



For Such a Time as This *Michael A. Johnson Returns to SGA as President*

Recently, Dr. Bob Provost sent a letter to SGA partners announcing his decision to retire after nearly 23 years as our mission's president. In his letter, Bob echoed the similar words of SGA founder Peter Deyneka Sr. when he decided to retire in 1975. While celebrating God's hand of blessing on SGA and our many fruitful ministries during his tenure, Peter said that it was time to transition leadership to someone with the strength and endurance of a younger man. He also noted that his successor, Peter Deyneka Jr., was already familiar to SGA partners.



And here in 2017, God has amazingly arranged similar circumstances as our board of directors has unanimously chosen Michael Johnson to succeed Bob as president of SGA effective May 1. Michael has a long history with our mission, having served as our vice president of advancement from 1996-2004. Board chairman Warner Tillman reflected on

how God's hand has guided this entire process . . .

For Michael and SGA, this is truly coming full circle for the glory of Christ. During a visit Bob Provost had made to a supporting church in New York City 21 years ago, he encountered Michael at an Adult Bible Fellowship Michael was teaching. Michael was then a young Madison Avenue advertising executive with a passion for teaching God's Word. Not long afterward, Bob invited Michael and his wife, Erin, to serve Christ at SGA.

During those years, Bob mentored Michael, and Michael helped develop SGA's Orphans Reborn and Immanuel's Child ministries, and





assisted in the growth of our training and church-planting ministries. In 2004, Michael stepped back into the business world to help put his sons through college. He has served for the past several years as senior vice president of the highly respected firm, Douglas Shaw and Associates in Naperville, Illinois. Through these experiences, the Lord has been equipping and preparing Michael to return to SGA for such a time and place as this.

In passing the torch to Michael, Bob Provost reflected with thanksgiving on what God has done through the gifts and prayerful support of our partners during his tenure . . .

Through you and other faithful partners over these past nearly 23 years, the progress of the Gospel across the Russian-speaking lands has been far more abundantly beyond all that we could have asked or thought.



As SGA's Vice President of Advancement, Michael helped develop our *Orphans Reborn* ministry.

Through the training of pastors, the planting of churches, the reaching and discipling of children and youth, especially orphans, great numbers of souls have been saved and are serving Christ.

But there is much more to do. With the great number of believers who have migrated to North America, the number of people remaining in the CIS who are secure in Christ and worshipping the God of the Bible is less than one percent. And more than 90 percent of all the communities are still waiting for their first Bible-preaching church, especially in Russia's Far East. The work that remains to be done is staggering, yet we trust that God will guide and provide in the exciting days ahead.

Michael desires to build on the solid biblical and ministry foundation laid by Peter Deyneka and Bob Provost, who will continue to serve as an advisor to Michael and is being honored by the board with the title of President Emeritus. Please join us in thanksgiving for God's provision, and please pray for Michael as he takes up this enormous responsibility for the glory of Christ.

Reaching the Orphans of Russia's Far East

The Overwhelming Need for SGA's Orphans Reborn Ministry

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 on families, where the divorce rate is double that of the United States. This region is among the highest for alcohol abuse, which impacts many families. .

Such living causes children to suffer the most from neglect and abuse. Many in this region are housed in 334 state-run orphanages. Nearly 70 percent of these children 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, get a hug, or sit on my lap and ask me to take them home with me. For these dear ones in the Far East, hope is even harder to find.

As many of you know, through SGA's *Orphans Reborn* ministry, we have been serving amazing Bible-teaching local churches as they reach out to orphans with the Gospel. We often 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 upon reaching young adulthood, have continued on as part of *Orphans Reborn* teams themselves. They love to reach younger orphans for Christ just as they were reached.

In the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, a local church supported through the *Orphans Reborn* ministry lovingly visited such children. 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 Russia Now* initiative, this is already changing dramatically! Plans are being implemented to visit ten orphanages.

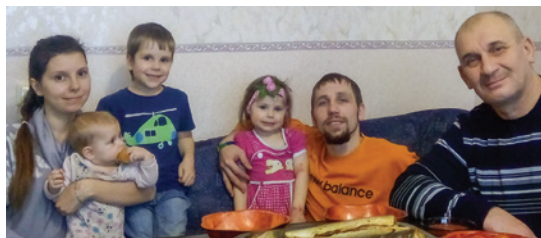
So much more can be done to love the fatherless in the Far East of Russia, and to comfort their broken hearts. Today there are churches in four key regions of the Far East ready to establish ministries at 10 orphanages. Please join us in praying for sponsors for this. Please join with us so that more churches can be planted and more orphan children can be reached with the Gospel through *Orphans Reborn*. These children are crying out for hope, a hope that only our Lord can provide.

God's Power on Display in the Courtroom

So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying to both small and great . . . (Acts 26:22).

Faithful evangelical believers across Russia and her neighboring countries encounter many different types of opposition. But God has the power to take the opposition of men and turn it into opportunity, as He vividly did in the life of a young man named Yevgeny. Missionary pastor Victor Bogushevich recently shared this wonderful testimony in a report to his SGA sponsors . . .

Alexander and Karina are a missionary couple sent out by our church. Alexander teaches school and is active in youth ministry. There are people in his village who are very negative



Victor (right) with Alexander and his family.

about the teaching of God's Word. One day, unknown people set Alexander's car on fire, destroying the vehicle completely. Alexander went to the police to report it, but the authorities were indifferent. They took the report, but said that there would not be any way to find who had burned the car. In other words, they made it clear that

they weren't going to do anything about it. Alexander kept visiting the station and pressing for investigation, but the local police just laughed and told him not to come back—they were tired of him.

Alexander quietly replied, "All authorities are established by God, and if you do not want to seek the person who committed this crime, I am going to ask for help from the Most High Authority—Jesus Christ Himself. And if He wills, the person who did this will come to the police station and confess his crime!" The police burst into laughter again, and Alexander left.

About a month later, a young man named Yevgeny walked into the police station and wanted to make a confession. He was the one who had set Alexander's car on fire. When the astonished police asked Yevgeny why he decided to confess his crime, he replied that he couldn't understand what was going on with himself. He could not sleep at night, and even during the day did not feel at rest. All he could think about was the burning car and the nagging thought—"Go to the police and admit your crime!" During the trial, Alexander told the court that he forgave Yevgeny and did not want any reimbursement for the car. That same night, Yevgeny



The convicting power of the Holy Spirit drew Yevgeny (second from left)

came to Alexander's home and asked why he had been forgiven, providing Alexander with a God-given opportunity. "Christ has forgiven me

much more and He commanded me to forgive you!" On that same evening, Yevgeny repented and trusted in Christ as his Lord and Savior!

In September of 2016, Yevgeny was baptized and shares his testimony as God provides opportunities. Please pray for him, as well as for Alexander, Karina, and Victor, as they shine the light of the Gospel in a very dark corner of Siberia.

God's Provision for Needy Children in Central Asia



Through Compassion Ministry and other resources provided through SGA partners, evangelical churches are reaching out to needy families in Central Asia where poverty is rampant. Recently, school supplies were provided for children in families where the parents are hearing-impaired, and the Gospel was shared. Our missionary pastors held Bible lessons and other activities with the children. Not many of the families can afford to buy school supplies, and they were very happy to receive the gifts . . .

I am 12 and I believe in God. Thank you very much for the presents. I heard about Christ, and I believe that He came to this world in order to save sinners,

and to grant them eternal life through His death on the cross. I pray to Jesus, asking Him to help me be His servant in the future. (Tamiljah, age 12)

I am in the sixth grade. I like reading the children's Bible, and I praise God for hearing my prayers. I am thankful for the gifts, and I am very thankful to God that He cares about me. I pray to God and attend the church, and I share biblical stories with my friends. (Aziz, age 12)

We praise and thank our Lord, for He encourages the hearts of brothers and sisters to give and bring joy into children's lives. May His love reach more people, and give them the desire to seek God and bring Him glory!



The Power of God's Word in the Heart of a Child

Polina Kozlova
SGA-Sponsored *Orphans Reborn Team*
(Russia)



Valeria

Valeria is only 10, and on first sight she seems to be a normal child in this orphanage. She was admitted four years ago from another orphanage

that the authorities closed down due to some criminal issues. Valeria had been abused, which probably contributed to her behavior being so unruly—to the point that all the teachers could do was leave her alone.

The first year she was at our orphanage, Valeria did not come to our lessons very often. When she did come, she would sit quietly in a corner, with her arms closed, and sway from side to side. It was a very sad picture and I began to pray for her.

Over the last academic year, she became the best student in our class. Valeria recently gave me a very pleasant surprise. At the end of the lesson, I asked the children to tell me which of them reads their Bible on a regular basis, and not only for completing homework, but in their leisure time. Very few raised their hands. But when the lesson was over, Valeria came to me and said that she had something important to tell me.

Quietly, she began to speak. *"I try to read the Bible very often because I need to know the way I need to live. Since I invited Christ into my heart, I need to know more of how to please Him and not to sadden Him with my sins. He healed me. I had a nervous breakdown and I asked Him to heal me, and He helped, and now I am healed."* Amazed, I asked her when all of this had happened, and who helped her to come to Christ? She looked at me somewhat puzzled, and replied, *"I was just reading the Bible and it became clear to me. I realized what I needed to do. Do I need someone's help to turn to God?"*

Of course, the answer to her question was no, but how wonderful to hear that a child was able to come to the point of understanding such a serious decision. God really can do anything without external help! He can accomplish His work in the hearts of sinners, and it does not matter the age.

Friends, I beg you to pray for Valeria, asking that God will strengthen her faith and keep the fire burning in her heart, as well as grant her continuous assurance in Christ. Today I can see the changes in her life, and the teacher also witnesses about it. This brings joy to our hearts, and gives us understanding that our labor in Christ is not in vain!

CIS in the News

Tensions Remain High in Ukraine

Recently there have been several outbreaks of renewed violence related to the war with separatists in eastern Ukraine. In addition to the fighting—which has claimed more than 10,000 lives—news media have conflicting accounts about blockades of certain goods to and from the region.

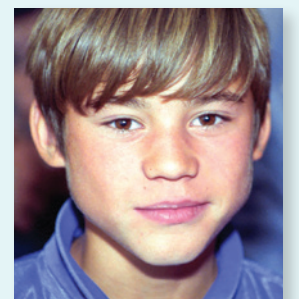
The ongoing loss of life and societal upheaval caused by this conflict grieves our brothers and sisters in evangelical Ukrainian churches. SGA continues to help as much as possible through our Crisis Evangelism Fund, which

supplies funds for food, clothing, shelter, heating coal, and other aid for refugees. Please join us in praying for the peace to hold, for settlement of the conflict, and for the ongoing resources needed to help the churches minister to the victims.



How You Can Help

As yet another fiscal year draws to a close at SGA, we praise and thank the Lord for what He has accomplished for the sake of the Gospel. And we give thanks for you, our ministry partners, for your faithfulness to the cause of Christ. Your prayerful support helps SGA continue to provide vital Bible training, church planting, youth outreaches, children's ministries, Russian-language Bibles and Christian literature, compassion ministry, and many other impactful ministries. Yet much remains to be done, and many millions are still waiting to hear and even wanting to hear, but there is no one to tell them. Please pray about how you can help today!



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Innecircle Perspective

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all. . . (Philippians 1:3-4)

When you receive this, our faithful Russian-speaking partners in the Gospel will still be celebrating Easter. They cling to the celebration of its great significance until they celebrate the ascension of Christ into heaven on the fortieth day after His Resurrection.

These are also very important days at Slavic Gospel Association. SGA founder Peter Deyneka traveled the globe holding massive all night prayer meetings asking God to bring down the Berlin Wall, while claiming God's promise in Jeremiah 33:3 that He would answer with *great and mighty things, which you do not know*. In God's providence, I was in Kiev with the Baptist theological leader of the Soviet Union, Pastor Yakov Kuzmich Dukhonchenko, when God so gloriously answered the prayers of countless millions of Christians.

Duke, as he was affectionately called, expressed grave concern that the soon coming freedom would bring a flood of false teachers to destroy the churches that had paid a terribly high price for their faith. I responded with, "Brother Yakov Kuzmich, if our Lord allows me to serve in your country my highest priority will be to help you maintain a doctrinal fence around your faithful churches."

Our Lord brought me to serve at SGA in 1994. Since then you have faithfully prayed and generously supported the biblical training of some 10,000 Russian-speaking

servants of Christ to *guard the treasure* of God's Word, including several hundred believing Russian-Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ in Israel.

By now you should have learned that our Lord has once again wonderfully answered our prayers. He has brought Michael Johnson back to SGA to serve as president, and to lead and sustain our emphasis of sound doctrine to protect the churches, and help them continue to advance the Gospel of Christ across their eleven time zones and even in Israel.



Dr. Robert W. Provost
SGA President Emeritus

I first met Michael in New York in 1997 when as a business executive he was also teaching an adult Bible fellowship class in an excellent church. I brought him and his wife, Erin, to visit SGA. I asked him to join our team to find new partners to help us reach more Russian-speaking people for Christ. For the next six years, I mentored Michael and he helped us develop the *Orphans Reborn* and *Immanuel's Child* ministries, while also attracting many new partners.

Now it will be my great joy to continue as *President Emeritus* and serve as advisor to Michael as he leads SGA forward for the glory of Christ. Please pray for our Lord to powerfully bless Michael and Erin and give him a strong start in leading SGA forward.

Once again my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you. May our Lord continue to richly bless you and SGA, as we strive together for His Kingdom.



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