eurasia Episcopal Area of the UMC with its Bishop's office in Moscow was created. The United Methodist Church in Eurasia became the part of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference.

Thanks to the documented history of Methodism in Russia, we were able to officially register the Russia United Methodist Church (RUMC) as Centralized Religious Organization. In 1995 the Moscow Theological Seminary was founded where we train pastors and lay leaders for the UMC in Eurasia. A few years after that our Methodist church has started ministry and mission in other countries of the former Soviet Union (Eurasia).

In April 2022 at the Extra Session of the Northern Europe and Eurasia the Annual Conference of Ukraine and Moldova was transferred from UMC in Eurasia to UMC in Nordic and Baltic Area.

Today the UMC in Eurasia consists of four Annual Conferences, which include 66 churches:

Central Russia Annual Conference  
Northwest Russia and Belarus Provisional Annual Conference  
South Russia Provisional Annual Conference  
East Russia and Central Asia Provisional Annual Conference

## REASONS FOR REQUESTING AUTONOMY

The history of revival of Methodism in Russia and Eurasia is a history of God's work through our sisters and brothers from around the world. We, ordained clergy, lay leaders and community representatives, are grateful to churches and ministers from the USA, Europe, Asia and Africa for their love and care, for helping us to raise leaders and educate them, for planting churches and helping people in need. All of these has helped us to grow our roots in our context and share the light of Jesus Christ to the world.

The issue of human sexuality in the UMC has brought a lot of tension on a worldwide scale. We hold the traditional view on marriage and ordination as expressed in the current Book of Discipline of the UMC. Many dialogues and conversations were held within Eurasia, as well as among and with our UMC sisters and brothers in Europe and worldwide. Our understanding of the Bible and our theological convictions inspire us to view marriage as union of love for one man and one woman. We see each person as God's creation of sacred worth. At the same time we believe that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

We see that more and more churches and conferences change their understanding of marriage and move towards ordination of LGBTQ people and electing them as bishops. We disagree with that. This contradicts our conviction not only biblically and theologically, it also creates tension for our churches which live and operate in a very conservative culture and context, let alone our issues with the current laws on homosexuality.

The decision to request autonomy for UMC in Eurasia was made after much prayer and discussions on many levels of our church. It is still painful for us, for we feel like leaving our own home. But we do not want to fight or create more pain for others or ourselves. We wish to peacefully leave our denomination and remember the many good years of collaboration and being in mission together. So, we ask the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference to approve our autonomy.

Our mission remains the same — to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our vision is to be a vital and faithful branch of the Methodist movement in the world. Our values will express the traditional view on marriage and ordination. We pray that God bless all of us as we continue to make these important decisions for our beloved UMC and beyond.

Eurasia Area group of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference Council

*Rev. Dmitri Lysin*

*Mrs. Elena Kitaeva*

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