

A Brief History of the Partnership between  
Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, USA  
and the Evangelical Baptist Church in Kostroma, Russia  
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In the late 1980s, the City of Durham began a Sister City relationship with the City of Kostroma Russia, a city on the banks of Volga River, 250 miles northeast of Moscow. Watts Street Baptist Church (WSBC) was invited to explore the establishment of a "Sister Church" relationship with the Evangelical Baptist Church in Kostroma (Kostroma Church). Three WSBC members, Nannie Mae Herndon, Rubyleigh Herndon and Christine Stocks provided leadership and encouragement.

In 1989 two pastors from the Kostroma Church traveled to Durham accompanied by their translator. The pastors participated in events designed to acquaint them with WSBC and Durham. Included were opportunities for WSBC members to meet and hear Kostroma stories. The visit was climaxed by the signing of a Sister Church Covenant. Signers included the pastors of the Kostroma Church, Joe Lee, WSBC moderator and Mel Williams, pastor of WSBC.

Together we pledged to:

1. *Follow Jesus and announce the Kingdom of God.*
2. *Pray regularly for each other's congregation and their individual members, and for peace everywhere.*
3. *Share with each other our congregational and individual experiences, lives, and dreams.*
4. *Plan for exchanges, beginning in 1990, if possible.*

Contact with the Kostroma Church continued through the 1990s by regular letters and a visit made to Kostroma by Liz Lutz and two WSBC youth. In 1997 Lee Canipe, a Duke Divinity School senior and part-time minister with youth at WSBC, experienced a call to spend a year in service with the Kostroma Church. In the fall of 1999 Lee and his wife Hilary, a physician, began ministry with the congregation working with the youth and Hilary meeting some medical needs. Upon their arrival, they began intensive study of the Russian language and shortly achieved an excellent facility.



In connection with the Canipe's term of service, WSBC organized a mission trip for two weeks in June 2000 to assist with the beginning phases of construction of the new church building. Members of the mission team included: Bob Ayers, Steve Booth, Dick and Ginny Chorley, Billy Griffin, Ed Newnam, Matt Norvell and Elizabeth Williams. The mission team helped to build a construction wall, participated in their first Vacation Bible School for a week, enjoyed the warm worship and hospitality of the Kostroma congregation and visited several important sites in Kostroma. Later WSBC sent \$10,000 to our Sister Church to be used toward the construction phase of the congregation's new church building.

Slav Rummyantsev, a member of the Kostroma Church who in June 2000 provided transportation and friendship, immigrated to the USA in 2002. He now lives in Durham and is active in the WSBC congregation. He is very helpful in our efforts to maintain continuing contact with our Sister Church.



The Kostroma Mission Committee was established several years ago to nurture continuing contact with the Kostroma Church. Efforts to host several youth from the Kostroma congregation in Durham in 2006 and 2007 failed because the youth were denied exit visas by the American Embassy in Moscow. Current and future plans for the Kostroma Mission Group include sending \$2,000 to assist with the new church building project, communicating via email, staying in contact with Yuri Vinogradov, who signed the Covenant, and his family who now live in Seattle, and partially sponsoring Slav Rummyantsev as WSBC's representative to the Kostroma Church when he visits his parents in Kostroma in July 2008. For more information, see the numerous Kostroma picture-scrap books in the church library.