



SLAVIC GOSPEL NEWS



NEWS FROM THE
FORMER SOVIET UNION
& EASTERN EUROPE

Religious Freedom in Jeopardy

Since the collapse of the Iron Curtain there has been great freedom to reach the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the Gospel. However, over the past several years tension has been escalating. "A campaign to limit religious freedoms has been taking place in many regions of the Russian Federation for several years already," comments Michael Cherenkov, vice-president for Association for Spiritual Renewal in a recent statement. "Requests from the Orthodox Church to local authorities to destroy rental agreements and other forms of partnerships with Protestants have become common practice.

They are concerned about 'extremism'. The formation of a common enemy is the best grounds for the mobilization of the 'Orthodox'. Orthodox leaders are losing their authority, so they need to portray Protestants as 'sectarian fanatics.' In comparison, the Orthodox portray themselves as the real, native spiritual leaders of the country."

Recent reports document an alarming increase in limiting the freedoms of minority religious groups across much of the post-Soviet region. In Siberia, local courts have attempted to ban the publication of religious books. In Soviet times, cults were targeted for persecution, and evangelical Christians were purposefully labelled as a cult.

Forum 18, a human rights organization, reports that in Kyrgyzstan the senior state Religious Affairs official Kairat Lama Sharif has described the 13% fall in the number of registered religious communities as a "positive dynamic outcome" after 579 small religious groups (each with fewer than 50 adult citizen members) were stripped of registration. He said the number of registered communities will probably fall further in the wake of the controversial new Religion Law. Akmola Region's senior Religious Affairs official wrote to District officials that "the activity of small religious groups in the territory of Kazakhstan is now banned since there is no such form of religious association of citizens". Regional Religious Affairs officials are now warning such groups that

they must stop any activity. Grace Bible Church and other Christian leaders have been summoned to be stripped of registration and warned not to meet. "Now our believers are afraid each time they gather for worship," one church leader stated.

Fines against Baptists and other religious workers in Uzbekistan are increasing. Activities under fire include reading as a group, allowing children to participate in services and any other activity consider as "proselytising" or "missionary activity". Fines have been levied against Christians and repressive laws restricting religious freedom are being enforced by authorities in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

Violence is on the rise, and Russian officials reported the deaths of 13 people in a shootout in the North Caucasus between Islamist militants and Russian servicemen. With ethnic violence and religious freedom under threat, the need to train Christian leaders in the former Soviet nations has never been more urgent. Local Christians continue to seek the Lord's guidance as the political scenes change, and new governments and policies voted in. SGA is committed to standing alongside and equipping our brethren as they reach the lost in the Slavic nations – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Central Asia – where religious restrictions and persecutions are increasing. Thank you for your financial support and prayers. ■



The Kremlin in Russia where political and religious discussions take place

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Ukraine Devastated by Cold

During the winter months a bitter cold wave swept across Eastern Europe, and Ukraine was especially hard hit with at least 151 deaths and more than 4,000 hospitalized suffering from hypothermia and frostbite. The government had to shut down schools, colleges and nursery schools due to the severe cold. Ukrainian officials told the Associated Press that 90% of the deaths were alcohol-related, as alcohol raises the risk of hypothermia and decreases a person's ability to feel and respond to the cold. In addition to this, heavy snows caused power outages, leaving families without heat in their homes and motorists stranded on highways. Economic conditions continue to be difficult, with many needy families having a hard time obtaining warm clothing. In addition, this severe cold raises concerns from an agricultural perspective. Ukraine is the "breadbasket" of Eastern Europe, and a poor planting and growing season would have devastating effects on the economy, not to mention on the lives of needy families and individuals. The gracious financial gifts of our supporters enabled SGA to send funds to pastors so that they could purchase basic food items and deliver them to the widows, elderly, and needy families.

Please be in prayer for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine as they seek to minister the love of Christ to afflicted families. We also have the opportunity to provide on-going help to not only the churches in Ukraine but also to churches across the other former Soviet countries. As Christian workers visit the homes they give out humanitarian aid to needy families, along with a loving Gospel witness. If you would like to help the needy with a special gift, please mark the "Humanitarian Aid" option on the donation slip. ■



ABOVE: With temperatures falling to minus 35 degrees Celcius, many villages were snowed in

BELOW: Pastor Kukushkin had to shovel the snow to clear the road before going to visit the elderly in the villages



Europe's Final Leprosy Colony

Leprosy is a disease which slowly eats the body leaving limbs withered and eyes missing, but it does not attack vital organs and people can live to an old age. Tichilesti (South East Romania) located on the Danube hosts Europe's final leprosy colony. It has been in existence since 1928. Those living there did not receive treatment until it was too late. Although they are no longer infectious the residents are scarred for life and have to manage without fingers and toes. Some are blind, but they do not complain. They have lived through war, hunger and isolation. Some were taken from their parents as children and have lived there ever since. Since the fall of Communism the hospital's reputation and the patients' lives have improved. The one thing that has remained is the support that the residents give to each other. Those who are fitter visit the weaker ones

and take them food. The residents soon hear when visitors arrive and they come out to greet them, because it is rare that they see anyone from outside the colony. They have no use for money because there are no shops to buy from. They simply need help because they may no longer be able to manage on their own. Despite the suffering of Tichilesti's leprosy patients, life goes on as normal.

Roman Nedelcu entered Tichilesti in 1957 infected with leprosy, and after being cured he left. Then he felt the call of God to return to the colony and serve those with whom he had lived for 20 years. He became a pastor of the Baptist church that meets in the colony. Through the support of SGA-UK Roman and his wife Vasilica are being funded in their ministry among these needy people. Their 22 year-old son is a great help to his father as he assists those who are not able to get to

the church on their own. We give thanks to God for Roman and his family as they minister in the leprosy colony. Please pray that as the Gospel is preached each week many will come to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ■

Lepers welcome the visits of Pastor Nedelcu at the colony



New Opportunities to Meet Urgent Needs

David Chidesa ministers in the western area of Ukraine where there is immense financial deprivation which has to be seen to be believed. John and Gabriela Patras, who along with David, are making a considerable difference and we need to stand with and support these devoted servants of Christ as they seek to bring hope where there is such great need. They have planted two evangelical churches in an area where there are over one thousand two hundred Jehovah's Witnesses. We need to pray for those working in a place of such spiritual confusion and darkness. In response to this needy situations, a Mission School in Slatina was established, and by the grace of God will be a means of equipping others to minister to the dear people in these locations.

The believers are already involved in effective ministry in this region of Ukraine and have welcomed the opportunity to be better equipped to fulfil the task which the Lord has given to them. They see the Mission School as a crucial means of enabling them to be faithful servants of their Lord and Saviour, as they seek to proclaim the Good News about Christ in a clear and compassionate way. It is an encouragement to see what has



The Mission School trains and equips young men for ministry

already been accomplished and at the same time a challenge to recognise how much need there is and how much still needs to be done. May the Lord help us to stand with our brethren in this new venture. ■

Testimony of a School Teacher

Lidia Vassiliyevna is a school teacher in Astrakhan. "I work in Public School #4, and in my class many children confuse Jesus Christ with Father Christmas. For a whole year I began praying for an opportunity to tell them about the Saviour. Then one day our church received a wonderful surprise – funds provided by SGA-Australia – for a Christmas outreach to children. I wanted to tell the children about God's love, and I received permission to hold meetings, but only outside of school hours. I also wanted to give the children a special gift, not just sweets but a book on the Christmas story.



We obtained 28 books and during the after-school sessions I told the children why Jesus came into the world and about His love for people. I was astonished at the many questions these children asked. Why did Jesus have to die? Did He really rise from the grave? One girl remembered a poem she had learnt about Jesus and she recited it to the entire class. We gave each child a book and they immediately started to read it. Our meeting was a great success! Imagine my surprise when after a few days I received many phone calls from parents, thanking me for the book. They said they have been reading it together with their children, and through this they have discovered many truths about God and salvation.

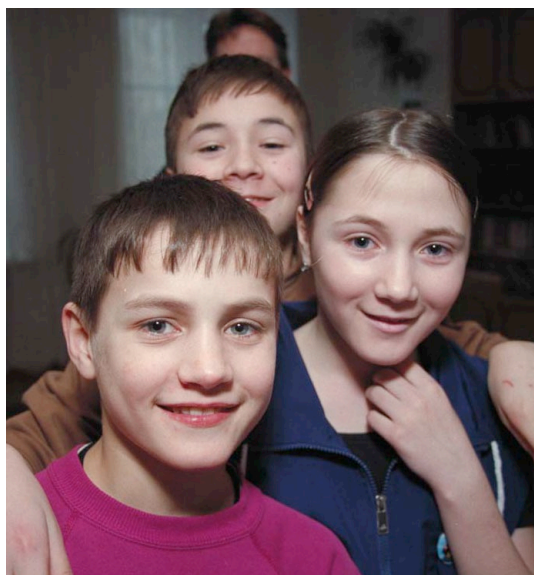
I want to personally thank you for your participation in this evangelistic outreach to our children. I truly believe that this has opened the way to have more conversations with parents and children, and the opportunity to point them towards the path of salvation".

Children enjoy their 'after school' Bible classes

Russia's Tragic Abortion and Divorce Rates

Professor Vasily Zhukov of the Russian Social University in Moscow says the number of abortions is vastly understated in the country. "Our statistics don't exactly reflect the perimeters of this issue. Annually there are from three to four million abortions carried out in Russia, rather than the 1.3 million officially reported". In addition to these troubling numbers, Professor Zhukov also said that the number of divorces is rising with 60% of marriages ending in divorce. Russia has been facing a serious demographic challenge, although the population decline that began in 1992 has begun to slow. Evangelical churches are deeply concerned about the impact of abortion and divorce in Russian society, and the only solution is saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for increased opportunities for evangelism in these challenging days.

You are the Helpers of the Fatherless



New Children at the Orphanage in Odessa (Ukraine)

Pastor Igor Bandura writes ...

"It is with thankfulness to God that we can announce the arrival of new children at the orphanage run by Grace Church in Odessa (Ukraine). Throughout the last year there have been many obstacles and there was a concern that this vital ministry might be hindered. However, the prayers of God's people have been answered and the orphanage has begun to receive new boys and girls. Over the next few months more children will arrive and the numbers will increase to 50 children living in the church-run orphanage. They will arrive in small groups as this will help them settle into a new environment, new carers, and a new routine. Once enrolled they will all go through a number of medical examinations and the older children will be prepared for school. Some of these children, although officially of 'school age', have not attended a school for the last 3 years. They will need help in adjusting to a new routine which will make fresh demands upon them. However, the team is excited and looks forward to caring for these needy children who have known only sadness in their young lives. If the Lord allows it we would have 50 young souls in our care, and each of them in urgent need of love and understanding.

We also sincerely thank SGA-Australia for the wonderful clothes and shoes we received for distribution. Pray for these young people, so that their hearts will be filled with warmth and love, and that they would feel that they are sincerely loved and cared for." ■

Teen Orphans in Belarus

Igor Tsegalko reports ...

"I want to share with you about the beginning of a ministry in Rudensk Orphanage. It was our first meeting and I was very excited because we were informed that most had mental health issues and I could not be sure if I would be able to reach them with the Gospel. There were 22 in the meeting, 11 girls and 11 boys, whose ages were between 18 - 19 years old. After the meeting one girl came up to me and said, "I thought you would give us a lecture about narcotics but then I understood that you wanted to talk to us about God". We had an amazing meeting. They were open and asked me many questions. We spent two hours together and it was obvious that God had touched their hearts. Finally, I gave them presents and they expressed their thanks for them. During the meeting we had no teachers present, but after our meeting the teachers expressed to me their astonishment that the young people had behaved so well. When it was time to go they ran out of the orphanage in order to say good bye. As I drove home I thanked the Lord for the meeting and I know for sure that ministry to these young teenage orphans was worth the effort.

At our next meeting almost all of them turned up. There were two other events on at the same time, including a disco. I was worried that they would all go there, but only one girl went. I had two further meetings with them where we spoke about obedience. I had brought gifts and they helped to distribute them to one another. One 18 year-old girl wept as she told me her life story. We agreed to talk some more later. I suggested to the young people that they choose the topics for our future meetings. They wanted to talk about 'betrayal', and the girls asked me to prepare a talk on the topic of 'love'. I have their birth dates and plan to do something special on their birthdays at our meetings. I thank and praise the Lord for the opportunity to reach out to the teens in this orphanage. I know for sure that there is a great need for our meetings. The majority of them are smart so I don't understand why they are in an institution for juveniles with mental issues. Please pray for this outreach and I thank God for your partnership in the Gospel with them. ■



Ministry in Mongolia

Pavel Baruskov – Krasnoyarsk region Russia

We want to share with you how God blessed our trip to Mongolia. It was an amazing and wonderful missionary trip for our team, which consisted of 18 young people. Leaving from Krasnoyarsk we were thinking that we would not have a camp this time because we were very low on funds. Nevertheless, when we came to Mongolia we saw the children who were eagerly waiting for a camp. We decided to have a shorter camp of only 5 days, and so we asked for a discount from the campground owners. God provided in a wonderful way and we were able to hold our camp. There were over 100 children and most have been to our camp in previous years. Now they are coming to Sunday school at the local church. The special blessing of our Mongolian camp was that among the leaders this year we had four 18-year-old girls who, for the previous 2 years were themselves just campers. At the camp they came to faith in Jesus Christ, started to attend church, and now they are keen camp leaders.

When we came to Mongolia our team was divided into two. One team went to work at the camp, and another team remained in the town in order to organise a daytime children's program at a local school. Every day they had about 65 children of primary school age. "Each morning we had team meetings, we read from both Russian and Mongolian Bibles, and our prayers were in both languages. One of the local MP's came to the camp and welcomed us and the children. When the camp was over we divided into two teams again. One team went to a village some 40 km away. There were no roads, only rough paths, and this was a serious time of testing. As we travelled it was raining really hard, and the plains looked like a river. We got off the track and became stuck in water streams.

Living in harsh conditions, the children were delighted to receive gifts from the visitors



The unexpected rain created some problems for the team

But the Lord was with us and we finally arrived at a village where 50 children were excited and glad to see us. We organised games, provided gifts and sweets, taught various crafts, and they especially liked the Bible lessons and puppet shows.

At the same time, the second team was working in the town. Representatives from the City Council welcomed us and we presented different concerts each day. The town mayor allowed us to set up a trampoline in the very centre of the town square and all day we had children playing on it. We brought several barrels of drinking water and freely handed out water to people as it was very hot. We inflated balloons and wrote on them "Jesus loves you", and gave them out to passers by. At the same time we handed out booklets in Mongolian, and simply fellowshiped with people, telling them about Jesus Christ. On the last day of our time in Mongolia we went to a beautiful lake where we were able to fish, enjoy the beautiful nature, fellowship with each other and exchange our experiences. God gave us a wonderful and blessed trip. Please pray for the lives that were touched with the Gospel. ■

Is Publishing Religious Poetry a Crime?

When Begjan Shirmedov – a protestant believer – tried to print copies of a small book of his religious poetry in Turkmenistan, a local religious affairs official was waiting for him at the printing shop. He was taken to the 6th Precinct Police Department which is responsible for counter-terrorism and organised crime. There the 77-year-old poet was questioned for six hours, forced to write a statement and banned from travelling outside his home region of Dashoguz in northern Turkmenistan while his case is investigated. Other local Protestants in Dashoguz have also been questioned over printing religious materials. It remains unclear if any will face charges. Turkmenistan imposes strict censorship on religious literature.

Difficult Times in Tajikistan



Pastor Werwai (left) with Pastor Kamil Abdullaiev (right)

Following the sudden death of Alexander Werwai (58) – pastor and also president of the Baptist Union of Tajikistan, Pastor Kamil Abdullaiev (32) was elected as both pastor and UECB president. Kamil represents a new generation of Christians in Tajikistan. He is of Tajik nationality and was brought up in a Muslim family. Kamil

became a Christian during the civil war in his country. After graduating from Odessa Theological Seminary (Ukraine) he became the senior pastor of Dushanbe Central Baptist Church in Tajikistan. He and his wife Zarina have three children. Pastor Kamil and other church leaders are reporting that it is a difficult time for Christians in Tajikistan. The restrictions are growing for all areas of Christian work. Pastor Kamil said; “One of the important things we must do is to complete the building of the Children’s House. This House was Alexander Werwai’s dream. He had a real burden for the underprivileged children who had neither enough food or clothes, nor a family to love them.” The church members regularly visited the orphanages and poor families, bringing them food and clothes, and sharing

God’s love with them. The Baptist Church was building a special house which would become a home for dozens of abandoned children, and could also be used as a summer camp and Bible training centre for teenagers from the surrounding villages.

Please pray for the Baptist churches in Tajikistan and the new leadership, especially for Pastor Abdullaiev to continue the good work started by Pastor Werwai. Pray that God will give him all the wisdom and strength he may need in his new position, and for unity among the churches. Pray that Pastor Werwai’s dream could be fulfilled and that the Children’s House could be completed and become a home for many children, as well as a training centre for young Christians. Pray for God’s provision of the necessary funds for this project.



Visiting church workers give out gifts of sweets to the orphans

Reaching Adults by Reaching Children

Yevgeny Dushakov is a missionary pastor in Russia’s Mari-El Republic. In the city of Ioshkar-Ola, he and the faithful workers in his church visit local orphanages. And they are impacting more than just the children ... “We have been able to have wonderful Easter and Christmas outreaches. Each time we visit the children and their caregivers they treat us with more and more confidence, and we can share Christian values and truths with them. One of the orphanage directors is interested in Christian values and she asks many questions. We have known her for many years, and only now are we seeing the results of our prayers and labours. In another orphanage a program was conducted called “Myths about Life”. As a result of hearing the Gospel, 18 teen orphans began coming to the church and 9 of them were baptised in the summer.

Yevgeny’s teams try to find new opportunities for sharing the Gospel, and they are excited to see the fruit of their endeavours. The support of SGA partners has played a vital role. In Ioshkar-Ola they had opportunities to speak to young men who are already successful businessmen and represent various companies. They have grown up in a self-centred culture, and as he witnesses to them Yevgeny speaks of how important it is to think of the needs of others and the importance of a spiritual foundation in their lives. He also speaks to students at local schools and they often ask him very serious questions about life. The topics vary, but all are based on Scripture and the importance of the Word of God as

the only solid foundation. More than 20 teenagers are involved in these lessons, and Yevgeny feels that this is a wonderful opportunity to help rescue them from the consequences of a godless life.”

Yevgeny and his church members are thankful to SGA for the prayers, encouragement and financial support. “It is great to know that Christians are praying for us and taking part in our ministry. We thank God for you, and may He bless your ministries and your churches!” ■

Adults stay to listen to the Gospel presentations



Pastor Ilmurad Nurliev Released



Nearly 18 months after his arrest in Turkmenistan, Protestant pastor Ilmurad Nurliev was among a group of about 230 prisoners freed under amnesty from a labour camp. “He and the other prisoners were brought by special police train to Mary, and we rushed to the station to meet him,” his wife Maya told Forum 18 News Service. “His release was so unexpected we forgot to get flowers. I can’t describe what a joy it was to see him.” Ilmurad was given a four-year prison sentence in October 2010 on charges which members of his congregation insist were fabricated, to punish him for leading his unregistered church services. Pastor Nurliev only learnt about the amnesty the night before his release. “I want to sincerely thank everyone who prayed for me, believed and supported me, and helped in my release”, he told Forum 18. However he will have to live under restrictions, reporting weekly to the police.

That They Might Set Their Hope In God

Last summer Pastor Alexander Yurovskikh saw great blessing as together with the church youth group they reached out to the children in four neighbouring villages. “We prepared everything we needed for the camp sessions. We formed a team with eight people, and the children readily took part in the program. They invited their friends to come. Parents, their children, and other adults came to observe, listening to what we said and watching what we did. Even the staff of village clubs and the orphanages not only watched, but joined in the activities! They were surprised to see the zeal and love among Christians who were working with their children ... without any payment ... serving them freely. The children eagerly took part in all the games with great interest. They learned Christian songs, listened to Bible stories with interest, and loved to attend the craft lessons. At the next session the children recited the Bible stories they had learned word by word. We saw God’s blessings in all these events, and it was an answer to our prayers. The children did not want us to leave. They said they would be looking forward to meeting again.

We encountered difficulties to enter three other villages. As we had come from Kurgan, we needed permission because the villages are on the border with Kazakhstan. It took me several

days to obtain permission for the visit. Another setback was that my wife, Nadia, had a gallbladder attack and she was hospitalised for 10 days. Despite these challenges we succeeded in holding all planned activities for the children in the villages. The Lord blessed our ministry in a special way. There were 152 children who heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

The children have taken home Bibles and New Testaments to read with their parents, and we are seeing results as new families are now attending our church services.

Children can’t wait for the summer camps to start



Fined For Leading a Congregation

Kazakhstan authorities are increasing punishment on people who are exercising their right to freedom of religion and faith. Aleksei Asetov, a shoe-repairer by trade, father of ten, and a Baptist preacher in eastern Kazakhstan, has been fined what local people estimate to be 18 months average local wages for leading an unregistered religious organisation. He was fined for leading the small congregation that meets in his private home. The judge has banned the congregation from meeting. A church in Petropavl in North Kazakhstan has been raided twice by

the police from the Department Against Extremism, Separatism and Terrorism, and a local official of the Agency of Religious Affairs (ARA). They confiscated New Testaments, Christian books and DVDs for censorship. They also want the church fined for leaving the books on a table which was ten metres from the entrance of the hall they rent for worship. Other fines for exercising religious freedom without state permission continue. One pastor was fined for leading unregistered worship meetings following a police operation called “Operation Legal Order”.

Gathering in a private home for fellowship can result in a raid by the police



Dr Nickolai Porublev Retires



Dr Nickolai Porublev

After having served SGA for many decades, Dr Nickolai Porublev (73) has retired as Interim Executive Director of the mission. Over the years he has served the Lord and the people of the former Soviet nations in his roles as Executive Director for Research and Cult Awareness (1991–1999); Executive Director (1999–2010); and Interim Executive Director (2010–2012). During this time Nickolai made numerous trips to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) teaching courses, training pastors and Bible

school students in the area of cults and world religions. These courses became crucial at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union because the religious freedom saw many false teachings, false prophets, and new cults flooding into the CIS at an alarming rate. Christian leaders, students, and church members needed to be informed and equipped. The Lord enabled Dr Porublev to use his Russian language skills to preach sermons, give radio interviews, write books, produce DVD's and audio tapes as training tools for distribution to Seminaries and Bible Schools all across the vast lands of the CIS.

Dr Porublev will continue to serve SGA as a valued Board Member, and he also has a vision and a desire to do more research in Apologetics. Please continue praying for Dr Porublev, and also pray for SGA's Board of Directors as they seek the Lord's guidance for a new Executive Director to lead the mission. ■

How You Can Help

Your partnership with SGA is vital and you can help raise awareness of the ministry needs by sharing this magazine with your church, family and friends and encouraging others to support the work of SGA. The believers in the CIS urgently need our prayers and financial support to equip them as they reach out to their communities with the Gospel.

As you read the testimonies, articles, and the appeals for assistance, please prayerfully consider how you can help meet the needs. Today there are still many open doors and new opportunities to reach adults, children, young people, orphans, prisoners, and drug addicts with the saving message of the Gospel. Pastors and missionaries are being trained and many are ready and willing to go out to unreached regions, but they need financial support. Churches are being planted in villages, but they also need financial assistance to purchase and renovate houses into suitable "Houses of Prayer" where they can meet, worship and hold other activities.

Would you continue to stand with SGA and our brethren in the CIS so that much can be accomplished for His glory!

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