

Letters from Bulgaria

Professor John Brenner
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Luke Wolfgramm
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In 1968 a young seminary graduate named Arno J. Wolfgramm arrived at his first congregation. The Assignment Committee under the guidance of the Holy Spirit had placed him at a little mission congregation in Toledo, Ohio. For five years Pastor Wolfgramm served St. Andrew congregation. He experienced the joys of serving God's people, but like all young pastors he also suffered the difficulties and frustrations of inexperience. On more than one occasion he wondered, "Why don't they assign more experienced pastors to mission congregations?"

Twenty-six years passed. During those years Pastor Wolfgramm served congregations in Toledo, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois and Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Through the power of Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit nurtured his desire to serve souls. Through twenty-six years of pastoral experience, the Holy Spirit forged a wise, veteran pastor thoroughly equipped to serve God's people.

In March of 1995 the Holy Spirit through the WELS Mission Board called Pastor Wolfgramm to serve as a missionary in Bulgaria. After several weeks of prayerful deliberation, Pastor Wolfgramm accepted his new call and declared that he was ready "for one more adventure" in God's service.

Accepting this call was not easy. The Wolfgramm family, Arno, Joan and their nine-year-old son Paul, would have to say good-bye to their congregation, their town, their nation and their culture. They would have to leave behind a close extended family and good friends. In an effort to maintain ties especially with his parents, Pastor Wolfgramm decided to keep a journal and send installments of that journal (along with personal letters) back to family and friends in the States.

After nearly two years, Pastor Wolfgramm has mailed back more than 450 pages of letters and journal entries. These letters are interesting

reading for family and friends, but they also provide insight into some of the earliest years of our synod's work in Bulgaria. This paper will attempt to share some of those insights. In particular this paper will (1) focus on Pastor Wolfgramm's early experiences and adjustments ^{to} of living overseas, (2) introduce readers to some of the first native workers in the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria and (3) trace the earliest beginnings of the Bulgarian worker training system.

Although this paper will use hundreds of pages of organized, first-hand information, it also faces some historical limitations. (1) The source for this paper relies on only one perspective. (2) Much of the history of the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria is still being written. What might seem highly important now might not mean much in the future. The converse is also true. (3) This paper is being written by an author who has never visited Bulgaria and who cannot possibly understand all that is involved with this new mission. Mindful of this disclaimer we are ready to examine the letters from Bulgaria.

The Teacher

Pastor Wolfgramm accepted his new call in May of 1995, but the Wolfgramms did not arrive in Bulgaria until September. Besides the usual delays of packing and moving, the family also had to apply for passports, obtain entrance visas, study in some limited language workshops and attend missionary orientation programs. Since the Wolfgramms had never been outside the U.S., everything was at the same time new, exciting, frustrating and bewildering.

Pastor Wolfgramm faced two main tasks upon entering Bulgaria. He had been called to serve as a missionary, to teach the word of God to the people of Bulgaria. But before he could begin any "real" church work, he and

his family would have to adjust to life in a new culture. One synodical mission official told him, "I don't want to hear any plans for mission work until you have been overseas *at least* six months."

Missionary orientation had told the Wolfgramm family what they could expect in their new home. Most people who move to foreign cultures go through three stages of adjustment. The first phase usually lasts about six to eight weeks. During this time family members feel more like tourists than residents. Most things are new, exciting and upbeat. This is the time when families take most of their pictures. The family hits the second phase when they realize they are not tourists. They have no tickets to return home. They will have to deal with their new culture. Most families experience frustration, irritation and even depression because it is so difficult to perform even the simplest tasks in their new surroundings. The final stage is a period of readjustment. During this time the family learns to handle their situation and is able to function in their new culture.

At first even the smallest cultural changes were new and exciting -- just as missionary orientation had predicted. At the very beginning of his journal, Pastor Wolfgramm noted some of these changes. He began by dating his journal, "Wed, 6-9-95 [*September 6*]," and explained, "The European style is to put the day first, then the month" (Journal, Sept. 6, 1995). Then he told of his first excursion from home, "This meant our first trip downtown on the bus. Lucy got Joan and me a 3-month pass -- cost: \$22.00. Not bad" (Journal, Sept. 6, 1995). A couple days later Pastor Wolfgramm noted, "[W]e saw a boy driving 10 sheep up the hill, a woman with a cow and heifer and another man bringing a couple cows and sheep home" (Journal, Sept. 8, 1995). Shopping also offered great surprises. "Stopped at a market on the way home. Got all the fruits and vegetables we could carry for less than \$10.

Two loaves of bread (16 leva, 25¢ per loaf) were still warm when I bought them. Warm bread (home made) and honey -- what a treat!" (Journal, Sept. 24, 1995).

However, the Wolfgramms quickly realized that they would have some troubles adjusting to life in Bulgaria. Pastor Wolfgramm had always been a hard worker. He was used to handling many responsibilities and getting a lot accomplished. In his first official newsletter, he reflected his desire to start working even though he had been in Bulgaria for less than a month. "My main work here is to train future workers for the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria. That work will begin in earnest after we have completed a month or so of intensive language training" (Newsletter, Oct. 2, 1995). These plans proved somewhat optimistic. The task of adjusting to Bulgarian culture would require more time.

Getting used to the slower pace of life in Bulgaria was perhaps the biggest challenge for Pastor Wolfgramm. Bulgaria is not the United States. Personal productivity and the average standard of living are much lower. Most things seemed to take far more time than necessary. Pastor Wolfgramm found it personally upsetting to "waste time" on inefficiency. On more than one occasion his journal entry described a frustrating day and concluded by saying, "That is why we do not get much 'mission work' done" (Journal, Nov. 8, 1995). Perhaps a few anecdotes will illustrate his frustration. Pastor Wolfgramm described one trip home from the WELS Christian Information Center:

We left the CIC downtown after our language lesson and intended to stop at the open market on the way home. ... We got to the bus stop just in time to see the back end of our bus. So we prepared to wait. And wait we did, for 40 minutes. (This was during rush hour, 3 PM.)

Finally our #63 came along -- and we could understand why things were not going so well. This bus had only 1 narrow side entrance. It took over a minute for those exiting to get out, and another couple minutes for the rest of us to get in. This bus had double seats on each side (very cramped) and a very narrow aisle.

Of course, when we got to the next stop, more big problems. If someone near the back wanted to get out, there were MAJOR problems. There was no way he/she would make it, unless everyone else down the aisle cleared out first. Then the shoving began again for those on the curb to get in. The bus driver kept yelling something in Bulgarian -- probably, "Move it to the back of the bus!" But try as we might, it was still a time-consuming business. Finally Joan and I were in the right spot to sit down. (We got off at the end of the bus line.) If this whole thing had not been such a waste of time, it would have been comical. For a while some poor old lady was squashed to the point that she was 80% sitting on Joan's lap. I suggested to Joan that she introduce herself. Unfortunately the poor woman did not understand English. So -- instead of getting home (3 miles) from the market in 20 minutes, it took an hour and a half (including waiting for the bus)! That's how the time goes here. Everything takes more time. (Journal, Oct. 12, 1995).

Shopping also takes much more time. The missionaries were never in danger of starving, but finding even basic items required a great struggle.

On one day during the Christmas season, Pastor Wolfgramm went shopping.

During his [Paul's Sunday School Christmas Eve] practice I was to do some shopping -- a light bulb and a pair of mittens. Easy in the US. Not here.

I walked a few blocks to Tsums (they have everything), went to the children's department and asked for mittens. The clerk shook her finger, the Bulgarian way of saying "no."

In another section of the store I happened to spy a counter of gloves and mittens. No mittens I could see large enough. So I asked the clerk. Another shake of the finger. I asked her where I could find mittens Paul's size (I had a sample along). A shrug of the shoulders. These people are really anxious to make a sale. So we will continue to look at the many sidewalk "stores." We have seen them around and in due time

we will find what we want. If not for this Christmas, then next year for sure.

While looking for a lightbulb, I spied oil lamps. Only 108 leva for a lamp (\$1.50). These would go for at least \$10 in the US. And, of all things, there were also some nails! (We need some for our doghouse project.) Kirby says, "If you see it and need it, then buy it. It probably will not be there next week." Buying the nails is not easy. You tell the clerk what you want. She writes out a ticket. You take the ticket to the cashier and pay her. Then you go back to clerk number 1 and she hands you your nails -- neatly wrapped in Christmas paper! Great. Wonder if anyone on our list wants a package of nails under their tree. (Of course each time you wait in line.)

Next for the light bulb. Try where they sell lamps. No, not there! Go to department next door. Success. Select your bulb from the clerk. Take your slip to the cashier. Take your receipt back to clerk #1. And success -- a neatly wrapped light bulb. This also will go great under someone's tree. (Journal, Dec. 16, 1995).

One more story will illustrate the "laid back" atmosphere of Bulgaria. The Wolfgramms were having some trouble with their electricity at home. Some of the main fuses were getting very hot.

I asked Ivan to look at our fuse box. And surprise! No wonder we were having problems. There are 6 fuses in a row, with a wire connecting each one with the next. Guess what. The insulation on that wire is completely burned off! Yup, bare wires in the fuse box. (Journal, Feb. 10, 1996).

Lucy [the landlady] told us that the "technician" might come after 6 PM this evening to fix our fuse box, but no one showed up. (If I were the landlord and the tenant told me there were bare wires in the fuse box, I would be out there in 10 minutes. But this is not the USA. [Wonder how long it would take the fire department to show up if we needed them.]) (Journal, Feb. 14, 1996).

At about 5:30 the fun began. The "technician" (Dimitar) arrived intending to fix our "boiler" (water heater). I told him the problem was not with the boiler but with the fuse box.

Now where are we going to get a piece of wire to replace what burned up? Obviously not in his little satchel. That contained only a screw driver and pliers plus a few bits of wire.

He started looking around in the garage, etc., wherever he thought Russi (our landlord) might have an extra piece.

Then he spied our long extension cord and wanted to use that. I told him, No, we use that. But he insisted he needed only a piece about a foot long. So -- he took our (Russi's) extension cord, snipped off about 18', and proceeded to use that as his piece to fix our fuse box. Imagine in the States snipping off a piece of your extension cord. (We are happy he did not need any more supplies. Our curtains might have been next.)

Russi himself arrived on the bus shortly thereafter.

Our technician proceeded to pull the main fuse, shutting off the current on the first floor (just as Joan was to serve supper to the boys -- they ate by candlelight) and our electrician was prepared to fix the fuse box in the dark. I told him I had a lamp upstairs that would give him some light -- but, of course, our long extension cord was presently inoperative. He then reattached the plug and soon we were in business.

By 7 PM they had the thing fixed, rewired. Now everything is working and the fuses again are cold. (Journal, Feb. 15, 1996).

Eventually the Wolfgramms grew more accustomed to these inconveniences. They learned to accept the reality that a trip downtown took at least forty-five minutes. They learned how to shop patiently. They grew more accustomed to everyday procedures because they were more familiar with the Bulgarian "routine." They learned to accomplish other tasks while waiting in lines. Finally they simply accepted the fact that they were not going to get as much accomplished because of normal difficulties.

Language study perhaps more than any other factor helped the Wolfgramms adjust to their new culture. Language is the master key which unlocks the secrets of a particular culture. Without that master key a person gropes about confused and frustrated. Obtaining the master key is hard work -- especially for a pastor in his 50's. However, the hard study is necessary and worth the effort.

Language workshops introduced the Wolfgramms to Bulgarian while they were still in the United States. Language study continued to be the number one priority in Sofia, Bulgaria. "Now is the time to do some intensive study -- 3 1/2 hrs/day for a month. If you put that off and get busy with other things, then you never do learn the language" (Journal, Sept. 13, 1995).

As usual Pastor Wolfgramm was ready to work. He also expected a lot (way too much) from himself. On September 9, *less than a week* after arriving, he wrote, "I did spend the AM doing some language study with my book and tapes. It is not coming too easily. Still have a great deal of trouble just reading the words (since many of the letters are different.) Can't even read a newspaper 1) I can't pronounce the words and 2) I would not know what they mean if I could pronounce them" (Journal, Sept. 9, 1995).

Bulgarian is based on the Cyrillic alphabet. Its closest relative is Russian. The ten million inhabitants of Bulgaria are the only ones in the world who speak the language. Learning Bulgarian would require countless hours over the next year-and-a-half. In fact, Pastor Wolfgramm's language study will probably continue as long as he remains in Bulgaria.

At first Pastor and Joan studied the language on their own. Pastor used a simple book called "Teach Yourself Bulgarian." He carried that book around and talked to friendly natives on the street. He found that most people were more than willing to help him.

However, Pastor and Joan started studying with a private tutor to speed their learning. They studied with a woman named Maia. Maia was tough but patient, demanding but helpful. Everyday for three hours she challenged Pastor and Joan. "Language class again this morning from 9:30 to 12:30. That really is hard on the brain. After a while you just cannot think anymore. Our teacher (Maia) is very patient -- but then, she is being paid

quite well. (\$12.00 American/hour) Evidently she understands more than how to teach" (Journal, Oct. 10, 1995).

Pastor Wolfgramm noted various milestones and accomplishments in his journal. By the end of October they were able to print the Cyrillic alphabet. In the beginning of November they reviewed the material they had learned. "[W]hat we did a couple weeks ago now seems easy" (Journal, Nov. 8, 1995).

Pastor and Joan studied together with Maia until early February 1996. At this time Pastor continued on his own because Joan was home-schooling Costel. (Two years before moving to Bulgaria the Wolfgramms had begun adoption proceedings for a Romanian orphan. On February 4, 1996, Pastor Wolfgramm finally returned from Romania with a nine-year-old boy named Costel. Costel had no educational background -- he didn't know the numbers or the alphabet and had little concept of adding or subtracting or putting sounds together in any language (Joan's Personal Letter, Feb. 12, 1996). Costel was at the kindergarten level physically, emotionally and mentally. The Wolfgramms decided to tutor their new son at home and prepare him for the classroom.)

Private language lessons proved to be a mixed blessing for Pastor Wolfgramm. "Seems like I will be going downtown for language class without Joan from now on. That is too bad. We liked going to school together. Now that Maia has only one student to teach, she can go faster. Which means there is more to cram into my old head and more for me to review at nights. We got through a whole chapter today" (Journal, Feb. 8, 1996).

Pastor Wolfgramm continued to reach linguistic milestones. By the beginning of April, he was writing short stories for Maia. By the beginning

of June, Maia announced that they were in the middle of the "verb jungle."
 "What it amounts to is that each verb has 2 (somewhat similar) main forms, a I form and a II form. Then each of these forms has its own past tense, its own future tense, its own imperatives, etc. You use one when you are talking about a specific, completed action, and the other when the action is not specific or completed. The trick is trying to keep all of this straight. (Apparently something like the Hebrew perfect and imperfect.) By the end of our 3 hours today, I could not even remember my name" (Journal, June 3, 1996).

Finally all his hard work began to pay off. Pastor was able to speak to a couple doctors at a local clinic. "[B]oth were impressed at the amount of Bulgarian I knew. (They don't realize how many 3-hour sessions I have had with Maia.) Anyway I was able to tell them about the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria in Bulgarian (and was happy I could do that)" (Journal, June 20, 1996). In December, sixteen months after arriving in their new home, Pastor Wolfgramm completed his first Bulgarian sermon. "I spent most of the day finishing writing my sermon for Sunday in Bulgarian. This is my first whole sermon -- and it took many hours. I remember all the hours I spent when I first started preaching in German -- but that, fortunately, got somewhat easier, especially when you were preaching German every week" (Journal, Dec. 26, 1996). Three days later he preached that first sermon. "Today was special for me -- first time I preached (read) a whole sermon in Bulgarian ... Now I can say I have preached in 3 languages without an interpreter. Plus a couple more with an interpreter" (Journal, Dec. 29, 1996).

Pastor Wolfgramm was able to do more and more "mission work" as language study progressed. He regularly visited shut-ins, taught nursery level Sunday School (in English), taught Bible information class with the aid

of an interpreter, taught Sunday morning Bible class, helped with English Bible Camp (the Bulgarian equivalent of V.B.S.) and did other general work. However, his main work involved teaching future church workers and establishing a Bulgarian seminary/institute.

The Students

The Lord blessed our work in Bulgaria by providing natives who were interested in serving the church and preparing themselves for full-time public ministry. In fact, three individuals desired to serve full-time even before the establishment of the seminary/institute.

Shortly after arriving in Bulgaria, Pastor Wolfgramm invited Vasil (pronounced Va-SEEL) over for supper. Pastor described him this way: "He is a member, 24 years old, and wants to be 'a servant in the church.' He has had some training in the Orthodox Church. He lives in 'Studentski Grad' (the dorm section) and I think was glad to be with us. He might well become our first Bulgarian Lutheran pastor" (Journal, Sept. 14, 1995). Vasil had studied at the Orthodox seminary for several years before the Wolfgramms arrived. Although he did not share confessional unity with the Orthodox, the Lutheran missionaries thought it would be wise for Vasil to complete his course of instruction. Then even if the communists forced the expatriate missionaries to leave the country, they might allow Vasil to serve the church since he had graduated from the "Bulgarian" seminary.

About a week later the Wolfgramms invited Maria for supper. "She is a student, 25 years old, small and thin, and is (apparently) Vasil's girlfriend. Both of them came out of the Orthodox Church and are interested in church work. ... She has had some theological classes (including Greek) at the university" (Journal, Sept. 20, 1995).

Both Vasil and Maria began attending classes with Pastor Wolfgramm. As time passed teacher and students got to know each other better.

I took Vasil and Maria out for a piece of bakery around supper time ... I had wanted to talk to both of them about their/our future. In particular I wanted to find out how much Maria had learned about teaching children in their Orthodox seminary. I asked her what kind of religious instruction she had had in church as a child. The answer: None. They did not attend church. This was forbidden. Her uncle was a priest and baptized her at home. Only some old people went to church. When she was 15 or so, she and a friend wanted to attend a service at the Alexander Nevsky church (the huge cathedral here downtown). The police turned them away. "Then how did you end up going to the Orthodox seminary?" Well, things are different now after 1989 (the fall of Communism). ... Maria and Vasil also let on that they plan to be married. When? They don't know. Probably before August. (Journal, Jan 16, 1996).

On many occasions Pastor Wolfgramm praised Vasil and Maria's faithfulness. "Vasil and Maria are some fine people and will become excellent workers in the church here" (Journal, Dec. 19, 1995). The Wolfgramm family has enjoyed getting to know these young people. Perhaps a couple stories will help to introduce them a little more vividly.

It was after 5 PM by the time we got back to the CIC. I was going to go home, and Vasil told me he wanted to visit his father yet who is still in the hospital. Since I had wanted to get to meet the father, and since I had wanted to see what the inside of a Bulgarian hospital looks like, I offered to go along. Fortunately the hospital was on my way home.

What a dump! You get off the tram and walk down the steps to the underground pedestrian walkway. The steps are all askew with the step part itself falling off. Parts of the staircase could be used as a ski slope. When you are on the other side of the street, you walk along an unlighted walkway though a kind of park. Then you arrive at a city street -- where the street lights were all out and it was completely dark. You walk here for a couple blocks, cut through a few back walkways, and there

you are -- at a 2-story building that looks like it should have been torn down 30 years ago. They call it a hospital.

The glass in the front door is partially broken out. There is no receptionist or information desk -- as a matter of fact there is no lobby. We went up to the 2nd floor and came to a room, a ward, where 8 men in 8 beds were crowded rather close together. No oxygen connections, no running water, no toilets, no bedside table or nightstand. Only a black and white TV blaring in one corner. Food trays (half eaten) on a table at the end of the room. The table was neatly covered with some old newspapers. An old lady in the hall was sweeping the floor with a broom that should have been discarded years ago. I would not send my dog here to have his nails clipped. But here is where Vasil's father had his brain surgery a week ago. Apparently they removed a large tumor from his head, and apparently it was malignant since, if I understand things correctly, he will need some radiation.

The poor man is conscious and able to communicate and is scheduled to go home Friday. I don't know how long he will be off from work. Vasil said perhaps 6 months. Unfortunately the man is an unbeliever -- and this bothers Vasil a great deal. The father was sure he would live to be 100 -- and he is only 51.

The mother stays at the hospital day and night since, as Vasil put it, "They are short of nurses." (Sure hope none of us needs brain surgery while we are living in Sofia.) (Journal, Oct. 24, 1995).

The missionaries were able to visit with Vasil's father for a number of months. By God's grace the Holy Spirit worked faith in the man before he died. This was a great comfort to Vasil. (The father died on August 13, 1996).

July of 1996 was a big month for Vasil and Maria. They married on the 12th and graduated from the Orthodox seminary on the 28th. Unfortunately, 1996 also brought financial crisis to the nation. Inflation skyrocketed. In March 1996, 62 leva equaled the value of the dollar. In February 1997, the dollar was worth 2900 leva -- an increase of 4677 percent! Prices fluctuated not by the week or day but by the hour. Some

merchants refused to sell their wares because they didn't know how much to charge. People were out of work and standing in bread lines. Banks began to fail.

 Maria got to class before Vacil (at 8:55) -- and explained that yesterday she stood in line at the bank from 8:30 until 3:00. She had \$700 (American) on deposit, money that her parents had put away for her, but was able to get only \$80. That's it. The rest is gone. That seemed disgusting to me. But she seemed to take it matter-of-factly -- she said she had never really HAD the money anyway, and the government maybe needs it more than she does. If you ask me, I don't think it is fair for anyone to take away a young couple's life savings.

 She had been at the bank again this morning from 6:00 AM to try to get more. But nothing. All the bank's money is gone.

 Vacil arrived at 9:05. Then they walked out of the classroom and had a little (10 minute) conference with someone (don't know who), and when they came back in Vacil announced that now they will need to find some other way to save (or invest) their money. "We will have to become like businessmen." I had a little talk with them about thieves, moths and rust -- but their experience of losing their money still makes me a little angry" (Journal, Sept. 24, 1996).

 The other original native worker in the church is a man named Cossio. The Wolfgramms got to meet Cossio and his wife, Ellie, one evening in October. Cossio explained some of his family background and life under communism.

 [At 6:30 Cossio (Constantine Toshkov), one of our worker training students, came to the CIC to pick up Joan, Paul and me for an evening at their house. Although they both work (he repairs computers, she works for the railroad) they have a very modest apartment. A huge couch, a TV and tape player/CD player with remote, but not a whole lot more. Supper consisted of a small piece of steak with French fries, the ever-present Bulgarian bread, pizza, plus another Bulgarian speciality whose name I forgot. Some meat wrapped in dough. ...

He [Cossio] also explained to us something of how it was during the days of the Communists. He has been a believer for only a few years. Before 1989 the Communists did not actually FORBID anyone from attending church, but it was very difficult. The youth belonged to a communist organization. So also the younger adults, age 16-30. This older group did not do anything. You just paid your dues in order to belong. Those who belonged were able to advance -- go to school, university, get a good job, etc. If the leader learned that you were attending church, this might be reason to expel you from the organization. In that case, he says, you might end up being a garbage collector.

On religious holidays the police would surround the churches and prevent people from entering. Foreigners (diplomats, etc.) were, of course, allowed to enter. Natives could enter only if they had a letter of permission from one of the communist leaders. This was the situation until 1989 -- and this is the background of what we are working with. Not real easy. (Journal, Oct. 26, 1995).

The history on Cossio is a little murky. At first he was attending classes regularly and helping with church work, but after a while he seemed to drift from the picture. (It is difficult to judge why this happened. What follows is one rather non-charitable explanation. Perhaps this reason is completely wrong. Perhaps there were other reasons for Cossio's restlessness.)

Staff meeting this morning. Kocio also was present since he will begin to work officially for the church next week.

After staff Kirby invited me to sit in on a meeting with himself, Lucy and Kocio. Purpose was to set Kocio's duties, hours, and "student stipend." Turns out he will be working half time (20 hours), some mornings (for study) and some afternoons (hanging around the Magazin to meet people, answer questions, do evangelism, etc.)

How much should you (we, WELS) pay the guy for now (since he is leaving his other job of selling/servicing computers)? Good question. American scale? That would be way out of line. Bulgarian scale? That would be next to nothing for a student and part-time worker. Kirby suggested 8000

levas/month for full time work (\$110). Kocio's candid comment, "That is miserable." I suppose he is right. Tram/bus drivers (who according to Kocio are quite well paid) earn 15,000 levass/month (\$200).

I don't know how people survive on that kind of money. (Journal, Mar. 4, 1996).

In the summer of 1996 (July?) Cossio and Ellie traveled to Bourgas on the Black Sea. Apparently his expectant wife was having some difficulties early in her pregnancy and required hospitalization there. For a time Cossio and Ellie considered moving to Bourgas. Cossio had a job working nights for AMOCO. But by the end of September, they moved back to Sofia. In November Cossio considered another move. It seems he had a different job offer. "Greg [Bey] scheduled a special pastoral staff meeting at 1:00 to discuss Kocio's latest possibility. Kocio now has a job offer to work (on Cyprus?) and Greg wanted to make him some kind of offer here in the church so we do not lose him. Kocio does an excellent job with translating and would make a good church worker" (Journal, Nov. 12, 1996). Kocio ended up staying in Sofia and has continued his association with worker training. In March 1997, Pastor Wolfgramm reported, "Kocio came into class this morning announcing that he and his wife are the parents of a baby girl. Apparently they induced labor yesterday. This is their first child. Name: Monica. They had lost a child before we got here two years ago" (March 25, 1997).

The Seminary/Institute

The WELS Mission Board had called Pastor Wolfgramm to start a worker training system in Bulgaria. That work began about two months after arriving in Bulgaria. "We got back downtown just in time for the very first meeting of our Lutheran Bible Institute and Seminary of Bulgaria. We are not that formally organized, but it is the first class I taught of those who

hope to be future church workers. And it was an auspicious day -- Reformation Day. We are continuing to read St. Mark (Mark 7), something that [Missionary] John Roebke had begun with this group longer ago" (Journal, Oct. 31, 1995).

This class stretched the definition of "Seminary/Institute." It would prove to be a precursor of the "real" Seminary/Institute. Pastor Wolfgramm recognized this at the time as well. "This is more or less just an adult Bible class, taught in English (with occasional translations into Bulgarian), with specific applications for the pastor or teacher. We are not using the Greek" (Journal, Oct. 31, 1995). This original class met for two hours on Tuesday nights. They studied the Gospel of Mark until May 1996. Then they studied Riese's, "What Does the Bible Say?".

Vasil, Maria and Cossio learned in the classroom. They also learned by doing church work for the congregation. Vasil accompanied Pastor Wolfgramm on mission calls and shut-in calls. At first he merely served as a translator. But by March 1996, Pastor Wolfgramm had assigned him calls to make on his own. Pastor Wolfgramm seems to have enjoyed the chance to spend time with Vasil. Sometimes he called him "Vicar Vasil." Working with Vasil reminded him of working with vicars in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Maria also served the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria as a type of pre-deaconness. She taught Sunday School and occasionally accompanied Pastor Wolfgramm and Vasil on shut-in calls. She also learned some teaching skills. "Maria practice-taught the chapter -- the creation of the world and of mankind. She taught in Bulgarian, so we had to stop every so often for a translation when I did not get the gist of what she was saying. She did an excellent job and will be able to teach adult classes of women in a short time.

I supplied her with a set of teaching notes for the chapter -- and hope to make a set of notes for all the chapters" (Journal, June 4, 1996).

Cossio's main work involved translating sermons on Sunday mornings. Whoever preached spoke one line in English, then Cossio would translate that sentence into Bulgarian. When pastors progressed to the point of preaching in Bulgarian, Cossio translated into English. He also witnessed to people who visited the Magazin (store that sold staples at reduced prices).

The Lord blessed the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria by providing young people who were willing to put in time to prepare themselves for public service. In February of 1996, the Wisconsin Synod demonstrated their appreciation to these young people and encouraged them to continue their study by pledging financial support for the students. "Another happy day as far as the mission is concerned. Kirby and I had our official interview with each of the 3 who want to become workers in the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria. On our part the WELS will be giving them free education as well as a stipend (to compensate them for the money they could be earning at a regular job). In return they will attend our school, study, and do hands-on church work. Hope things will work out" (Journal, Feb. 14, 1996).

Seven months later the indigenous church of Bulgaria took a large step toward independence by taking on the responsibility of supporting their native workers. "After church we had our first 'voters' meeting.' They adopted recommendations from the 'council' to ... Spend their \$ for support of future workers ... Recommend Vacil, Maria and Kocio for our Worker Training school; and ... Call the 3 of them to work as students in the congregation" (Journal, Sept. 15, 1996). Two days later Missionary Kirby Spevacek preached for opening day of the "Bible Institute and Seminary of Bulgaria." Classes began the next day.

Many individuals spent a great deal of time setting up a curriculum for the new seminary. Six months ago Pastor Wolfgramm and Pastor Spevacek had met with John Kurth, the World Board's Worker Training Coordinator. He encouraged the missionaries to continue their language study and promised to send a proposed class schedule for the new seminary (Journal, Mar. 29, 1996). By September the class schedule was ready to go. "Had our first classes in the Augsburg Confession (which will meet 5 times a week), Elements of Greek (also 5 times a week), Church History -- the Book of Acts (3 times a week), and *Law and Gospel* (3 times a week). Walther's *Law and Gospel* (actually, an abridgment, *God's No and God's Yes*) has already been put into Bulgarian but has not yet been published. As a practicum we will study, review, and correct the translation" (Journal, Sept. 18, 1996).

The seminary's first trimester proceeded smoothly. The second trimester began in December. "First day of our new trimester for worker training. I am teaching the Letters of Paul, Hermeneutics (using Prof. Kuske's book as our text), and the continuation of Elements of Greek. (I remember the Greek I learned at Watertown 30 years ago much better than the Bulgarian I was supposed to learn last week. Suppose that is a sign of old age.) These classes meet every day. Also will have 2 periods a week with Vacil for Sermon Making. Eric Vertein will have church history 4 times a week; John Roebke will have Evangelism 2 periods (back-to-back) a week" (Journal, Dec. 3, 1996).

After several months of careful Bible study, Pastor Wolfgramm noticed some spiritual fruits among his students. "Vacil was happy to go through the last 2 chapters of Galatians. He has some Bulgarian 'commentary' at home which, he says, is fairly straight. So it seems that his

appetite has been whetted for further Bible study -- something I am very happy about" (Journal, Sept.17, 1996).

Although the students were eager to learn, they did not immediately accept everything their teachers said. If the students were unsure of a particular doctrine, they discussed it until they were convinced of Scriptural teaching. Pastor Wolfgramm related four such instances.

The first "controversy" involved original sin. "[W]e finished Mark 7. Apparently Orthodox church is not completely straight on original sin. Hard for them to understand that 'man's nature is THOROUGHLY corrupt' when there are so many nice people. We will need more study on this" (Journal, Nov. 7, 1995). Apparently teacher and students resolved this issue rather quickly. Pastor Wolfgramm never mentioned trouble with original sin again.

The second extended discussion was more difficult to resolve. "Article I of the Augsburg Confession talks 'Of God.' This is the place to discuss the 'filioque' clause of the Nicene Creed. (In our Nicene Creed it says that the Holy Spirit proceeds 'from the Father and the Son.' In the Eastern churches the words 'and the Son' (that is, filioque) were never accepted. This has been the most visible division between the western (Catholic) church and the eastern (Orthodox) church for more than a thousand years.) In the States the filioque clause was never a problem. But here we spent the greater part of an hour discussing it and, I think, we are still not finished. So a different area of the world has different problems" (Journal, Oct. 1, 1996). Apparently Pastor Wolfgramm had a chance to think the class discussion over. The next day he wrote, "What would happen if our Lutheran Church here decided to use the Nicene Creed during the church service; and if they chose to use the creed without 'filioque' -- not because they reject the teaching but because this is the original, unaltered form? Not sure if this will happen, but I guess

that would be a possibility" (Journal, Oct. 2, 1996). History still has not answered how this issue will be resolved.

The curse of Babel continued to present problems in the seminary even though the students speak English and the teacher speaks Bulgarian. "Classes with V&M this AM. Even with these people who speak good English, there is still a communication problem. We spent 15 minutes with John 6, explaining that Jesus here is NOT talking about Holy Communion. At the end of that discussion their question was whether Jesus was not here talking about Holy Communion. Apparently that also is the teaching in the Orthodox Church" (Journal, Oct. 24, 1996). Language also presented a problem with the interpretation of a passage from I Thessalonians. "Vacil and Maria are certainly not 'yes men.' We had quite a vocal discussion for over an hour regarding the exegesis of 1 Thes. 4:4. Part of the problem, I think, is that they did not always understand all of my English. (And perhaps I do not understand them entirely.)" (Journal, Jan. 15, 1997).

Pastor Wolfgramm also briefly mentioned one more area of doubt. "In worker training we discussed 2 Thessalonians 2. V&M are not quite sure yet about the anti-Christ. Hope it will come" (Journal, Dec. 9, 1996). Even though the students were not always comfortable with the lessons presented, these doctrinal issues did not appear to cause real problems. In fact, the issues seemed to prompt a healthy examination of the Scripture. Thank God for students who follow the example of the Berean Christians! Pastor Wolfgramm reported no on-going problems with any of these teachings.

At the present time the Bulgarian seminary is suffering from a lack of materials printed in good Bulgarian. The study of the Augsburg Confession and *God's No and God's Yes* turned out to be a much larger project than

Pastor Wolfgramm anticipated. "As part of our work in classes we are reviewing the translation of the Augsburg Confession and of Walther's 'God's No and God's Yes.' Even though the work was done by a good translator, she still did not catch a lot of things. For example: 'Christians may serve in government without sin' came out 'Christians without sin may serve in the government.' [That, of course, would dramatically cut down the number of Christians in government.] 'Jesus' return for judgment' came out 'Jesus' return for justice' or 'Jesus' return for judgment in the civil court.' The translator did not know and use the proper 'church word.' 'Some Jews in Worms' came out (you guessed it) 'some Jews in "worms."' The curse of Babel. Even people who think they know another language do not get things right all the time. Vacil and Maria are acquainted with the theological meaning of the words and catch most of these errors" (Journal, Nov. 6, 1996).

The Bulgarian seminary also suffers from a lack of Greek/Bulgarian language tools. For a while Vasil and Maria were operating without a Greek/Bulgarian lexicon. "But I was able to find one thing I was looking for -- a dictionary for ancient Greek (Greek/Bulgarian). In class right now we are sort of making up a dictionary as we go along. When we learn a list of Greek words, I can tell V&M what the word means in English, and then they have to give (or guess at) the Bulgarian equivalent. The dictionary I bought is not a New Testament dictionary, but it does contain some NT references. Originally published in 1938, but a new printing in 1992. Cost: 6000 leva (\$12.00). Almost a month's wages for many people" (Journal, Dec. 11, 1996).

As of March 1997 the seminary was also looking for a Greek/Bulgarian grammar. "I have Greek classes for the LBI and LS. When the teacher thinks in English and the students think in Bulgarian and all are trying to learn Greek, we have an interesting situation. I can give some of

the instruction in Bulgarian. Kocio does an excellent job translating when I say words or sentences in English. What we need is a Greek NT grammar written in Bulgarian. (Or in Bulgarian and English.) Tony [one of the "new" students in the LBI] claims there is such a thing. That it is out of print; that he has a copy at home 'in the village'; and that there are a couple copies in the Orthodox seminary. (Sounds something like the Bible Luther found in the monastery.) (Journal, Mar. 6, 1997).

Most recently the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria took another large step forward. The Lord blessed them by allowing them to open a pre-seminary institute. Pastor Wolfgramm preached for the opening service. His sermon, "How to Open a Lutheran Bible Institute" was based on Matthew 9:35-38. Pastor Wolfgramm commented, "A special day for the Lutheran Church of Bulgaria. We open our 2nd school, jump from 2 students to 6, and now have in place a 5 year worker training program. -- Of course, there are still a lot of bugs to be worked out. ... All the American pastors will be involved with teaching something. A class schedule is enclosed" (Journal, Mar. 4, 1997). (The class schedule is printed at the end of this paper.)

God is good! What a blessing for God to open a formerly communist nation so that His servants can preach the gospel. What a blessing for God to provide natives willing to struggle and study and learn and serve. What a blessing God has provided for the Wolfgramm family. He has protected them. He has helped them to adjust to a foreign culture. He has used them and their hard work to save souls. The early history of the Bulgarian church teaches us that mission work is never easy. It also teaches us that God keeps His promises. The Lord's Word will not return empty. It will always accomplish what God desires!

DAILY SCHEDULE
 Quarter IV -- 3 March 1997 to 23 May 1997
 Revised 4 March 1997

	MON	TUES	WED	THU	FRI
9:00	Devotion and Prayer				
9:05	I-Greek-AW S-ChurHis-EV	I-Greek-AW S-ChurHis-EV	I-Greek-AW S-ChurHis-EV	I-Greek-AW S-ChurHis-EV	I-Greek-AW S-
9:50	I-ChurHis-EV S-Greek-AW	I-ChurHis-EV S-Greek-AW	I-ChurHis-EV S-Greek-AW	I-ChurHis-EV S-Greek-AW	I- S-Greek-AW
10:35	Break				
10:45	I-Cat-GB S-NTIsag-AW	I-ThTerms-JR S-NTIsag-AW	I- S-	I-Cat-GB S-NTIsag-AW	I-Cat-GB S-NTIsag-AW
11:30	I-Cat-GB S-SmArt-GH	I-Evangel-JR S-SmArt-GH	I-LifeOfX-GH S-NTIsag-AW	I-Cat-GB S-	I-LifeOfX-GH S-Homilet-AW
12:15	I-LifeOfX-GH S-XianEd-AW	I-LifeOfX-GH S-Homilet-AW	I- S-SmArt-GH	I-LifeOfX-AW S-	I- S-SmArt-GH

LBI -- 22 class hours
 LS -- 22 class hours

GB -- Greg Bey
 GH -- Gary Haag
 JR -- John Roebke
 EV -- Eric Vertein
 AW -- Arno Wolfgramm

I -- Institute
 S -- Seminary