



## “Shoe-ing In” in the Fruitful Harvest

*How God Uses Faithful, SGA Partner Churches for the Sake of the Gospel*

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Bret Laird  
Executive Assistant  
to SGA President  
Bob Provost

Recently, I visited Barre Evangelical Free Church (BEFC) in Vermont, a long-term SGA partner church. The congregation was greatly encouraged by participating in a live video interview with one of the missionary pastors they’ve sponsored in Belarus for many years. But I was even more encouraged by the outpouring of love from the congregation, and the testimony shared by Pastor Neal Laybourne.

BEFC had humble beginnings. Pastor Neal spent two years doing evangelism in this spiritually hardened part of the country, before founding the church with two families in 1981. They shared rented space with a karate club, and Pastor Neal

had to be bi-vocational for the first eight years. In human eyes, they were few in number, with little resources, ministering in a hard, cold, and spiritually oppressed area.

But the Lord had impressed upon them a principle that would enable this small church to have a worldwide impact. Pastor Neal expresses it this way . . . *The story of how the Lord multiplied the 5 loaves and two fish, given by a small boy, teaches us that when we see great needs and have no resources to meet them, God wants us to give our pathetically insignificant—yet sacrificial—gifts anyway.*

The BEFC congregation began applying that principle to missions, and God began doing miracle after miracle.

In 1989—even though they had only 90 people—they sent 27 to start a new church, and in the next five years helped to start two others—and God blessed their

sacrifice by granting them growth. They are now the largest evangelical church in the area.

When believers in Belarus shared an urgent need for socks, the Lord unexpectedly provided bags of brand new socks that were being thrown away by a manufacturer due to a defect on the last stitch. Volunteers from the congregation began sorting them and fixing the stitches. Soon the volume overwhelmed them, so they recruited elderly women in eight nursing homes to help. But the expense of shipping the socks to the nursing homes and then to SGA was prohibitive. So they asked their local shipping office to send 12 large boxes for free—and they agreed! Over the next 6 years, this office shipped 1,500 boxes absolutely free of charge!

Though desperately in need of their own facilities, BEFC decided to devote 90% of their building fund to missions . . . and then God responded by blessing them with an abandoned downtown building they purchased for the symbolic amount of \$1.38!

When their partner church in Belarus



was given a free piece of land with the condition that they begin construction within nine months, BEFC didn't know what to do, as the congregation was "tapped out" from recent, generous giving. So they raided every part of the church budget, asking every ministry leader to sacrifice something. But the \$2,200 they were able to cobble together was still far short of the need. So they did what they could, writing letters to everyone they knew—and a \$5,000 check came from a church in Cincinnati, enabling the construction in Belarus to proceed on schedule. Pastor Neal summarized, "Our gifts were pathetically insignificant—yet sacrificial. And God multiplied them."

But the most amazing way God multiplied the sacrificial giving of this church came in 1996. After the collapse of the Soviet



Thousands of quality shoes and boots were shipped through the generous donation of a major footwear company and the initiative of BEFC members.

Union, good shoes—especially warm winter shoes—were either unavailable or unaffordable. After hearing of this widespread need, BEFC sprung into action, collecting shoes from their congregation and friends. But they only had a few pairs.

Rather than conclude they had "done all they could," they began asking local shoe stores to donate shoes. The stores all said "no," but referred them to their suppliers. So a member of the church, Jean Dufresne, started calling them one by one. They all said "no", except for one. They asked, "How many pairs do you need?" Not wanting to ask for too much, but stepping out on faith, Jean answered, "50-100 pairs." They immediately said "no." Jean was brokenhearted, thinking she had asked for too many. But then they said, "We can only donate if you can use several thousand pairs and provide us with guarantees they'll stay off the black market." Jean referred them to



... having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15)

SGA, and soon thereafter 3,094 pairs of exceptionally high-quality winter shoes were donated, followed a few months later by 279 more...then 1,251 more...then 1,354 more...then 2,164 more...then 1,419 more...1,630 more...then 1,642...then 814 more...and then 1,409 more!

Then in 1999, SGA received a huge surprise. The company was retiring an entire line of products, and wanted to donate everything they had left over on Dec. 31. The amount? More than 45,000 pairs! SGA's *Soles for Souls* ministry was born, and these shoes enabled missionaries, pastors, and church members to trudge through snowy streets all over the former Soviet Union, taking the good news of the Gospel wherever they went. *How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news* (Isaiah 52:7)!

All of this began with—as Pastor Neal puts it—"pathetically insignificant—but sacrificial gifts." The Lord took their five loaves and two fish, and multiplied them. The total wholesale value of the 64,066 boots and shoes donated over the five years of the *Soles for Souls* project was more than all the money for any purpose that had come into BEFC for the first 30 years of its existence! Pastor Neal's conclusion? "Belarus taught our church that God does miracles!"

# Reaching the Orphans of Russia's Far East

## The Overwhelming Need for SGA's *Orphans Reborn* Ministry

By Eric Mock  
Vice President of Ministry  
Operations

Life in Far East Russia can be challenging at best. The winters are bitter cold, with temperatures exceeding 50 below zero Fahrenheit. Living in this harsh region of Russia takes its toll most notably on families, where divorce is double that of the United States. In fact, the Far-East regions of Magadan and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (Birobidzhan) lead Russia in alcohol consumption (an estimated 2/3 of all violent crimes in Russia are alcohol-related).

Such living often means that children suffer the most. These children suffer neglect, abuse, with many becoming wards of the state and following the pattern lived out before them by their parents. These children are scattered across this vast region in 334 state-run orphanages. Nearly 70 percent of all children in Russian orphanages have a

living parent or guardian. With broken hearts, these children suffer daily with growing hopelessness, as they look for their parents to come and take them home—and the parents never come. I have visited orphanages where the children crowded around me just for a chance to hold my hand or get a hug. For these dear ones in the Far East, hope is even harder to find. If being an orphan is not difficult enough, a majority of them have never heard the Gospel, nor have they been told of the hope we have in Jesus.

As many of you know, through the SGA-sponsored *Orphans Reborn* ministry, we have been serving amazing Bible-teaching local churches as they reach out to orphans. We hear of orphans coming to faith and being totally transformed by God's grace. We know of orphans who have been saved, and after leaving the orphanage on reaching young adulthood, have continued on as part of *Orphans*



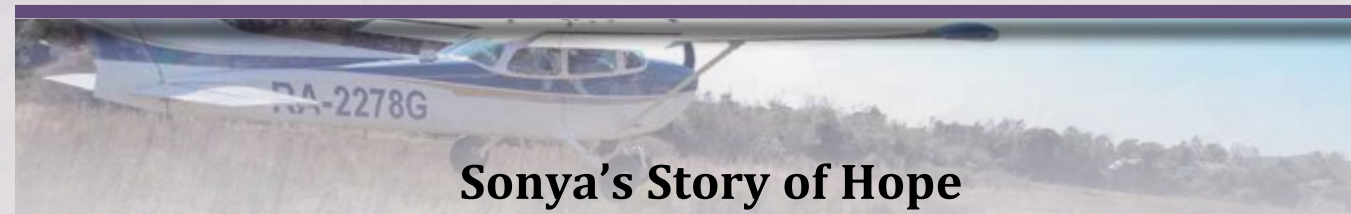
*Reborn* teams themselves. They keenly want to reach younger orphans for Christ just as they were reached.

For a time in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, a local church supported through the *Orphans Reborn* ministry lovingly visited such children. Orphans in this tiny remote region were hearing the Gospel and being discipled monthly. They were turning to Jesus and finding lasting hope where there was previously none. Then suddenly, the door to the orphanage tragically closed. At that time, this was the only ministry to orphans in Russia's Far East that had requested support. However, under SGA's new *Reach Russian Now* initiative, we pray this will soon dramatically change!

There are currently only 65 evangelical churches across this vast region to reach 6.3 million people, but many of them are near to orphanages. Today, these churches are only able to hold ministry at nine of the 334 orphanages, and that only on a sporadic basis. So much more can be done to help the

fatherless in the Far East of Russia, and to comfort their broken hearts. Today there are churches in four key regions of the Far East ready to establish regular visits each month to these nine orphanages, and even double the number of orphanages they are reaching. Yet even this falls short of the need!

Will you join with us in both seeing more churches planted through our *Reach Russian Now* initiative and more orphan children reached with the Gospel through *Orphans Reborn*? These children and crying out for hope, a hope that only our Lord can truly provide.



## Sonya's Story of Hope

By Bret Laird  
Executive Assistant to SGA President Bob  
Provost

*Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation (Psalm 27:9)!*

The SGA team's visit to the Far East to launch *Reach Russian Now* brought much encouragement and excitement to us all. The faithful pastors mobilizing their congregations, the eager evangelists waiting to be sent, and the airplanes ready to carry them to take the Gospel to those who have never heard—all brought us tremendous joy and a sense of anticipation of what God is about to do. And one deeply moving testimony about a Christian family adopting a heartbroken, abandoned girl shows that God is already at work preparing the ground for a fruitful harvest.



Eight-year-old Sonya

Hearing about eight-year-old Sonya and visiting her adoptive family was the highlight of the trip for me personally. Alexei is a faithful missionary pastor who ministers in a large village. The love he and his family had for each other and for Christ was clear, and their home—though very humble by Western standards—was filled with joy. And radiating that joy was Sonya. Seeing Sonya wrapped in her mother's arms and flashing her bright smile, it was hard to imagine how different

her life is now from the way it began. Nothing is known about Sonya’s biological parents. What is known is that God providentially intervened to save her life. Late at night, a Russian policeman was driving down a remote country road, and out of the corner of his eye noticed something moving on the side of the road. It was Sonya. She had been tossed out like trash and abandoned. And she was dying. The severe cold and exposure had taken their toll, and she was barely alive by the time the policeman carried her into the nearest hospital. Miraculously, she survived, and was eventually transferred into an orphanage. But in God’s plan, she was adopted by Christian parents who love her and cherish her.

After hearing her story, I couldn’t help but say to her, “My dear Sonya, you’re a living miracle.” With the simple certitude that is the precious hallmark of child-like faith, she replied simply and sweetly: “I know.”

As adults, when hearing stories like this, our minds immediately jump to all the “what ifs.” What if the policeman had decided to take a right instead of a left? What if he had glanced down at his radio

in that split-second when the edges of his headlights illuminated the child? What if a wild animal had heard her cries before he arrived? What if the temperature had been a few degrees colder? But for Sonya, it’s all really quite simple: “God saved me and gave me a family.”

When she grows up, Sonya will certainly contemplate the marvelous truth that it was God who knit her together in her mother’s womb. She may wrestle with

why her biological mother abandoned her and left her to die. She may wonder about the interplay of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility in bringing that policeman down exactly the right road at the right time. She may come to understand that the life-saving care she was given in the

hospital was a manifestation of common grace, which flows from man being created in the image of God and blessed with the ability to “subdue the earth.” Someday, she may contemplate, wrestle, wonder, and understand more fully. But for now, the love of God manifested in the embrace of her parents—and the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ— is all she needs to know.

*At the beginning of her life, she was tossed out like trash. But now she is treasured.*

## CIS in the News



### Peace Remains Elusive in Ukraine’s East

Although little is mentioned by the news media, eastern Ukraine continues to endure horrendous fighting between Russian separatists and Ukrainian government troops. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said a battle near Avdiivka in January caused large

numbers of casualties and a humanitarian crisis for 17,000 people. The OSCE called for a recommitment to the cease-fire reached during talks in Minsk, Belarus, and to allow repairs for critical infrastructure.

This ongoing tragedy underscores the need for continuing ministry through SGA’s Crisis Evangelism Fund, which enables churches to distribute much-needed humanitarian aid including food, along with evangelistic literature. Pray for the missionary pastors serving in this region, as the danger is very high, and for the families receiving aid to be open to the Gospel. Pray also for peace to come at last after several years of bloodshed.

## How You Can Help

In simply human terms, the thought of reaching every inch of Russia with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is daunting. As a whole, there are more than 130 different people groups. And the majority of the six million living in remote Far East Russia have yet to hear the life-changing Gospel. Your faithfulness will help send faithful workers to the harvest field there and across the CIS. You help children’s ministries, Bible training, Compassion Ministry and humanitarian aid, crisis evangelism—and so much more. Please pray about how you can help today!



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# Innercircle Perspective

*Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here,  
but He has risen (Luke 24:5,6).*

God's great power was manifest in Jerusalem . . .

*. . . the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.*

*. . . At early dawn, they (the women) found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*

*. . . Behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen." And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.*

*The chief priests and elders gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' And they took the money and did as they had been instructed;*

*and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

But to this day, they couldn't stop the risen Christ from building His church.

Across the Russian-speaking lands today, Easter is celebrated with first century excitement. It is amazing to behold! "*Christos Voskres!*" is heard everywhere and the response is always a resounding, "*Voistinu Voskres!*" (Christ arose.... Indeed He arose!)



Dr. Robert W. Provost  
SGA President

The churches SGA serve hold many extra services, evangelistic lunches with Easter cake, and

other joyful Easter events, and unbelievers are usually excited to be invited. There are usually banners above the streets and large signs even in Red Square, saying, "*Christos Voskres!*" And all the churches celebrate Easter in every service for 40 days until they celebrate Christ's ascension into heaven.

I would love to be able to take you and every faithful SGA partner to join in the wonderful Easter celebrations. It is glorious and your prayers and your help make it all possible. We thank God for you.



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