



Vilis Stanislavovich Neikurs

Photo courtesy of Pavel V. Gonchar.

Neikurs, Vilis Stanislavovich (1938–2006)

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Vilis Stanislavovich Neikurs served as a pastor and church administrator in the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, and Russia for over 45 years.¹

Early Life

Vilis Stanislavovich Neikurs was born in the Latvian city of Rēzekne on October 22, 1938. His father, Stanislav Donatovich Neikurs, was a cabinetmaker and served as an elder in the Adventist church in Rēzekne, and his mother, Yekaterina Andreevna Neikurs (née Matsanova), graduated from the Baltic Union Missionary School.

From an early age, Neikurs was actively involved in the life of the local congregation and helped his father in his ministry. In 1956 Vilis Neikurs was baptized in the Adventist church in Rēzekne. Shortly thereafter, his faith was put to the first serious test. It so happened that Neikurs was not allowed to take his final exams in high school because he did not attend classes on Saturdays. Then the young man went to Riga to the Ministry of Education of the Latvian SSR for an appointment with the minister, where he was received. After the interview it turned out that Neikurs, in spite of not attending school on Saturdays, had successfully learned the school curriculum and was ready to take the exams. After the minister's intervention, Neikurs was allowed to take his exams and received his high school diploma with honors.

After finishing school, Vilis was drafted into the army, and upon demobilization he went to visit his uncle, Pavel Andreevich Matsanov, who served as an Adventist pastor in the city of Novosibirsk. Pavel Andreevich, being aware of his nephew's devotion to God, suggested that Neikurs choose the path of pastoral ministry and remain in Siberia. Neikurs' first missionary field was in the city of Kemerovo, where he served as a Bible worker.

Marriage and Pastoral and Administrative Ministry

From 1963 Neikurs continued his ministry in the town of Tulchin (Vinnitsa Region, Ukraine) as an assistant to pastor Abram Dmitrievich Vasyukov.² In 1965 he married Lydia Dmitrievna Kolbach, the daughter of an Adventist pastor from Kiev.

Beginning in 1961, the Soviet law treated "evasion of socially useful labor" as a crime, and if a clergyman did not have a certificate from the state authorities confirming his right to pastoral service, he was prosecuted by law as a "parasite." For this reason, all ministers who did not have such a certificate were in an illegal situation and had to work for state enterprises in addition to their ministry. Neikurs had to work as a bricklayer, photographer, bookbinder, and janitor.³

In 1966, Neikurs was ordained as a pastor and assigned to serve the Adventist congregation in the city of Vinnitsa as well as to lead missionary work in the Vinnitsa, Zhitomir, and Khmel'nitsky Regions. He also became a member of the All-Ukrainian Council of the SDA Church, which functioned illegally. As time passed, the sphere of Neikurs' service expanded to include, in addition to the territory of Ukrainian Podolia, the Kiev, Cherkassy, and Chernigov Regions. Neikurs had to perform his pastoral work under the close scrutiny of the state security agencies, which forbade him from even entering the pulpit.

In 1976, Neikurs was included in the commission on the elimination of church schism that was taking place in the Adventist Church in the USSR.

In 1980, Neikurs obtained approval from the authorities to serve as an elder in Dubno, Rivne Region, with the Rivne and Volyn Regions being his field of activity. In 1987, after organizing the Volyn-Rivne Conference, he was elected secretary of that organization at its first session.

During his ministry as conference secretary, Neikurs was in charge of the construction of new prayer houses in the cities of Dubno and Rivne. In the church building in Dubno, Neikurs made a pulpit in the form of the petals of a blossoming flower, which even today reminds us of his fruitful ministry.⁴

In August 1988, the delegates to the 4th All-Ukrainian Session of the SDA Church elected Vilis Neikurs president of the Eastern Ukrainian Conference headquartered in the city of Donetsk. In those years great changes, called 'perestroika', were taking place in the USSR. The time of Vilis and Lydia Neikurs' service in Eastern Ukraine was a time of new opportunities for outreach initiatives and the gathering of an abundant spiritual harvest. During the period of their ministry, the church membership in the Eastern Ukrainian Conference increased tenfold. All while, Neikurs trained and ordained many young men for pastoral ministry, who, in turn, contributed greatly to the development of the Adventist Church in the territory of the former Soviet Union.⁵

In 1992, Neikurs was appointed as the Global Mission director of the SDA Church in Ukraine. He and his wife moved to Kiev, where he began organizing evangelistic campaigns, a completely new type of outreach ministry for the former Soviet Union.

At the 5th All-Ukrainian Session of the SDA Church held in 1993, Neikurs was elected director of the Church Ministries department, and his efforts were focused on developing the Sabbath School, home churches, and family ministries in Ukrainian congregations.

In 1996, Neikurs was elected secretary of the Ministerial Association and Stewardship director of the Euro-Asia Division and moved to Moscow. At the same time, he taught at Zaoksky Theological Seminary.⁶

Later Life

Having retired in 2000, Vilis and Lydia Neikurs, at the request of the Euro-Asia Division administration, moved to the city of Kemerovo to assist in resolving the conflict that arose due to the fault of the leaders of the West Siberian Conference. It was a very stressful time for Neikurs, which took a lot of mental and physical strength from an already elderly minister. Instead of the planned two months Vilis and Lydia Neikurs continued their ministry in Siberia, in the cities of Kemerovo, Novosibirsk, and Biysk, for over two years. According to Lydia's recollections, those years were not easy but especially blessed because, at that time, the Lord's help was felt in a special way.

After his return to Kiev, Neikurs, now retired, continued his ministry as the secretary of the Ministerial Association of the Kiev Mission and, in addition, as a counselor and mentor for the West Russian Union.⁷ He died on October 20, 2006, at the age of 68 and was buried in Kiev.

SOURCES

Adventistskiy Vestnik 1 (52) (2007).

Zhukalyuk, N. A. *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh*. Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999.

NOTES

1. This article was translated from Russian by Vladimir Ivenko.
2. N. A. Zhukalyuk, *Vspominaite nastavnikov vashikh* (Kiev: Djerelo Zhyttia, 1999), 248.
3. Ibid., 523.
4. Ibid., 524.
5. Ibid., 525.
6. Ibid., 526.
7. *Adventistskiy Vestnik* 1 (52) (2007): 32.

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