WHEN TRADITION MEETS CULTURE
Immigrants from former Soviet Union challenge German secularism

The vitality of their congregational life provides a fascinating contrast to Germany’s increasingly empty state churches.

in the 1930s and ‘40s, these settlements barely exist in living memory. Yet on this Sunday morning, as we listen to stories of Bolshevik persecution, deportation and enslavement in Central Asian gulags, they are as real as the love of Christ.

"Imagine the faith," the speaker says, pausing to collect his emotions, "of those men who stood in the village squares to the last moment, proclaiming God’s word until the atheists’ bullets cut them down."

I am visiting a Mennonite congregation near Heidelberg, one of hundreds established over the last 40 years in Germany by immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Arriving from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Siberia and elsewhere, Mennonites and related Anabaptist groups have settled in large numbers across West German cities. In a matter of decades, Germany’s Anabaptist population has swollen from a few thousand members to as many as 100,000.

Colloquially known as Russlanddeutsche, meaning Germans from Russia, these immigrants have helped establish a new ethnic subgroup within Germany. High German is most often spoken in the home, although many

By Ben Gooßen

Mennonite World Review

Conference leaders call 2 events ‘catastrophic’

Leaders of several Mennonite Church USA conferences have expressed concern to the denomination’s Executive Board about issues related to homosexuality.

Franconia Mennonite Conference posted a letter from leaders of five of the conferences on its website Feb. 27.

The letter, dated Feb. 12, cited two recent actions:

- Eastern Mennonite University’s review of its employment policy that prohibits hiring people in same-sex relationships; and

- Mountain States Mennonite Conference’s licensing of a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship.

The letter describes the two events “as catastrophic for our constituencies.”

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Word game

Bible quizzing tournament marks 40 years of study and fun

For a Bible quizzzer, the end-of-season invitational tournament is like the World Series of Quiz, says coordinator Fred Hertzler of Lancaster, Pa.

He and his wife, Chris, are helping to plan and organize the 40th annual Mennonite Bible Quiz invitational at Lancaster Mennonite School March 21-23.

The Hertzlers have been involved with the Scripture memorization competition for junior high and high schoolers for 20 years. In the last few years, interest has grown steadily, especially in their area.

“It seems to be the thing to do,” Fred Hertzler said. About 350 student quizzers are expected to demonstrate their memorization of Exodus at the invitation.

That’s 77 teams — 48 of them from the Lancaster area.

In 1974, when Don Yoder of Harrisonburg, Va., first had the idea for an invitational, there were 12 teams.

He said it was an effort to get more youth involved in the annual Ohio Conference meeting. At the time he was the conference youth minister.

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