



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

# Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

## Believers Offer Christ's Compassion to Orphans, Outcasts, and Refugees



### INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ◆ Read how four families in troubled Belarus are receiving God's love—and what could come next.
- ◆ A joyful orphan—once rejected—now opens heart to Christ in Irkutsk.
- ◆ Pastors bring hope in the midst of great sorrow.

*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)*

# Four Struggling Families in Belarus

*Your support brings Christ's love to many homes like these*

**Editor's Note:** Four families. Four stories. We could tell you of countless thousands. Please read **Pastor Pavel's descriptions** of the plights of these four families in **Vitebsk, Belarus**. Please read and take a moment to pray for them.

**F**irst, I want to tell you about **Svetlana**. She is a **single parent**, raising a son and daughter—Maksim and Alina. She works in commerce, but her salary is very small. The pandemic has hit Svetlana hard and she is not in good health as it is. The children attend school and some of their teachers have COVID-19. Svetlana is **open to the Gospel and listens carefully**. She understands the need for repentance but is not yet attending the church. Her faith is gradually growing, and I am **praying that soon God will call her and that she will come to Him**. She is so thankful to you for the help.



Svetlana and her two children.

**Grigori** is a father of four. **His wife left him to raise their three children on his own**, but he got married again. He has a fourth child with his new wife. They had COVID but God had mercy on them, but sadly an uncle in their family passed away at 61



Grigori's family.

years of age. Their children—Egor, Ellina, Lera, and Polina—**listen to the Gospel carefully**. They are all thankful for the food. Pray that they also will come to the Lord.

**Natalya** is a **single parent** as well, with **two biological children and two foster children**. Her husband passed two years ago. In spite of all these hardships, she is raising two orphan children. We shared the Gospel and gave them food and Christian literature. Natalya said, "Prayer is fuel for the car!" We pray for their salvation.

The Lord cares for His children in this critical time also. **Andrew and Yulia** are the parents of four children, and both take an active part in the church's ministry. Andrew helps with transport while Yulia teaches Sunday school. **Yulia and one of their daughters had COVID**. As we visited them and helped them with food, we shared with each other about how God takes care of His children in difficult times. They thank you with all of their hearts. I cordially thank you for your help in sowing the Gospel with families during the global pandemic, and ask that you continue to intercede in prayer. ♦

# Christ's Word—and a Beloved Orphan—Open Doors in Irkutsk!

*Your gifts support new Immanuel's Child and family outreaches*



Delivering Immanuel's Child gifts in Bokhan.

**R**ecently, following a request from church leaders in Russia's Irkutsk region, SGA partners helped us begin supporting **Compassion Ministry** in a remote village in Siberia called Bokhan. The local pastor, Alexander Timofeyev and his wife Galina, were excited to learn of this because they **had not been supported by anyone** for several years. And they got even more excited when they learned that **SGA also provided them with funds for an Immanuel's Child Christmas outreach, which has never been held in Bokhan before**. Alexander shared about his family and ministry with us . . .

*I came to Bokhan as a missionary in 2014, and also married Galina in that same year. We have always kept in our hearts the words of Joshua—As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15).*

*Therefore, we decided to adopt an orphan child in hopes of giving the opportunity to be happy in Christ to at least one. Arina suffers from spina bifida and conditions that are related to it. Despite this, she*

*is growing, joyful, and sociable. On her own, she learned the song "Hallelujah" by watching other kids sing it. She is such a blessing, and the Lord has given us such joy through her. The Lord opens many doors through our daughter, as people see that we do not only give lip service, but also carry through on good works for His glory.*

*Thanks to SGA partners, our church engaged in preparing for Immanuel's Child in Bokhan. We purchased gifts, sweets, warm socks and gloves, and also included Christian books and the Star of Bethlehem ornament. We praised God for His provision, and it shows that even though we live in countries far from each other, we are near and close as one family united in His name!*



The children were delighted to receive the Christmas presents.

*Pray for Alexei and Anna Kononov and their children. Both Alexei and Anna had been going through rehab at a church, but the church closed and for several months they had no means of support, and were jobless. The day before, Alexei cried to God in prayer saying "Lord, you are an ever-present help in trouble! Please, help us!" After he said those words, the phone rang and he was invited to a church meeting. The next day, the brothers in the church got them a load of firewood for heat, and helped Anna find a part-time job. Alexei said that the Lord truly is always ready to help in times of trouble! The children received special gifts with the help of you in North America, and the whole family was delighted to become part of our church! ♦*

# Eternal Hope Rises from the Ashes of War

## Rendering aid in Jesus' name to war refugees in Armenia and Azerbaijan

When armed conflict broke out again last September between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, thousands of families had already suffered devastation from the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, some 2,855 Azeri soldiers were killed, along with more than 3,000 Armenian soldiers. About 150 civilians lost their lives, and thousands were driven out of their homes to become refugees.

When you add the COVID-19 pandemic into the equation, the need, heartbreak, and tragedy only increased. **It is into this great sorrow that SGA partners helped evangelical churches in both countries step in to bring comfort, urgently needed humanitarian aid, and the hope of the Gospel.** Between April 2020 and January 2021, evangelical churches distributed enough food to provide 77,263 meals to needy families impacted by



Delivering food packages to needy families.

the pandemic, and later the war refugees. The food packages also contained items such as shoes, blankets, and some medicines.



The disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In Armenia, Pastor Asatur told us of Armen and Alla, an Armenian family that had been living in Nagorno-Karabakh. *“They had been driven out of Azerbaijan in the first war back in the 1990s and settled in Shushi. Through the ministry of the Baptist Church there, they became believers and built a beautiful home there, allowing the church to use it for children’s ministry and youth. Then the new war broke out, and they barely escaped with eight children. Sadly, their two oldest sons did not return from the war and their bodies have not been found. They are in a small apartment in Stepanakert, but they are having great difficulty.”*



Bringing groceries to a family in Armenia.



Above, Right, and Below: Distributing aid in Azerbaijan. Pastor Khafiz's face has been blurred for his protection.



In Azerbaijan, Pastor Khafiz and his church are also ministering to suffering families: *“We recently returned home safely after we met with families who lost their homes in the war. Dear brothers and sisters, the needy families were delighted to get warm blankets, clothes, and medicine. They were not able to take anything out of their houses when the shelling was going on. The children radiated delight when they received the toys, and we were able to share God’s Word with the parents. We cannot thank you enough!”*

There are many other reports coming in from this troubled region—reports that are wonderful examples of how your prayers and gifts are making a difference as shattered families receive help in the name of Jesus. **Please continue to intercede for our brothers and sisters! ♦**



# The Euro-Asiatic Baptist Federation: A Fruitful Partnership in Advancing the Gospel in the Former Soviet Union!



Pastor Yuri Apatov

A few weeks ago, we had the wonderful opportunity to hear the testimony of Pastor Yuri Apatov, executive secretary of the Euro-Asiatic Baptist Federation—a cooperative fellowship of the individual Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of each former Soviet country. The vital importance of SGA's partnership with the faithful churches that make up the Federation cannot be overstated. As our faithful partners provide the resources for fruitful ministry, this broad network—thousands of churches strong—has been strategically placed by God to share His love and preach the Gospel across all 11 time zones of the former Soviet Union.

If we could select one word that sums up Yuri's passion and that of the dedicated pastors that serve these churches, it is unity. And that is in obedience to the Lord, who said . . . *that they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me* (John 17:21)

As Yuri relates, *"During the Soviet days, we used to have one union for all Baptist churches in one country. Since the authorities persecuted believers, our brothers and sisters treasured their unity and connection. In the 1920s, many churches were liquidated, and the pastors were sent to prison camps in*

*the 1930s. Yet during World War II and right after that, persecution certainly continued but we were allowed to start the Baptist Union within the Soviet Union. This existed until 1991 when the Soviet collapse took place, and then Baptists in each country developed their own unions. As time went on, we thought of how we had come together for our congresses in the past. We wanted to keep our unity, and so the Federation was formed. Our basic principle is that when we are together, we are stronger!"*

Yuri's own testimony is a wonderful example of God raising up a leader at just the right time to help achieve His purpose. Yuri came from a non-believing family in Russia's Kursk region. He studied physics and mathematics at a special university, and while there, he began soul searching. Reading books by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky raised questions about belief in God and he began thinking. He eventually visited Moscow's Central Baptist Church and became a believer, which was a shock to his atheist communist parents and at the university. He was thrown out of Komsomol (the Soviet communist youth organization), but by God's grace not expelled from the university. Yuri's military specialty was rockets. He would later find out that one of the colonels connected with his case had become a believer himself and also joined Moscow Central Baptist Church! And today, Yuri heads the Euro-Asiatic Baptist Federation, which SGA has been privileged to serve and support for many years!

Please join us in praying for SGA's ongoing partnership with the Federation, as well as for the individual member churches across the former Soviet Union. Having such a broad network helps accomplish so much more ministry, and the conflicts in eastern Ukraine and the Nagorno-Karabakh region is a great example of how our joint labor can accomplish much for the sake of the Gospel. Ask the Lord to open even more doors for outreach in the days ahead! ♦

## CIS IN THE NEWS

### New School Heightens Concerns in Disputed Nagorno-Karabakh Region

According to a report on the website of **International Christian Concern (ICC)**, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Azerbaijan's president Ilham Eliyev have approved of building a so-called "**Grey Wolf School**" in Nagorno-Karabakh. The move was announced by the head of Turkey's **Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)** during a parliamentary address in Ankara January 16. The Ulku Ocaklari Education and Culture Foundation is building the school, and this foundation is an official name of the Grey Wolves—labeled as a terrorist organization by the international community. The Grey Wolves allegedly acknowledged their presence during the recent hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. ICC

spokeswoman Claire Evans expressed deep concern, saying that *"some of the worst religious freedom incidents in Turkey's history were at the hands of the Grey Wolves. **This decision is completely incompatible with Turkish-Azeri promises to protect religious diversity.**"*

The evangelical churches that SGA serves in both Armenia and Azerbaijan are focused on sharing the love of Christ and the Gospel with people on both sides of the conflict, and with the aid of SGA partners, helping needy refugees. **Pray for peace to come at last to this region, and that the love of Christ will overcome the hatred and bitterness of war.** ♦

### HOW YOU CAN HELP



Compassion ministry in Ukraine.

*How blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in a day of trouble* (Psalm 41:1).

Even though it has been 30 years since the Soviet breakup, **deep poverty** remains a serious issue in those nations. Economic turmoil has not been the only trouble the people have faced. In many regions, war and bloodshed cause deeper poverty, death, and sorrow. And of course, the deadly COVID-19 pandemic has added even more stress on an already bad situation. **It is into these sorrows that your prayers and support help churches share the love, comfort, and provision of the Lord along with the life-changing Gospel.**

In addition to food and other aid, **you help provide Bible training, children's ministry, support missionary pastors dedicated to reaching the lost, Russian-language Bibles and Christian literature, and so much more.** Thank you! Please prayerfully consider how you can help today! ♦

# Insight FROM MICHAEL

## The Compassion of Christ Opens Many Doors

After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 and ministry in the constituent countries became possible, one of the first things noticed by Western Christians who visited was the deep poverty that existed across much of society. The atheistic communist system had wrecked the economy, and the collapse of the system made poverty even worse. Over the next 30 years, things got better in some regions, but in others there was little to no change. Today, poverty is heightened even more by armed conflict in several regions plus a deadly pandemic.

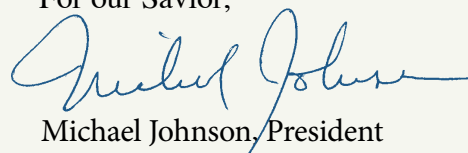
Along with others on the SGA staff, I have seen this poverty up close and it is heartbreaking. But along with the heartbreak and devastation, I have seen the joy and thanksgiving that results when faithful missionary pastors and church workers distribute aid that our partners helped provide. We all rejoice when we receive the wonderful reports from the churches testifying about how the love of Christ being shown to a needy family opened the door for the Gospel, and how new men,

women and children have been born into the family of God as a result.

Since the deadly COVID-19 pandemic began spreading across Russia and her neighboring countries, SGA partners have helped churches take much needed food and other aid to hurting families. This is in addition to SGA-sponsored Compassion Ministry already taking place in Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and other countries. As you'll see in the article on the Euro-Asiatic Baptist Federation in this issue of Good News Report, the existing network of sound Bible-teaching churches is foundational to ensuring that urgently needed help gets to where it needs to go the most. And along with the humanitarian aid, entire families are hearing about the hope of the Gospel—the Lord using the tragic circumstances to bring many to a saving knowledge of Himself.

I can't express my thanks enough for all that you do in your partnership with SGA! We will keep pressing on as the Lord provides and grants the opportunities. Pray with us for a bountiful harvest of souls as His love is proclaimed.

For our Savior,



Michael Johnson, President



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