



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

The Return of Operation Winter Warmth!

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Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . . (MATTHEW 28:19)

Encouraging the Hearts of Faithful Missionary Pastors

Aleks Pashkovets
SGA Ministry Administrator

Recently with my wife Elena, I was able to spend several days in Russia's Samara region with the purpose of visiting and encouraging SGA-sponsored missionary pastors and their churches. Yet I found they visited and encouraged us as much, if not more.

In the beginning of our trip, we were able to visit SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Vyacheslav Tkachenko in Bezenchuk. This brother is filled with



Elena Pashkovets, Pastor Vyacheslav Tkachenko and Alex Pashkovets (left to right).

radiance and joy! Every day, he asks God to fill him with the joy of the Lord. You smile just because you are around him. He lives in the same building as the House of Prayer, so we were able to see

the sanctuary. This is where Vyacheslav prepares his sermons, sings hymns in worship to God, and where the Lord gives him music to the hymns of which he never knew the melody. Vyacheslav shared with us how just a few weeks ago, his daughter Liza and her best friend, Tanya, repented before the Lord. We praised God together for adding the newly saved to the church!

One Sunday, we visited the church in Tal'yati. After the service, the church hosted lunch for us. Elena was sitting with the sisters listening to their testimonies, while I sat with the brothers. A little later, I noticed her talking to the younger girls. One of them

was the pastor's daughter (age 15) and another was an older woman who was 30 years old, yet part of the youth group. They turned out to be the oldest among the youth—everybody else is younger than 15. The older woman had just lost her father to a heart attack a month ago, and was still going through the grieving stage. The father was a man only in his 50s and it was an unexpected death. Later they went for a walk, where the girls were more open about their struggles of growing up in a small church with little fellowship with other like-minded believers. Elena encouraged them to keep each other accountable in their walk with the Lord.

During this trip, we noticed several God-ordained opportunities to encourage people. One such story happened in Priozersk, while visiting Dmitri Pavlov, another missionary pastor. Together with his wife, Dmitri and their young daughter live in a very small apartment. They unsuccessfully spent a whole day looking for a couch they could buy so that we could sleep in their kitchen. In the end, they called a sister in the church asking if she could host us in her apartment. She said yes, so after arriving on the train at 11 p.m. Dmitri took us there. It so happened that Galina's daughter-in-law was also there visiting with her five children. One of the first words this young mother told Dmitri was "Dima, we have to pray for Dasha!"

Later, we heard the story of how over the course of the summer, 10-year-old Dasha's vision has deteriorated from -1.5 to -8! This is a huge jump, which has brought much heartache to the family. We talked late into the night, and at the end prayed for each family member, including Dasha. We have seen the Lord's hand in ordaining every detail of the trip and guiding us! We praise God for His protection, and for the opportunity to be a blessing to these faithful families. ♦

Ukraine: Celebrating the Reformation with Evangelism



This past October marked a major milestone—the 500-year anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. And in Ukraine, yet another major milestone took place when President Petro Poroshenko issued a proclamation that the Reformation's anniversary would be observed throughout the country. It is the first time a former Soviet nation officially celebrated the reclamation of the biblical Gospel, and evangelical churches rejoiced with thanksgiving!

SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Alexander Kobzar in Ukraine's war-torn Donetsk region wrote to tell us how his church used the event to not only celebrate, but also to share the Gospel with unbelievers in as many ways as they could . . .

Earlier in the year, we held a special congress dedicated to the Reformation. We invited believers from across the region, and reflected on how believers stood for the purity of biblical, evangelical teaching—sometimes laying down their lives. We went from time to time to the main square, erecting tents for several days, serving tea with passersby, distributing evangelistic literature and talking to them about salvation in Jesus Christ.

Alexander says they distributed food to needy people in town, and that feeding children has become an important part of the church's ministry. Twice a week, about 30 needy children come to the church and the sisters in the congregation prepare meals for

them. In addition, they are reaching out to needy elderly in Avdeevka, where constant shelling damaged many homes. Believers in the nearby town of Chasov Yar purchased a house and turned it into a nursing home, and eight elderly people live there now. They are in the process of buying yet another home to house even more elderly refugees.

Alexander and his church are deeply thankful to God for you and every one of SGA's faithful partners who help sustain his ministry. He asks that we



It is a blessing that Alexander Kobzar's church is able to minister and provide meals to needy children from the region.

continually lift them in prayer as they fulfill the ministry God has given them. It is often said that the Reformation missed Russia and the former Soviet countries, but for Alexander and thousands of other evangelical churches SGA serves, it is alive and well and the Gospel is being faithfully proclaimed! ♦

The Return of Operation Winter Warmth!

With winter in a firm, icy grip across Russia and her neighboring countries, needy individuals and families in the throes of deep poverty face serious struggles trying to keep warm and survive. In some regions—especially the “stan” countries of Central Asia—poverty is especially horrific and the human need is enormous. In light of this reality, SGA has prayerfully re-launched a ministry we call *Operation Winter Warmth*. Its beginnings go back to the difficult days after the fall of communism.

How It All Began

In the winter of 2002, Russia was in the midst of a serious economic crisis. Thousands of individuals and families were destitute and uncertain how they were going to survive the cold. To help Russian evangelical churches respond to that great need, SGA launched *Operation Winter Warmth* with the help of our partners. Tons of warm clothing, footwear, and other aid were placed in the hands of those who desperately needed it, as well as thousands of Russian-language copies of God’s Word. Most wonderful of all,



Providing warm clothing and heat is an opportunity to show Christ’s love and compassion to those in need.



Without warm clothing, this boy’s future is dire.

the Lord used this massive effort to help open the door for SGA-sponsored missionary pastors to demonstrate Christ’s love and to share the Gospel with unbelievers.

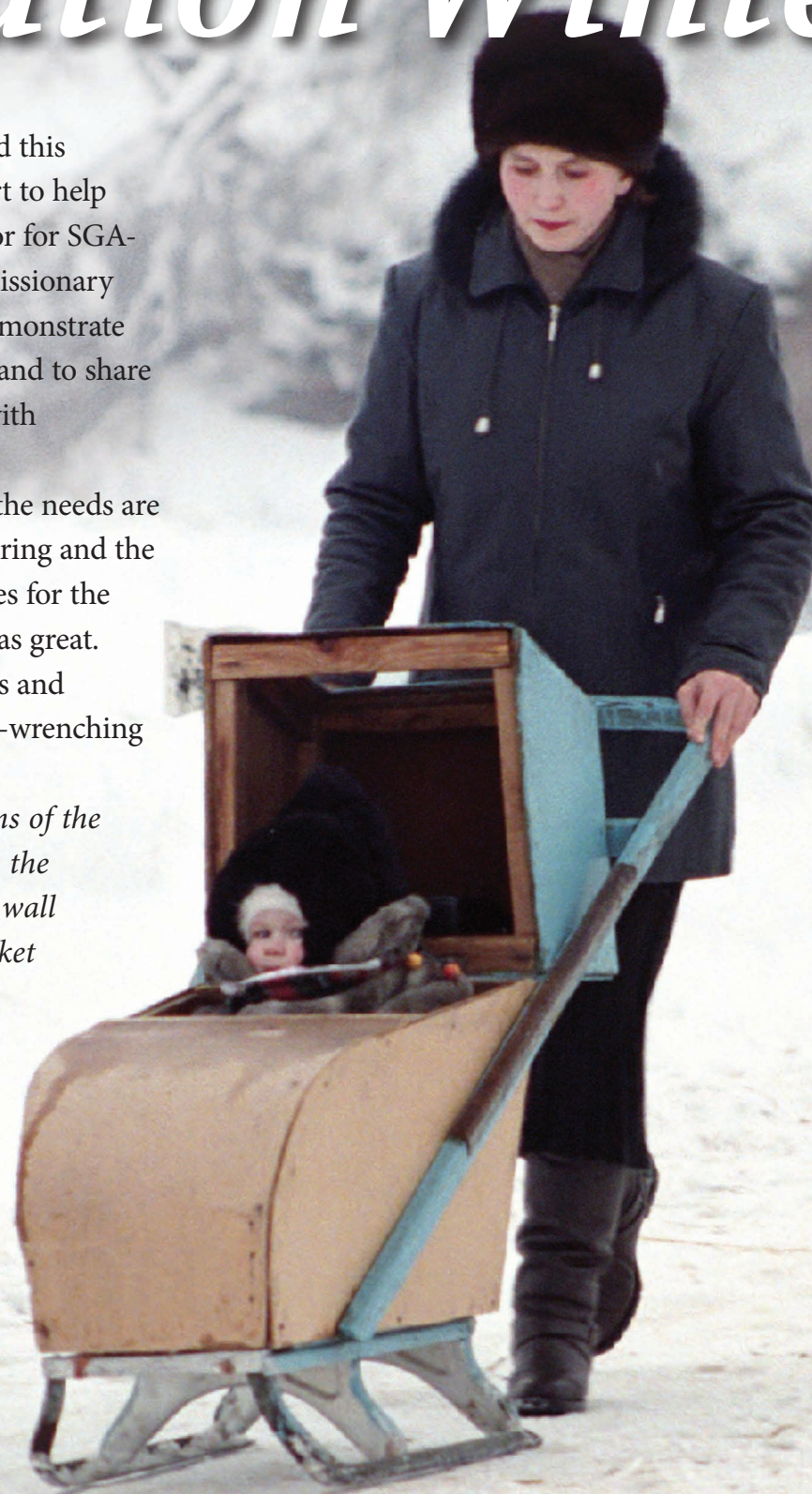
Today, the needs are just as staggering and the opportunities for the Gospel just as great.

SGA’s Eric Mock has visited the Caucasus and Central Asia several times and saw heart-wrenching poverty first hand . . .

These are among the poorest regions of the former Soviet Union. You can drive into the mountains and people are living in clay wall homes. The front door is literally a blanket hanging on a rod. I’ve been among homeless people where hungry single mothers sell their children just to put food on the table. It just rips your heart out!

In eastern Ukraine, people were on the edge of dying last winter, especially older people who couldn’t warm their homes and were freezing. The churches that we support go out to villages like this, and a ministry like Operation Winter Warmth can give them access to help people in Jesus’ name. It strengthens bridges for the Gospel!

Please pray with faithful missionary pastors and church teams as they visit needy families and



children, orphans, and the elderly who are neglected and alone. In so doing, they are living examples of our compassionate God whose Word declares . . . *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and*



Children and elderly throughout the former Russian-speaking lands need warm clothing and jackets to survive the winter months.



Through your support of *Operation Winter Warmth*, we are able to put warm winter clothing into needy hands like these.

father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27). We will update you on this ministry in future issues of the Good News Report. ♦

The Bold Witness of a Transformed Life

Eric Mock Reporting From Yakutia

I want to tell you about Ludmila, who was the first believer in village of Oktyom. She was in a difficult marriage where her husband beat and neglected her terribly. She literally despaired of life itself.

But she was not alone. For in the village of Moxogollokh, where Pastor Valery had planted the first church in Yakutia and where young Stas had come to faith, another woman was being moved by God. Galina had also been in an abusive marriage. She had three children, and her husband had left her. She had become an alcoholic and her life was falling apart. A friend pointed her to Pastor Valery for help.

It is these churches that SGA is dedicated to serving, for the task remains unfinished.

And through Valery, she found that help in Christ. Galina and Ludmila were friends, and Galina now reached out with the same message of hope.

Ludmila was quite sick. Abused and in terrible health, Galina began to care for her friend. Ludmila left her husband and lived in despair with her children. She had grown up as a communist and attended Pioneer camps. Ludmila had been taught there was no God. But at last, she was motivated to attend a service at another church nearby in Pakrovsk (another church that Valery had planted). She realized that she would never be the same after



Yakutia (Sakha Republic) is the largest subdivision of the Russian Federation but has one of the least dense populations.

God moved in her heart. She came to saving faith in 1994. So overwhelmed by her new faith, she began to post flyers all over town to see a church begin in her own village. Pastor Valery brought Stas along to minister at the fledgling church that had sprung up. Later, at only 16 years of age, Stas began preaching weekly at the church.

Week after week people met in Ludmila's home. In 1998, she married Vasily—a man who also was brought to faith by Valery, and he took over for Stas as pastor. The missionary work throughout the region truly began as God's team had just been formed. They bought a car that barely ran and started taking the Gospel everywhere. Ludmila and Vasily, along with Galina and young Stas, took the Gospel throughout Yakutia. Dozens of villages heard the Gospel for the very first time. Every day, they went to needy families with food and the Gospel. Today, Stas is 40 years old, has a family of four, and leads an association of 24 churches extending even into the transpolar regions where they are still herding reindeer. It is these churches that SGA is dedicated to serving, for the task remains unfinished. Hundreds of villages and orphanages in the vast region of Yakutia have yet to hear the life-changing Gospel. ♦

God took a few people with broken lives and no training to be His zealous ambassadors to a lost and hurting people. What is stopping you?

CIS IN THE NEWS

Russia: No New Cold War

Many pundits have suggested that Russia and the United States are headed for a new Cold War, but Russia's deputy foreign minister dismisses the idea. According to Sergei Ryabkov, the current tensions between the two countries "isn't equivalent to confrontation that may spill into open conflict. I don't think we are in a state of a new Cold War because there are no grounds for it in the old meaning of the term—a confrontation between systems and ideologies, ideological rivalry." Mr. Ryabkov added that decades of experience have taught both Washington and Moscow caution.



Sergei Ryabkov

Tensions between Russia and the U.S. have heightened over the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. election controversy, and the war in Syria. Please pray that God will protect the churches and not allow political controversies to hinder the Gospel, or to block the resources they need for ministry. ♦

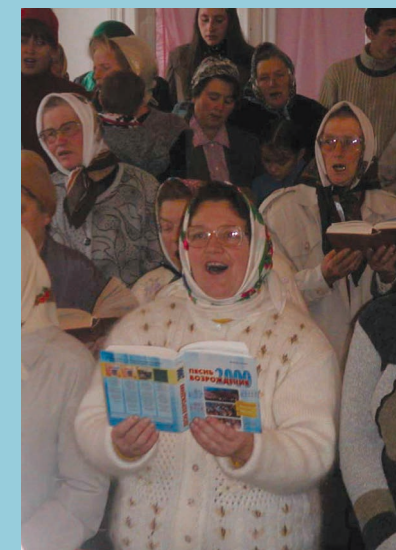
HOW YOU CAN HELP

As we begin 2018, our hearts are so deeply thankful to the Lord for what He has done over the past year through your generous support and faithful prayers. In future issues of the Good News Report,



The Immanuel's Child program reaches children throughout the region.

we look forward to reporting on the fruit of Immanuel's Child outreaches, as well as the other SGA-sponsored ministries across Russia and her neighboring countries. Your support helps make Gospel outreach possible for many.



Your support helps make worship possible for so many.

Please prayerfully consider how you can help today!

Insight FROM MICHAEL

As I traveled across Russia and the other countries that made up the Soviet Union, one thing I observed very quickly is that large cities like Moscow or Kiev do not paint an accurate picture of what life is really like for millions of people. If you get out into the rural towns and villages, your heart will likely be broken when you see the tragic poverty that exists. So many live in very run-down, small old houses or dilapidated apartment complexes. Winter is especially harsh, and families have to scrape together any heat source they can find from firewood to coal. Some even lack these resources.

In light of this, I am so very thankful to God for the opportunity to help evangelical churches reach these families through *Operation Winter Warmth*. I will never forget how SGA partners responded to the need when I served with the mission years ago. We were able then to ship over tons of warm clothing, footwear, and other humanitarian aid. These days, we can purchase the aid overseas and supply the churches directly—much more cost-effective than shipping and negotiating the customs minefields. And the emotional, thankful reaction of those receiving help is truly moving. They are amazed that someone cares about them enough to help them with their most basic needs, and frequently are much more open to hear of salvation in Jesus Christ. You truly have a part in this ministry, and I thank God for every one of you.

As we embark on 2018, I ask you to join me in prayer that God will increase His provision—not only for *Operation Winter Warmth*, but also for all the other SGA ministries designed to help His church proclaim the life-changing Gospel. There are numerous challenges that lie ahead in the coming year, and I trust that you will be with us as always. Thank you for all that you do!



Michael Johnson
President



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Prayer & Praise

SHARING THE GOSPEL • EQUIPPING THE CHURCH • HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Please join us each day this month in praise for the work of Christ in the Russian speaking lands.

1 **Reflection/New Year's Day:** We begin this new month with the psalmist's beautiful song of trust in the Lord . . . *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change* (Psalm 46:1-2).

2 Please continue to pray for the children reached with the Gospel through last month's *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreaches. We pray that the Gospel seeds planted will take root and grow, leading to salvation and eternal life for many!



3 Lift SGA president Michael Johnson in prayer this month. Ask God to grant him abundant wisdom and direction as he maintains a heavy travel schedule in the coming days.

4 Pray for SGA's international offices in Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. We are thankful to God for their devotion to the Gospel's advance across the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Eastern Europe.

RUSSIA



5 Russia's presidential election is scheduled to take place later in the spring. Pray for God's hand of protection over His people, and for continued freedom to proclaim the Gospel and worship freely.

6 Please lift up Pastor Vlad Treskin, who serves as national youth ministry director for the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (UECB). Pray for him today, and for his fellow youth pastors across Russia's vast expanse.

7 Political tensions have been heating up again between Russia and Western nations due to various factors. Our prayer, as always, is that these tensions will be eased and that nothing will hinder the ministries of the evangelical churches we serve.

8 We praise and thank the Lord for Valery Kazakov and SGA's Moscow Regional Ministry Center (RMC) team. Valery and his staff are joyful and tireless in their service to Russia's evangelical churches and assist U.S. staff traveling in-country.

9 Pray for Russian UECB leadership both at the national level, and in each of the 89 oblasts (states) across the country. May the Lord grant them great wisdom and direction in leading their congregations.

UKRAINE



10 Pray today for SGA's Kiev RMC staff, led by Ruslan Muratayev. While Ukrainian churches enjoy great freedom, they also face many ministry challenges including great poverty and ongoing political turmoil in the country.

11 Please remember the faculty and students of the SGA-sponsored Irpen Biblical Seminary in prayer. We praise God for the growing impact of this biblically sound school on the ministry of the church across the CIS.

12 Intercede for the family of SGA's Sergei Omelchenko, who serves as our chief Russian-language book editor and assistant to SGA president Michael Johnson. May the Lord encourage their hearts as they faithfully serve Him.

13 SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Oleg Ogorodnik and his

congregation in Radomyshl continue to share the Gospel on the street in their town, and several young people have come to faith in Christ. Join us in praising God for Oleg's fruitful labors.

14 Please intercede regularly for Pastor Valery Antonyuk, president of the Ukrainian UECB. As the ministries of the churches are impacted by the ongoing conflict in the east, ask God to grant them wisdom and opportunities to share the reconciling love of Jesus.

15 Distributing food and other aid through SGA-sponsored Compassion Ministry continues to be a key outreach of evangelical Ukrainian churches. The needs are especially acute during winter, so join us in praying for increased resources.

BELARUS



16 Pray today for Piotr and Dima Podrez, and the rest of SGA's Minsk RMC staff. May God grant them increased opportunities to help evangelical churches in what can be a very challenging ministry environment.



17 In Belarus—as is the case in the other CIS nations where SGA works—churches will be engaging in follow up ministry with children reaching during *Immanuel's Child* Christmas ministries. Ask the Lord to go in advance, preparing the hearts of the children and their families to respond to the Gospel.

18 Lift Belarussian UECB president Dr. Viktor Krutko in prayer today. Join us in praising and thanking the Lord for the fruitful Gospel partnership SGA has enjoyed with this faithful brother for many years.

19 Missionary pastor Alexei Alexeevich held a very fruitful VBS ministry last summer and continues to have a vibrant children's outreach. Ask for God's continued blessing and provision ahead of this spring and summer's outreaches.

20 Continue to intercede for the SGA-sponsored children's

diagnostic center and camp ministry at Kobrin. This camp assists hundreds of children suffering the effects of Chernobyl radiation that continues to plague a significant portion of the country.

KAZAKHSTAN



21 Pray for Pastor Franz Tissen, president of the Kazakh UECB. Also intercede for the regional pastors responsible for overseeing churches in the country's 14 provinces as opposition to their ministries increases.

22 Pastor Myrza, whose ministry SGA partners help sponsor in Kazakhstan, reported that he was able to hold outreaches with permission from local authorities, which is a huge blessing. Pray for a fruitful harvest from the Gospel seeds that were planted.

23 We are thankful to God for the Kazakh evangelical churches that participate in the SGA-sponsored *Orphans Reborn* ministry. Pray for the additional resources needed to expand this outreach into more regions as the needs remain great.

24 Pray for director Alexander Karyakov at the SGA-sponsored Almaty Bible Institute. May God continue to grant His favor and protection to this solid Bible school in a nation where Islam is increasingly dominant.

CENTRAL ASIA, CAUCASUS, & ISRAEL

25 In Uzbekistan, evangelical churches face a great deal of pressure from the government as well as other religious groups opposed to their ministries. Pray for Khafis, a faithful missionary pastor who discreetly holds children's outreaches as God opens the door.

26 Although the war in Russia's Chechnya region officially ended in 2009, this Caucasus region can still be very dangerous for evangelical churches and missionary pastors. Please pray for God's

protection for those who discreetly share Christ's love with the lost.

27 Pray for Bill Ball, executive director of SGA/Canada, and his assistants Sue Petten and Olive Coke. May God encourage their hearts and increase his provision for the CIS ministries supported by our Canadian partners.

28 **Reflection:** We conclude February with the wonderful encouragement found in Hebrews . . . *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful* (Hebrews 10:23).

Partner Prayer Requests

Pray for loved ones facing surgery and serious illness . . .

Flat Rock, Michigan

Praising God for the safe return of my son . . .

Calimesa, California

Please pray for our 40-year ministry . . .

Mountain Home, Arkansas

We are both battling diabetes . . . pray for better health . . .

Schenectady, New York

**The SGA staff is honored to bring your request to the Lord.
We thank you for the opportunity to serve you in this way.**



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