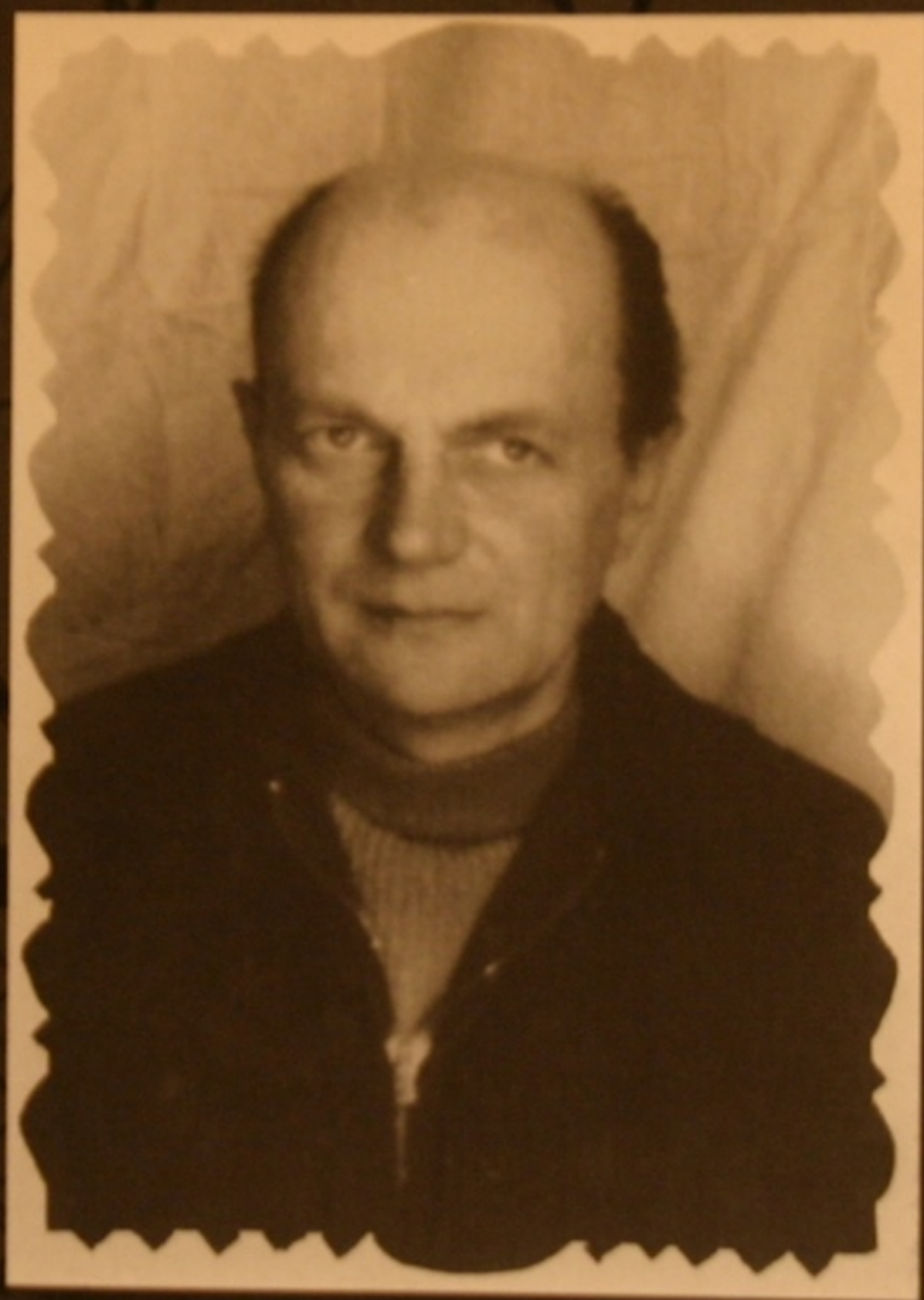


We Shall Live in Heaven

**A pastor's testimony of faith,
recounting his experiences in a
Soviet slave labor camp**



Pastor Harri Haamer

FOREWORD

Tartu is located on the banks of the Emajogi River in south central Estonia. It is a beautiful, progressive, clean, modern city with a taste of old Europe. The skyline of Tartu is marked by the steeples of several churches, most of them Lutheran. Harri Haamer became the pastor of one of those, St Paul's Lutheran Church, in 1933.

It was a dark and sad day in 1939 when the Haamer family looked out their parsonage window and saw the endless lines of Soviet tanks, trucks, armored vehicles and infantry marching through their beloved Tartu. Their lives would be radically changed. Stalin's secret police sent Pastor Haamer to slave labor camps in Siberia for eight years. His wife Maimu, son Eenok and foster son Albert had to go into hiding in the forests. A younger son, Andres, and a daughter Maarja were hastily left with parishioners. By God's grace, the entire family survived and was reunited later.

For over 50 long and dreary years of Soviet oppression they waited, prayed and hoped for change. By that time, the Soviet empire was breaking down. Economic failure was endemic, drunkenness was rampant, and society was in a free fall that even the mighty Red Army or the dreaded KGB could not prevent. People in Estonia and other occupied states were beginning to resist their Communist masters. God heard their prayers and freedom finally came in 1991, though Pastor Haamer did not live to see it.

Seeing a great opportunity for the Gospel, a number of American denominations and para-church organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators formed a bold cooperative mission called The Co-Mission. They wanted people—as many as possible—to go to the former Soviet Union. Their mandate was to meet people, build relationships with them, tell them about Jesus, involve them in Bible study, share the Gospel and make disciples.

In January 1992 a representative of The Co-Mission met with me over breakfast. He explained that they were going to have a large convocation in Tallinn, Estonia, that March. Since Estonia is traditionally a Lutheran country, he asked if I could recruit ten evangelical Lutheran pastors from America to take part in that convocation. I found eight.

Few Estonian pastors were able to come to that convocation, but one who did was Pastor Eenok Haamer. He was eager to meet his American colleagues. As they met with Eenok, he began to share the vision God had given him, the seeds of which were sown while he and his mother were in hiding in an underground bunker. He wanted to start a Bible training school that would prepare teachers to hold Bible classes in public schools. The pastors' group felt this was a task they were to pursue.

At a subsequent meeting held in the Tartu University Library, the American pastors asked Eenok if there was something specific they could do to help. Again he spoke of his vision for a school. Of course, he didn't have the money to realize his vision and he asked if they could help.

The American pastors quickly organized around the acronym LEAF (Lutheran Estonian American Friends). Upon their return home they met often to make plans to raise the \$10,000 and find ways to help the new school. On September 16, 1992, the Tartu Academy of Theology was born, and classes at TAT began in February of 1993. It was officially accredited internationally and by the Estonian government in 2000 and again in 2004.

The members of LEAF and the Board of Directors of the East European Missions Network (EEMN) continued to meet, pray and seek ways to encourage and help the fledgling school.

It was one thing to start TAT, but sustaining it financially became a test of faith. Often it happened that they were unable to pay their teachers, the rent or other expenses, and they were in very critical situations. They asked God what to do, because they had nowhere else to turn. During some of my visits to the school, Eenok would reluctantly and anxiously describe the financial crisis they were facing. Then we would pray together, Eenok, his son Siimon (the dean of TAT) and I. Back at the hotel, I would phone the Boards of Directors in the U.S. and explain the situation to them. With the Lord's help, they would find money somewhere to avert the crisis. TAT continued working.

Now, some 15 years later, TAT is still alive and well. Pastor Harri Haamer's prayers are being honored, and Eenok's vision is being fulfilled. God has raised up, *and will continue to raise up*, new and faithful partners to stand beside TAT. Eenok, Siimon and the other staff members continue their mission of preparing pastors, Bible teachers, youth workers, Christian counselors, Christian radio broadcasters and others to take the Word of God and the message of Jesus to the hearts and minds of the Estonian people.

Pastor Don Richman
Founding Director of EEMN

INTRODUCTION

“We Shall Live in Heaven”

(*Meie elu on taevas*)

My father, Harri Haamer, was born in the small town of Kuressaare on the green island Saaremaa which nestles up against Estonia, just out in the Baltic Sea. He was the middle son among three in the family, and he grew up in that peaceful place.

He did not know it, but before he was born, a book had been written whose influence would fling him across the vast continent of Eurasia and into a wretched exile. That book was Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*, and its ideas still enslave whole populations, as it did millions during the Soviet time. Harri was only 11 when the Bolshevik Revolution seized power in Russia. He was 12 when his homeland, which had been a Russian colony for 200 years, took advantage of the upheaval and won independence.

At age 16 he became a Boy Scout and later was a Scout leader, beginning a life-long calling to care for youth. After graduation from the Gymnasium (high school) he entered studies with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Tartu, from which he graduated in 1929. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor and appointed to Püha (Holy) Congregation in Saaremaa. In the autumn of 1933, he was called to Paulus Church in Tartu.

He married Maimu Maramaa on May 10, 1934, and they were blessed with three children, Eenok, Maarja and Andres. However, turmoil surrounded their little home and parish, as first the Nazis (Fascists) invaded Estonia, and then in 1940 the Soviet Russians came back.

A fire burnt down the Paulus Church in 1944. When the WWII was over, my father started to restore this church. The Soviet Occupation Authorities did not favor it, and neither did they like his pastoral activities with students. On February 5, 1948, Harri was arrested and deported to a convict-labor camp in far eastern Siberia. He was sentenced to eight years in concentration camps because he was accused of having educated Estonian youth in the wrong spirituality. Here his book begins.

Not content to strike at him alone, his family was also scheduled to be deported to Siberia on March 25, 1949. On that day, more than 20,000 Estonians were forced to leave their homes for Siberia. Most of them never returned, and we also might have gone and died there. Andres was six, Maarja ten, and I was 13 years old.

However, our mother got word of it and decided that we would leave home before the soldiers came. Andres had caught a high fever, and mother had to leave him with neighbors. My sister Maarja was taken to people we knew. So began a six-and-a-half year period of escaping and hiding ourselves constantly. Mother, a 17-year-old homeless boy named Albert whom we had adopted, and I became “anti-Communist partisans” in the dense forests of Southern Estonian. It was possible to hide ourselves there because faithful local people, who knew us, helped us and risked their freedom for us. For four of those six years we lived in an underground bunker dug adjacent to a farm cellar. The kindly couple who lived there fed us, cared for us, and even vented the bunker’s chimney through theirs.

God twice saved us from getting arrested. Once a raid was conducted on the farm where we were sheltered, and the soldiers

almost caught us. However, they did not recognize us as the Haamer family, supposedly a mother with a young teenage boy, a little girl and a small boy. Next, when they came to capture us somewhere else, we were there but God closed their eyes so that they did not see the hidden door of our room.

I fell ill with bone tuberculosis, and there was no way to treat it. We could not go to the doctor, since we could not be seen in public. Danger was everywhere. God heard our prayers and the disease withdrew, so that I was able to grow up, do my work and take care of my family. This time became for me a university of suffering, which mirrored the anguish and darkness in my country. It was then, when I was fourteen, that God gave me the vision to start a Christian college that would help to replenish the ranks of all the church workers who had been eradicated.

I was 20 when my father returned from Siberia and gathered together his scattered family. It was due to the great mercy of God that we were all alive. We received the gift of life with father for 32 more years, and those were blessed years. Father was a profound believer, who trusted Jesus completely. His great influence is also reflected in our children. My three sons have studied theology, and they all have become workers for God's Kingdom. They are pastors of the third generation.

Father Harri has also had a great impact on the Estonian Lutheran Church. His mind was open ecumenically, and he tried to unite all those who loved God. He had many friends in different Christian churches. I also consider the Tartu Academy of Theology, which I founded, to be my father's heritage.

He was an excellent story teller and a skilled writer. His literary heritage is large, and a special place is dedicated to the spiritual literature he wrote for children. On the 100th anniversary of his birth, a book was published—*Children's Stories*, a collection of all the little books he wrote for each of his grandchildren's fifth birthdays.

Out of his approximately 2,000 preserved sermons, there are only two published collections. Through his blessed heritage he is still talking to the people of his beloved Estonia.

Eenok Haamer
Son of Harri Haamer
President of Tartu Academy of Theology

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Tartu, Estonia, February 4, 1948

I am arrested.

Estonia, my homeland, is a land that won independence in 1918, but was then taken over again by the U.S.S.R. in 1940.

I am taken to what is known as the "Gray House" of Tartu, the headquarters of the KGB. Very little is said. The same pock-marked *chekist*, a member of the secret police, who had been threatening people on the street with his Nagant revolver, sends me down to the cellar. I am ordered to disrobe by two guards with *Komsomol* insignia.

"Why must I do that?" I ask.

"Are you in jail for the first time?" asks one young man.

"For the first time!" I reply.

"How old are you?" the same boy asks.

"Nearly forty-two."

Turning to the other guard he says, "This guy has lived on this earth for 42 years, and he is in jail for the first time!"

I do not understand why they are so surprised.

What else can I do but strip myself naked?

They take my belt. They cut off my pants buttons. They pull out my shoelaces. They empty my pockets. They take my money. They like my pocket knife, and they take it but decide not to record it. One of the guards slips it into his own pocket as I watch.

They take my New Testament.

They order me to get dressed. I am holding my pants up with one hand as they shove me into a cell.

There I stand. The space is too small to take even a single step. I can sit on the floor only if I pull my knees up tight to my chin. I have never been in such a miserable chamber. One 15-watt bulb hangs from the ceiling and dimly lights the space.

Why have they thrown me in here?

Others have been here before me. Their names have been scraped into the plaster and then erased by another hand. One name remains, Laine Aller. She suffered in this cell before me. Perhaps it was yesterday or perhaps today before I got here. Is she a young girl or perhaps a mother? What did she do to make them arrest her? I have never heard the name before this day, but I will remember it for a long time. It means she stood here as I am standing with just enough presence to scrape her name into the wall. I wonder what she used to scrape the plaster. They have taken away all my sharp objects. Maybe they left her with one button or the clasp of her bra. Did she scrape it with her fingernail?

I ponder my own situation. Why have they arrested me? I saw no arrest warrant. They entrapped me by that woman who called herself Olenina, the city's Executive Committee Secretary. Was she also an officer for state security? Have Lavrenti Pavlovitch Beria's Soviet secret police (KGB) finally recruited all the local officials into their service? Is the Executive Committee a branch of the state security apparatus? Olenina had said they wanted to honor me by granting me the job of informer. My refusal to accept this "honor" could be my reason for this arrest. I do not know; I really do not know anything. They must just want to dispose of me quietly.

A few weeks ago, the Deputy for Religious Affairs ordered me to stop conducting my youth classes, attended by many university students. I told him, "I won't stop. It is more important to obey the word of God than the word of man."

The Deputy became *very* angry and said, "Well, then we must find another way to discipline you."

This is undoubtedly "another way to discipline me."

I see now this Deputy is also an agent for the state security apparatus. We are surrounded by Beria's secret police. What I did or did not do makes no difference. Eventually they would have found me and *disciplined me*.

My wife Maimu came along with me to the Gray House as if trying to protect me. No sooner had we stepped out of our house and a boy began to follow us.

He elbowed his way over to me and inquired, "Are you Pastor Haamer?"

I try to brush him off by replying, "No, I am not."

He shadowed us all the way to the Gray House. There I was met by an entire pack of men carrying pistols. They did not need me to introduce myself to them. Immediately I was taken up the stairs and not allowed to utter another word to Maimu.

Did they release my wife? My son Eenok has a fever and I had wanted to call the doctor. Now I am standing in this cell. I was in such a hurry to obey those arresting me; I did not even take the time to pray with my children. Eenok had called to me from his bed, but I simply glanced at him without realizing I needed to say good-bye. Ats (Andres) sat on the floor playing with his blocks; Maarja and Albert were in school.

All those who have despaired here before me have also been torn away from some loved one. Whom did Laine leave behind? Perhaps a father, maybe a mother, a sister or brother, or maybe her husband and children. Would I ever be able to discover this? I pray for Laine Aller's children, even though I do not know if she has any. Maybe they apprehended her as she was taking food into the forest for her father or brother, if they were members of the Resistance. Is she being prosecuted as a "bandit collaborator"? How will my crime be classified?

I ponder my own fate and Laine Aller's for a long time. If I ever meet her I will greet her as a sister.

Suddenly the door opens and a somber-faced guard, without saying a word, hands me a bowl of gray soup. Its odor fills the cell and without a word I push it back to him.

Nobody comes around to bother me for some time and the corridor gradually becomes silent. It may already be nighttime, but there is no way I can lie down.

I do not need to lie down because two uniformed men open the cell and order me to follow them. One leads the way and the other follows behind me. One with a machine gun carries my leather suitcase which probably represents the fruits of their search of the parsonage. I am handcuffed in case I try to resist. It is hard for me to move along with my pants sagging around my hips and my unlaced shoes wanting to flop off my feet.

We go out onto the streets, and I am taken to the station where one of the drivers recognizes me. I try to whisper to him to tell my wife that I am being taken away, but the *chekists* shoo the man away.

For the first time in my life I am traveling at the government's expense under heavy guard. They have apprehended a dangerous national criminal! The *chekists* are diligently fulfilling their plan.

EPILOGUE

Tartu Academy of Theology

*An Institution Founded on
Harri Haamer's Life and Activities*

When by the grace of God, Harri Haamer returned from imprisonment, he committed all his energy to leading his Estonian people back to Jesus Christ. In 1987, when the Lord called His servant home, those who loved him felt responsible before God to continue that work. Harri Haamer had been a spiritual father to many people from different denominations, and his son Eenok has carried on this heritage. By now, Eenok Haamer has been a pastor in the Lutheran Church for 44 years and the president of Tartu Academy of Theology (TAT) for 15 years. At the end of 1980's, when Estonia seemed set to become free from Soviet occupation, Eenok felt the country needed an interdenominational institution to prepare workers for various church work and to gather together people who would cherish personal contact with God. The occupation that had lasted almost 50 years had done great harm to Estonia, and the situation we faced was comparable to damage from a great storm. It left everything a mess and broke to pieces our spiritual heritage.

More than 90 percent of Estonians considered themselves Christians in 1939, but by the end of the 1980s, the figure was less than ten percent. It was time to start rebuilding everything

in the Christian faith. Certainly, after a devastating storm all help is very welcome, and eight clergymen from the United States of America came. They felt that God had called them to come and spiritually help this small country to get on its feet. Thanks to their support, TAT was founded in the autumn of 1992, and started to train people in five specialties: Minister, Teacher of Religion, Pastoral Counselor, Christian Youth Worker and Christian Media Personnel. Recovering from such a great crisis was a time-consuming process, and founding and developing a school based on Christian values was very complicated in a society that was also wounded from the damage caused by the storm.

There was a severe shortage of clergy in our country, due to the murders and harsh imprisonments of pastors. There was a lack of lay leadership training, as even simple faith-sharing work like teaching in Sunday School was not a common skill. There were many, many problems in the society, and there was a need for counselors who knew that healing comes from Jesus. Young people needed Godly leaders to show them hope. Schools needed ethical teachers to get rid of deceitful propaganda. In the hearts of people there was still a spark of faith, although it had nearly been smothered. It needed rekindling, and a good way to do it was through day-by-day broadcasting. Even the false hope for happiness through materialism that now lures Eastern Europeans needs sound Bible teaching to combat it.

What is the vision? To rebuild Christ's Church in Estonia, focusing on one inspired young person at a time. Even in impoverished circumstances, TAT has taught and continues to teach courses in ethics, religious education, the ministerial profession, counseling, Christian media, youth work, pre-seminary training and a Master's course for post-seminary accreditation—all based on sound Biblical teaching.

By the summer of 2007 we have already had 67 graduates. Many of them work as pastors in the Lutheran Church, most of the alumni have work in the field they have studied, and many others

have continued their studies on the MA level at TAT or in other universities.

We hold onto the promise that “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.” (Philippians 1:6) The house of faith here is God’s house, and He will rebuild it! We are His workers, and by His grace, we will carry on the task.

Siimon Haamer

*Grandson of Harri Haamer and
Vice-president for Academic Affairs
Tartu Academy of Theology*

August, 2007



Harri Haamer while
in exile in Kolyma
May 1955

Harri and Maimu
at Tarvastu Church
on her 75th birthday



The family together again in 1955 after Harri was allowed to
return from Siberia.

l-r: Andres, Miamu, Maarja, Harri and Eenok



Harri Haamer
going to church
on his bicycle

3 Generations of Pastors

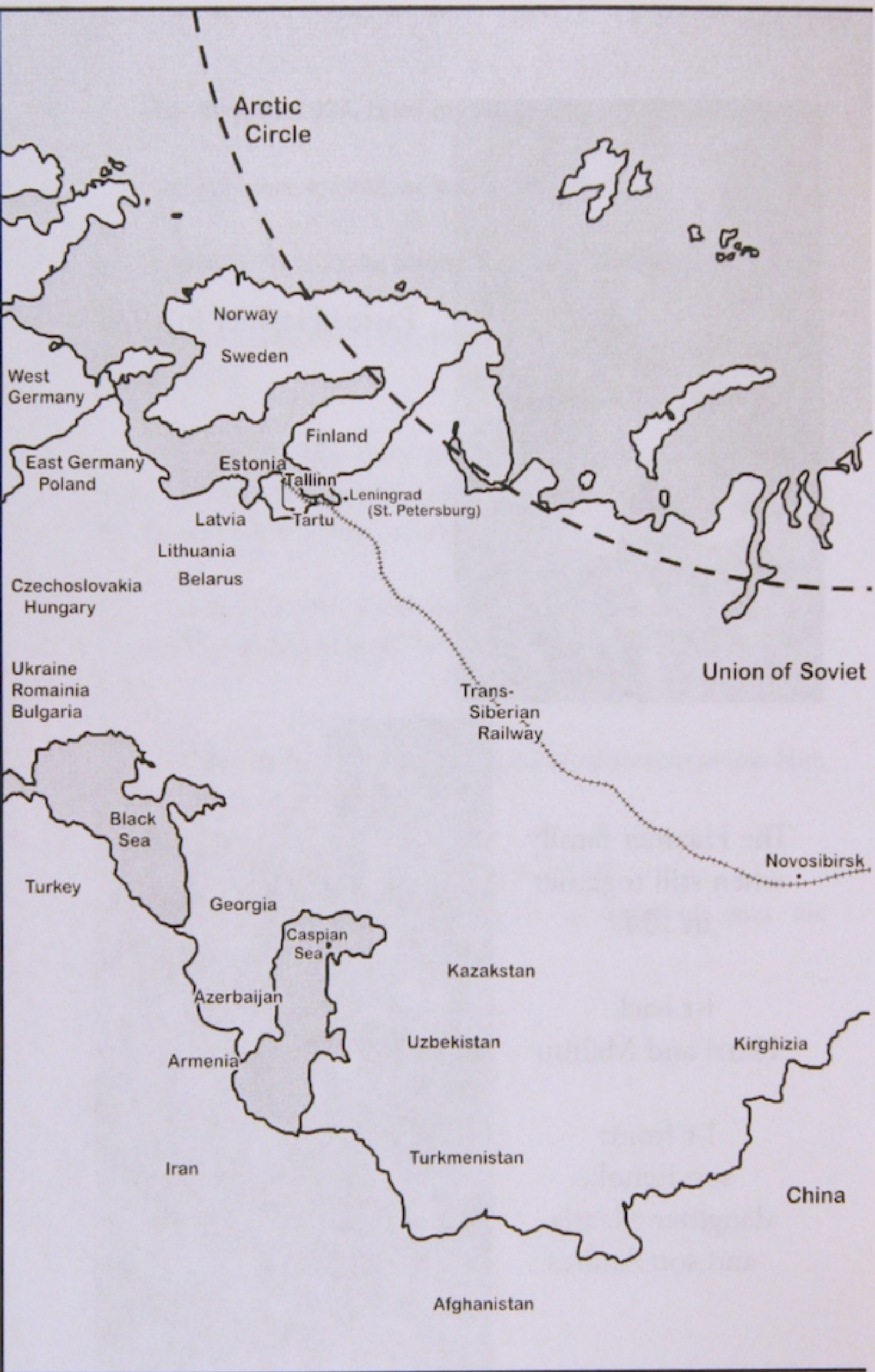
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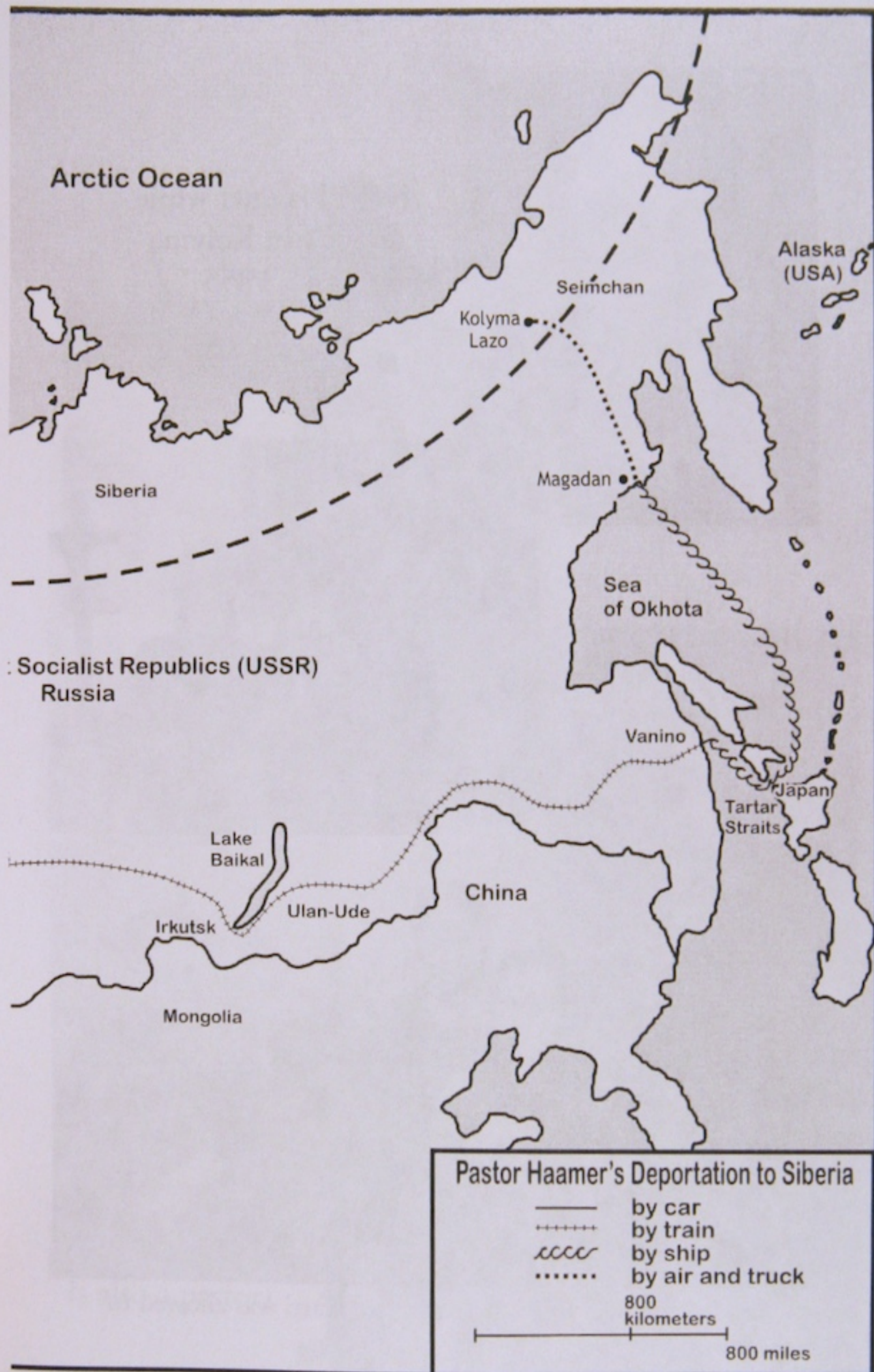
Markus, Eenok,
Harri, Naatan

Taken in front of
altar at
Tarvastu Church
July 14, 1987

(A third
grandson, Siimon,
is also a pastor)







As you read these snapshots of Pastor Haamer's cruel exile, you will feel you are right there beside him. His writing style has such vividness and immediacy that you will experience his despair in the KGB dungeon, his homesickness on the prisoner transports and the bleakness he felt in the prison camp on the edge of the tundra. He takes you into a world you may not have known existed, but one which now you will not forget.

As we find ourselves in a world that is ever more hostile to the Gospel, do you wonder how you would fare if you were persecuted for your faith? This book will give you courage, for it was the Holy Spirit that sustained Pastor Haamer through those long years. Also remarkable still to me was the testimony of another Estonian pastor, "After Haari Haamer came back from Siberia, he was fearless!"

Pastor Bob Nordvall
Charity Lutheran Church

Even as the years of freedom increase in Eastern Europe and the memories of Communist occupation fade, there are still stories that must be told. This testimony of faith is one of them.

Pastor Bill Moberly, Director
East European Missions Network