



SERVING CHURCHES — REACHING RUSSIAN SPEAKERS

November 2017

Alcoholic Transformed by Christ Reaches Hurting, Curious Children

Many testimonies have come to us from Russia and her neighboring countries about men, women, and children being gloriously saved out of sin and despair! Those powerful testimonies—and even more the visible evidence of a changed life—are used by God over and over to build eternal links in His chain of grace.

Here is one example: After last year's ***Immanuel's Child*** Christmas outreach in the Kabardino-Balkaria region, SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Viktor Levashov wrote to tell us how a former alcoholic named Sergei amazed a group of needy children and their mother . . .

*At this state sanatorium, there are **200 children** who stay there for three weeks of rehabilitation. Then new children come. We saw the director and offered to hold a Christmas program, and it was accepted. The children,*



parents, and the staff were happy and enjoyed the program. I had invited Sergei to come along and help us distribute gifts.

Sergei had spent 16 years in prison, and heard the Gospel when

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . (Romans 1:16).

believers visited the detox center where Sergei was staying. He asked us for help when he heard that Christ could set him free. We sent him to our

Christian rehab center, and there he repented. **Sergei was baptized and now ministers in the rehab center. Before his salvation, Sergei lived in the street, was often drunk, and slept on the ground.** But God had other plans.

During the Christmas distribution, a lady with her children came up and expressed their great surprise. **The children asked, “Uncle Sergei, is it you? You take part in the puppet theater [this is part of the Immanuel’s Child presentation]? How could you stop drinking?”** The children told me that Sergei often used to stay at the entrance of their house and was often drunk.

They noticed how much he had changed—he was dressed in good clothing and did not smell the way he used to smell when he was on the street. His eyes and facial expression were changed. Sergei said that it was Christ who changed him. Others overheard this conversation. The mother of the children asked us for our church phone number and address. She said that she knew many dependent people and would tell them about us.

God used your support for Immanuel’s Child—and for faithful missionary pastors like Viktor—to provide Sergei’s powerful



These Bethlehem Stars remind the children that Jesus loves them, and that an SGA partner is praying for them.



The Church is Growing in Central Asia!



By Eric Mock
SGA Vice President of
Ministry Operations

As I write this, I am in the midst of a trip to visit churches in the Central

Asian nations. The Lord has blessed our time in here. The ministry continues to be profound in the midst of economic hardship and religious persecution. There are very few evangelical believers among millions of predominately Muslim people.

But by God’s grace, the church is growing and the testimonies are compelling.

For example, a woman who I will call **Lydia came to faith as a result of SGA supported Compassion Ministry.** Lydia lived in the Russian city of Krasnoyarsk with her three daughters. Her life was



Lydia’s life was powerfully changed by an encounter with the Word of God.

difficult at best, for her husband was physically abusive. She was in constant pain, and one day her husband threatened to kill her. Fearing for her life, she gathered up her children and fled as far away as she could go—to a country here in Central Asia.

Lydia knew no one, and suffered great economic hardship. **She found a job as a waitress, but the local population looked on her as an outcast.** Yet there was some who did not pass her by: Pastor A and his wife reached out to Lydia with much needed food and the Gospel. She had grown up in the Russian Orthodox tradition, and had read the Bible with little regard.

This time, she was given a Bible and began to read it with care and interest. She started with Genesis, and then she was pointed to the New Testament. Lydia’s her was radically changed as she placed her faith in Christ. She said that sin was a part of her life on every side. Now by God’s grace, she says she is getting better. **The church she attends now has become an outstanding ministry to the many social orphans in the community.** Pray for Lydia, Pastor A, and the ministry of this vibrant church reaching out for Christ in difficult conditions.

Crisis Evangelism Fund Update

Although the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has seldom been in the news these days, the fighting has not ended. SGA established the Crisis Evangelism Fund (CEF) to help supply evangelical Ukrainian churches with food, clothing, shelter, and other humanitarian aid. **Since the conflict broke out nearly four years ago, SGA partners have helped thousands of refugees from the conflict zones, but more help is needed and the CEF needs to be replenished.** Below are some wonderful examples of what your prayers and support have helped accomplish.



War Refugees in Desperate Need of Compassion . . . and Christ

The ongoing war has shattered many lives and heavily damaged dwellings. Your gifts help reach refugees with aid and the life-changing Gospel.

Pastor Dmitri’s church serves as **one of the vitally important CEF aid distribution centers** in Ukraine. In a tour through the conflict zones at Easter, Dmitri took some heartbreaking photos that reveal the awful devastation caused by the ongoing hostilities. He reports that the help of SGA partners is opening doors for the Gospel, and bringing hope to shattered lives . . .



*We continued our relief operations in the spring, traveling to the Mariinka area and surrounding villages. **Sadly, even on that Easter when people search for peace and mercy, the shelling continued with even more loss of life and destruction.** It was hard to find comfort for one lady we visited as she stood in the ruins of what was once her home. It had taken lifetimes of toil for her entire family to build the home, and now it is gone. **It is so important we do what we can for these who bear tremendous losses and live in grief.** The streets can be dangerous with unexploded mines and shells, but we still go. A food parcel with bread, a kind word, and Christ’s love can make a huge difference for these individuals and families.*



God Draws Students to Weekly Bible Study in Far East Russian University

Alexander Dubynin
SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastor in Far East Russia

For the last six years, we have been praying about organizing ministry on the campus of **Far Eastern Federal University**, which is located on the island of Russky in Vladivostok. This is a strategic place where people from many different regions come to study and work. Some time ago, two of the brothers from our church got jobs on campus with a firm that oversees catering and food supply to the University. As we set aside a special day for prayer, these brothers started to organize regular informal meetings with young students. **Today, it has grown to where we hold meetings every Thursday with the students. God answered our prayers!** You and I are the witnesses of this—the Lord builds His Kingdom and guides the history of our civilization towards His glory! We dreamed and prayed about this, and now God has opened this door for us. Friends, be persistent in your prayers!



Children Respond to the True Story of Christmas!

2017 Immanuel's Child Goal: 20,000 Children

In little more than two months' time, Russian Christmas will be here. Lord willing, needy children across Russia and her neighboring countries will gather for SGA-sponsored *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreaches organized by the evangelical churches we serve. **These eager boys and girls will receive Christmas gifts that SGA partners help provide, and hear the true account of the greatest gift of all—the Lord Jesus Christ and how He came to earth to save His people from their sins.**

Over the course of last year's outreach, more than **17,000 children** were reached with the Gospel—a full **12,270 of them from unbelieving families!** Our hope is to reach even more this Christmas—at least 20,000—and the wonderful reports we received from missionary pastors demonstrate a harvest waiting to be gathered. In Kazakhstan, opposition to evangelical churches is growing, but nothing can stop the Lord from drawing boys and girls to Himself . . .

A boy named Gosha who had attended summer camp once learned about our Christmas celebration from another boy who comes to Sunday school. He came to the service and

*had Immanuel's Child stars with him. Gosha said that he had received a letter in his mailbox, and in the letter was a prayer of repentance and some Golden Bible Verses. **During the Christmas celebration, Gosha said that he had received Jesus into His heart and asked Him for forgiveness. He has started coming to the church!***

In the Russian city of **Volgodonsk**, five *Immanuel's Child* gatherings were held at four churches. After a Bible-based play about the Christmas story, the church teams began asking questions that got the unsaved children thinking . . .

*There are children who know the Bible story, while there are others who think it is a real story but do not know why. **We asked them, "Is***



A gift given in Jesus' name helps open a young heart to the Gospel.

*Christmas a fairy tale, and if not, why not?" Then we asked them if they knew which year it is now and how we count our time, years, and era. This part of the questioning had the unsaved children wondering. But we showed them that our era began with the birth of Christ—one more proof of the reality of the event. Then we asked them, "Who is Jesus Christ? Whose birthday are we celebrating and what gift can we give Him?" We then spoke of repentance and the Gospel. **Afterward, several children began coming to our children's Bible club at the Central Church, and new children also began coming to Sunday school at the Resurrection of Christ Church.***

Since *Immanuel's Child* began in 2003, it has been a fruitful partnership



As they receive their gifts, children learn of Jesus, the Greatest Gift of all.

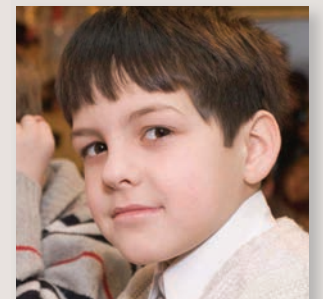
between Russian-speaking evangelical churches across the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and North American congregations. Desiring to reach even more needy children for Christ, SGA leadership last year prayerfully determined to open *Immanuel's Child* to individual partner support in addition to the participating churches. **Please pray with us that God will provide abundant resources for this year's ministries, and that thousands of children would come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord!**

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This Christmas, You Can Help Make Disciples!

It is such a wonderful blessing to see needy boys and girls respond with joy to the Gospel of Jesus Christ after the door is opened by expressions of His love at Christmas. We look forward with great anticipation to this season's *Immanuel's Child* outreaches to see what God will do in the lives of thousands of children. **It's just a part of what you help accomplish through your prayers and faithful support throughout the year—**serving missionary pastors, providing Bible training, humanitarian aid, Russian-language Bibles and Christian literature, and much more. Please pray about how you can help reach the lost across Russia and her neighboring countries for Christ today.



Insight from Michael



Michael Johnson
SGA President

As I have noted in previous columns, it's been a wonderful thing for me to return to SGA and see the vibrant growth of ministries that I saw from the beginning or in their first years.

This month's look at the SGA-sponsored *Immanuel's Child* children's Christmas outreach is no different.

Thanks to your faithful prayers and generous support, *Immanuel's Child* has grown to become one of the most vibrant, fruitful outreaches of the churches we serve across Russia and her neighboring countries. As thousands of children receive



the gifts you helped provide, and hear the true Christmas story of the Lord Jesus from God's Word, the seeds are planted for them to be saved and become disciples. These children often become the little evangelists who open the door for their parents or caregivers to be reached with the Gospel. Year after year, we rejoice at the impact of *Immanuel's Child*.



And then there is the impact on supporting churches here. I am thankful for the hundreds of churches here across North America that prayerfully support this outreach each year. As the offerings are taken to help purchase the gifts, and Bethlehem Star ornaments are hung on Christmas trees as reminders to pray, a true partnership in the Gospel takes place. Won't it be wonderful in heaven to see the eternal harvest gathered because of this joint effort to see young souls saved? I think so!

Late last year, the decision was made to broaden the support of *Immanuel's Child* to include individuals as well as churches. I am praying that many will discover the joy and blessing of being a part of reaching a young boy or girl for Christ this Christmas!



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Slavic Gospel Association
6151 Commonwealth Drive
Loves Park, IL 61111
www.sga.org
E-mail: insight@sga.org
Phone: 815-282-8900
Fax: 815-282-8901

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