



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION
Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Your Prayers and Support Reach into the Depths of War . . . and the Hearts of Orphans

INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ♦ War refugees face a nightmare winter—Christ is the only hope.
- ♦ Despite the epidemic, orphans turn to Jesus for salvation and new life.
- ♦ A glorious way to begin 2021!

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)



You are Sending Gospel Hope and Help to War Refugees

SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastors Aid Needy Families in War-Torn Region

Next December 25—Christmas Day in Western nations—will mark 30 years since the breakup of the Soviet Union. In some areas, those 30 years have been filled with turmoil and war. The Nagorno-Karabakh region between the former Soviet nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan is one such territory.

War broke out between the two countries over possession of this region in the early 1990s, and late last year, fighting broke out again.

The result? Many dead and wounded. Heartbreak. And thousands of needy refugees. The people inhabiting this region are already under severe stress from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war has made things even worse.

Yet your prayers and faithful giving have enabled SGA-supported churches on both sides of the border to visit refugees with much needed humanitarian relief, and most importantly, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Eric Mock, SGA vice president of ministry operations, describes the difficulties being faced in stark terms:

“On the Armenian side, refugees have attempted to return home as winter set in. They returned to find their homes destroyed or occupied. There is much anger and pain right now. Some of the aid



Bringing food packs to a family that moved from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

was used to purchase small heaters as people have returned to homes where there is no heat, and the house is freezing. They are suffering as well on the Azeri side, and SGA-sponsored missionary pastors are the only ones helping there.”

An Azeri church leader wrote to tell us that the aid is making a tremendous difference:

“Today, we safely got back home after we met with families who have lost their houses due to the war. The weather has been foggy, rainy, and cold. The needy families were delighted to get warm blankets, warm clothing, and medicines. These people were not able

to take anything out of their houses when they endured shelling. We cannot thank you enough, but we want you to know that when we were giving out toys to the children, they were radiating delight, it was a pure and peaceful joy that only a child can have. We also had an opportunity to share the Word of God with the children’s parents. We were not able to take many photos, because they did not want to be photographed, but that did not prevent us from giving them food, warm clothes, and the Gospel!”

In Armenia, believing families have also been severely impacted. Pastor Asatur describes their plight in the aftermath of the fighting.

“Brother Grigor has a family of seven—his wife Anahit and their five children. They are members of the Baptist church in Stepanakert (capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh region). They



Delivering aid in Azerbaijan.

had moved there in 2009 because Grigor had been offered construction work and came to faith in Christ afterward. Several days before the war, Grigor broke his leg and has been unable to work. They were unable to pay the rent on their apartment while they were refugees, and the owner is urging them to leave. They have no other home and have to start from scratch. Grigor and his family are grateful for the

support from SGA partners during these difficult days.”

While a cease-fire agreement has been brokered in Nagorno-Karabakh, the needs of the refugees are likely to continue for some time. Please be in prayer for them, and for the evangelical churches reaching out to them with help and the love of Christ. We pray that many will trust in Christ as their Savior as they hear the life-changing Gospel! ♦

Despite the Pandemic . . . Your Gifts Help Missionary Pastors Carry On with Life-Changing Ministry!

Anatoly Sedogin
SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastor in Usman, Russia

I greet you, dear friends in the Lord! Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been able to come together for worship while observing the necessary measures to protect health.

One of our sisters in the Usman church gave her unfinished house to the church as a gift. There are several Christian families in the village, and we held the first worship service with them in July. We prayed, asking the Lord to bless the construction that would now take place, and He did! We began cutting grass and cleaning up garbage. We also invited local believers to take part in fundraising for the church construction. Progress has been made and Bible studies are now being held there. We also held a baptism service, with eight people publicly declaring their faith in Christ and a celebration afterward.



At the baptism service.

Together with other church members, I visited the town of Dankov where the church was celebrating 50 years of ministry. Then in Yelets, the church there was celebrating 100 years of ministry, and Baptist Union president Dr. Piotr Mitskevich joined me in the celebrations, with many prayers and joyful songs being sung. Then back in Usman, we celebrated our Harvest Day by baptizing more new believers and sharing our testimonies at the worship service. I also organized a men’s meeting in Bolshaya-Kuzminka, where we held a night prayer service and asked the Lord to help us be faithful witnesses in word and deed.

Ministry to needy families impacted by the pandemic was not forgotten, and we gave out food parcels to them, along with New Testaments and sharing the Gospel. We invited them to our church services in the days ahead. In addition to all of this, I visited Dankov, Lipetsk, Leo-Tolstoy, Khlevnoye, Yelets, and Gryazi, where another baptism service was held. Please continue to pray for me and my family, for God’s protection from the pandemic, and that God will raise up new workers here to help in the ministry. Pray also for church construction in Chaplygin and Golovchino, where funds are needed. I want to thank you for your support of my ministry! ♦

You Helped Plant These Seeds!

Summer Orphans Reborn and Youth Ministry in Krasnoyarsk

Vadim Barsukov and Anastasia Ostanina
SGA-Sponsored Orphans Reborn Team in Krasnoyarsk, Russia

I do not know what effect the pandemic had on worldwide politics and the global economy, but in our ministry to teenagers, orphans, and children from dysfunctional families, this past summer was a very profitable time! Because of the challenging situation, we had to re-evaluate everything about how our ministry operated.

We decided not to hold our annual “Sinai” camp in our usual form. We knew that we would not be able to evacuate a person from the middle of the wilderness during a 10-day rafting trip—if someone ended up becoming ill, it would have been very difficult for us. Instead, we led a walking tourist route for a group of 13 children and 7 leaders. We had planned three, but due to bad weather and other church events, we were able to hold only one trip. In

our walking trip, for our spiritual meditations, we read the story of Esau and Jacob. We showed the children how in pursuit of earthly goods



Top and Above: Walking trip with children.

and careers, we often lose God's blessings and even our souls. There were different children on our trip, some heard about God for the first time, while others had to re-evaluate their priorities.

The seed was planted!

Instead of one of the planned trips, we took a group of teenagers from the orphanages, along with older orphans, to a church retreat. Dr. Piotr Mitskevich, president of the Baptist Union, and



Session at the church retreat.

Pastor Oleg Askalenok led the sessions and then we held a baptism service. **Not only adults, but also young people between 17 and 19 years old entered into covenant with the Lord. All together there were 19 people who were baptised.** This had great influence upon the children. They asked questions during seminars and general assemblies.

Again, the seed was planted!

After that retreat, three of the youths stayed



Exploring God's creation during the walking trip.



Daniel with his Bible.

the Bible in his hands!

There was also time to participate in a family camp called Arc. **This was a camp where a Christian family and a non-Christian family were bound together into one team. They stayed together, read the Bible, participated in all camp**



Top: Family camp; Above: Baptism

overnight with me because it was too late to return to their orphanage, and before we went to bed a boy named Daniel said, “I want to read the Bible.” I gave him a Bible and he read it till he fell asleep with

events, and witnessed to unbelievers, and as for our family it was both recreation and ministry!

The last Sunday we baptised one of the older orphans who had graduated from an

orphanage where he had attended our lessons and summer camps. Our work is not in vain!

The seed was planted.

In July, we were able to hold a teenage camp in the town of Novokuznetsk. The camp was attended by teenagers from all over Kuzbass. All together there were 65 people. During the week, the children heard a full explanation of the Gospel. Each night, there was a brief message and then discussion in small groups. On the last day of the camp, the children spent 15 minutes in quietness. They were sent to different places around the camp area: in rooms, indoors and outdoors. The goal was to not talk to anyone for 15 minutes and to spend the time being focused on their thoughts and listening to their hearts. When the time was up, children came back to their leaders and prayed together. **A total of 25 teenagers out of 65 prayed the prayer of repentance, while other children asked for prayer as God worked in their hearts. The seed was planted!**



Top and Above: Teenage camp in Novokuznetsk.

Due to quarantine many events were cancelled, but the work that the Lord entrusted to us could not be either stopped or cancelled. **Thank you for your support and prayers! ♦**

With Your Help, Aviation Ministry Takes Off in Far East Russia!

Michael T., Far East Russia

God's sovereignty is not only a doctrine for theologians to wrestle with, but a doctrine which fills the hearts of ordinary man and woman with confidence and assurance that God's plans will come to pass. With this conviction, two and a half years ago we arrived in Far East Russia. I am not the best at making detailed plans, but with the help of many people, we had a clear and detailed plan for our life and ministry to serve the church here in Russia. Initially our focus was on getting settled in a new place, but soon after the basics of life were taken care of, we shifted our attention back on the main reason for the move. And the reason was simple, to use the skills and experience which God has given us to assist with taking the Gospel of Jesus to the unreached. Aviation is my background and I purposed to help the local churches in using aviation to reach the distant villages of Far East Russia.

By the time we moved, missionary aviation had already become a reality in Far East Russia, and I supposed that I would smoothly blend into the work of the ministry and it would only continue to grow in its effectiveness. Contrary to my expectations, shortly before we arrived, the operation in our local region had stalled. The annual certification had lapsed on both aircrafts and we found ourselves in an uphill battle to get the airplanes back in the air. Shortly after our arrival, several significant changes were introduced into the federal aviation regulations. The changes affected the following areas: the classification of our aircraft, the engine and propeller time, and calendar limitations. In short, every part of the aircraft was affected by the changes of the new regulations. What made the new process even more difficult, was the confusion on how to implement these new requirements on the level of the local aviation authorities. Everyone was confused and it took time to



The first flight.

burn off the fog of the new requirements.

Two and a half years later, as the dust of confusion in complying with the new requirements settled, we were able to complete the certification on one of our aircraft in October of this year. This was a major milestone in our efforts to resuscitate missionary aviation in Far East Russia. Unfortunately, due to the flooding of our airfield, the next milestone had to wait a little longer, but the waiting is over. **The day before Thanksgiving 2020, in God's sovereign plan, together with the local missionary pilot and my wife as the media representative, we left the frozen runway along with the many questions of uncertainly behind us and circled the airfield.** The first flight consisted of mostly take-off and landings and maneuvers near the airfield. The airplane did great; the pilots could do a little better (that is usually the case). With all the legal documentation in order, a decent workshop, and a covering for an airplane (hard to call it a hangar), we are intent on continuing the flights into the winter months. We will begin with shorter flights to familiar airfields and build up our experience for flights to more remote and difficult areas.

It is hard to predict the future in any part of the world these days, but it is reassuring to know the One who controls the future. We continue to rest in the sovereignty of God, as we move forward in taking the Gospel to people in remote areas of Far East Russia. ♦

CIS IN THE NEWS

Russia's Health Systems Strained Under COVID Pandemic

With a second wave of COVID-19 cases breaking out late in the fall, health care systems around the world—including Russia—were placed under severe strain. Toward the end of November, 81 percent of hospital beds set aside for coronavirus patients were full, and the number of daily new infections per 100,000 people had doubled since the beginning of October. Russian president Vladimir Putin urged regional health officials to not underplay the matter, saying “feigning the impression that everything is perfectly normal is not acceptable.” In the region of Buryatia, local authorities imposed a strict lockdown after local hospitals were overwhelmed.

While the United States and other Western

nations have certainly felt serious impacts from COVID-19 with strained health care services, the impacts on Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union have been especially severe, especially in outlying regions where infrastructure is lacking. The economic impacts have been tragic as well, driving many families and individuals into deep need. **Your prayers and support for the SGA-sponsored Christ Over COVID ministry is making a huge difference for these families, providing food and other essentials.** In addition, this outreach is opening wonderful opportunities to share the Gospel and the love of Christ. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP



Bringing food packs to a family in the Ukraine war zone.

It is a new year, and its arrival brings many new needs and ministry opportunities for the evangelical churches SGA serves across the former Soviet Union. Whether it is food aid for needy families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, help for war refugees in the Nagorno-Karabakh region or eastern Ukraine, or meeting individuals and families in regions where the Gospel has never been preached, your faithful support continues to have eternal impact. You are helping to provide Russian-language Bibles and Christian literature, theological training for pastors and church workers, ministry to orphans and other needy children, resources for planting new churches, and so much more. Please pray about how you can help today! ♦



Delivering aid to an Azeri family.

Insight FROM MICHAEL

What a Glorious Way to Begin 2021!

If there has been one phrase repeated by many as 2020 exited the stage, it was “good riddance!” It was indeed a difficult year for so many as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the globe, claiming thousands of lives and disrupting economic livelihoods. We endured government-mandated shutdowns for a good portion of the year, as well as the political turmoil of an election year. And that was only here in the United States.

Life was beyond difficult in the former Soviet Union, where our brothers and sisters in Christ faced numerous challenges related to the pandemic. Fighting continued to sporadically break out in the **eastern Ukraine war zone**, and a new military conflict erupted between **Armenia and Azerbaijan** over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. In **Belarus**, massive protests against the authoritarian government began after the August

presidential election there, and the government responded with a severe crackdown that drew international attention. And those were only a few of the many troubling events that took place in a very troubling year.

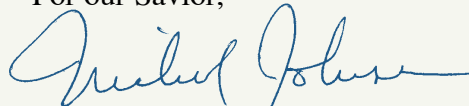
Yet in the middle of all the trouble, our faithful Lord and Savior shone a bright light of hope that only He can shine. His

people—driven by His loving compassion and supported through your faithful giving—stepped into the storm of events with food, medicine, warm clothing as needed, and the Good News of the Gospel that so many desperately needed to hear. The global media rarely cover good, joyful news, so it is up to us as followers of Christ to share it far and wide.

Lives are being changed. Needy people are being helped. The broken-hearted are being comforted. New believers are being baptized and welcomed into the family of God. The Gospel is being proclaimed, and new links in His eternal chain of grace are being forged. The Lord continues to build His church as He promised.

And the great wonder of it all is that He graciously allows you and me to be a part of His great work. **What a glorious way to begin 2021!**

For our Savior,



Michael Johnson
President



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Good News Report is published to report religious news about Russia, the rest of the CIS and the ministries of:

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