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Letter from Pastor W. Stärkel to
Evangelical Mission Society, Basel, Switzerland
(Translation by Dr. Paul G. Reitzer)

Norka, Russia
June 27, 1869
July 9, 1869



Dear Inspector:

This will probably be the last time that I shall write to you from Norka. Within the next three weeks I will move away from my father-in-law to the plains region on the other side of the Volga River, where about a half year ago I was elected pastor of a parish, but it wasn't until the beginning of June that I received the confirmation by the Minister. The parish consists of ten colonies, newly established within the last ten to twelve years, and composed of settlers from the over-populated colonies along the Volga. The pastorate is located in the center of the diocese and yet the remaining congregations, according to distances, are still 10, 15, to 30 werst (1 werst = .66 miles) away. I must ride 60 werst (39.6 miles) from one end of the diocese to the other. Naturally, the congregations are small, yet the total number of parishioners is over 4000. This is definitely quite a nice mission station in the Russian Steppes. Three weeks ago I visited there and did not find the landscape beautiful. Oh, one sees only Steppes, no mountain for contrast as in dear Switzerland; ~~there are~~ no green trees to enliven the view; no live stream flowing by, only dug wells with water which isn't the best. Consequently, it is considerably more desirable on the mountain side of the Volga where one can enjoy all these things. And yet I can also love the Steppes. Is it not a master stroke of our God who has wisely ordered it? And while it is disliked by mankind, I feel myself the more closely drawn to it, knowing that in God's eyes, what man considers unlovely, belongs to the best and the most noteworthy. And I believe the great expanses of earth, despite their ugliness, are more valuable than we would deem them to be. Therefore, it gives me great joy to be able to go to the Steppes. Even though many primitive mud huts still exist there, I will often find myself going in to these people who themselves were called together in this everlasting Palestine. Only may God grant me health as long as I may serve Him, or at least have the needed strength with a sick body to work and supplemented with the power of the Holy Spirit from on high, who can make me diligent in regards to the Spirit and power to work among these souls.

In this work I have had to experience various new things, until I gradually learned to differentiate between working for God's glory and seeking my glory. Oh, how the flesh does encroach into the work of the Kingdom! In all the eagerness to work for the Lord and through using all human methods to win souls, I find it comes to naught. And the Lord deliberately does not allow success to happen as long as the delusion exists that one's own strength and clever methods attempt to accomplish this. Only when one is freed from this delusion through a really humbling experience, and one comes to the realization how God's Spirit rules and acts in and through His Word, then, and only then, we must acknowledge this power belonging to Him above -- Oh, then He imparts His blessings upon our words and allows them to kindle a flame in the listeners. Such experiences have I made and it has made clear the words of the apostles, "the kingdom of God exists not in words, but in power." Freely the tempests of the soul change. I find the cause of this tempest of the soul to be in large part due to a negligence of prayer. As long as I maintain an active prayer life, I can speak more warmly from the depths of the heart. If hardness enters here, then everything becomes frosty and cold. I must say to myself that I am

my own destroyer. How happy will I one time be, when this mortal flesh will be put off and I will serve God unhindered and will carry out His will.

My father-in-law is very ill with peritonitis, which almost killed him. Yet the Lord helped graciously, so that we hope he will recover in a few weeks. It would have been a severe loss, not only for his family, but also for the Basel Mission House, which he faithfully serves in the name of the Lord. Who should take his place as an agent between Basel and here? Under the present situation and the remoteness of my parish, I cannot take his place, as much as I would like to do so, but I shall try to do what I can with God's help.

Your servant,

W. Stärkel

Letter from Pastor W. Stärkel to
Evangelical Mission Society, Basel, Switzerland
(Translation by Dr. Paul G. Reitzer)

Norka, Russia
August 1, 1868

Honorable Inspector:

You will undoubtedly have received the letter I wrote on my trip from Hamburg. I arrived back in my home place in mid-May. Since then I have visited my friends and relatives and celebrated my wedding. This (wedding) took place on July 4 of this year -- May the Lord be greatly thanked that he gave me such a wife who suits me so well in all respects. Oh, He knows what His children need and according to His divine wisdom shares His gifts to each.

For a longer period of time I was unclear as to the will of God, whether to stay here in Russia or to return to America, but finally I could decide to stay here and believe to have done this according to His will. Freely much occurs under the cloak of being God's will and is, observed in His light, purely self-will and a self-elected way. Yet, in spite of everything, the Lord rules and guides throughout, among his enemies also, whereby the misdirected will of man likewise listens. My stay here seems to me to be the will of the Lord. When I wanted to go to Russia, He sent me to America. There I gradually killed this desire, and so it happened that I had to come back after all. On top of this, two positions became vacant after I returned and both villages asked me if I would accept their call. From one parish I have a nomination in hand. From the other I shall receive one shortly. This I do know, that the true God will lead me not in my way but in His way.

Greetings to you and the entire Mission House.

Your servant,

W. Stärkel

NOTE: Emma S. Haynes obtained the three letters concerning Pastor W. Stärkel from Prof. Reitzer at Baptist College at Charleston, P. O. Box 10027, Charleston, South Carolina, South Carolina 29411. Professor Reitzer is currently doing research on those Volga Germans who settled in the southern part of the United States.