



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

# Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

## Christmas Ministry is Coming Soon!

### God Uses Your Prayers and Support to Reach Many!



#### INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ◆ *Immanuel's Child* blessed so many last year—now we're ramping up again!
- ◆ A stern school principal softens to the Gospel!
- ◆ As war and distress grind on . . . God moves to bring people to Himself.

*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)*

# Your Gifts Will Bless Thankful Hearts at Christmas

*Immanuel's Child touches children and adults with the story of Christ*

As summer comes to an end and cooler temperatures arrive, the countdown begins in earnest for the upcoming Christmas season and SGA-supported *Immanuel's Child* outreaches across the former Soviet Union. With the support of SGA partners last year, a record number of children received Christmas gifts and heard the Gospel as the true story of Christmas was shared.

**Valentin is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Russia's Altai region, and he describes how each year's ministries begin on a foundation of prayer:**

*"In October, we began to pray for the Christmas holidays at the initiative of the sisters of our church. We began praying for the children and their parents, and that God would give us wisdom in organizing all the meetings and events, praying about finances, the presentation, and for those who would participate.*

*Last year, we held Christmas evangelism outreaches in front of houses where believers or children who attended our church lived. And this year we agreed to do the same thing. We decided in advance who would do what and almost all members of our church wanted to participate. This, too, was a manifestation of the glory of God—the unity of His Body.*

*The first outdoor program lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. One boy named Oleg told us, 'I have a cross.' We replied, 'It is good that you have it, since the cross reminds us of Jesus, but it is more important for you to receive Jesus into your heart.' They were then instructed about repentance and given an example of prayer. 'When are you coming again?' Oleg asked. 'Probably in the spring,' we answered. 'Come visit us!' sounded the reply. Thus, two more souls were touched with the great mystery of God's salvation. At the second meeting, there were more than 20 children who came with their parents. Some of the adults joined in the celebration. The Christmas story, focused on the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, was heard with joy by both children and*



Outdoor *Immanuel's Child* Christmas program.

**adults.** *A grandmother always brings her two grandchildren to our celebrations, which are held outside. And this time she was not alone, but with her daughter Anna. After speaking with Anna, you could see how the message of salvation touched her heart. She cried and asked us to pray for her and her grown-up son. The Lord softens the hearts of people!*

*At the third meeting, they were waiting for us, as everyone had already gathered 15 minutes before the beginning. There were also about 20 children with their mothers, and the Good News resounded again. We also handed out gifts and books at the end of the celebration, and every child received one. 'But I can't read yet!' exclaimed one boy. 'Can your mom read?' – 'Yes, she can!' – 'So, you'll read together!' – he was delighted when he left!*

*Once again, we would like to thank all those who helped us minister to the children and their families. Thanks to these meetings, some children have begun attending our Sunday school. Some adults have also begun attending our church services."*

**Please pray in advance for Pastor Valentin and the hundreds of churches across the former Soviet Union that will hold *Immanuel's Child* ministries this Christmas. Pray that an even greater number of children will be reached with the Gospel and come to faith in Christ! ♦**

# "Are you going to do your propaganda again?"

*Immanuel's Child "miracle" in Beslan opens a closed door*

By German

SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Beslan, Russia

We would like to extend our special thanks to the sponsors of the *Immanuel's Child* project for your year-round support. There is a saying in Russia that miracles happen not only in fairy tales, but also on Christmas Eve. If "heavenly stars" from *Immanuel's Child* had not rained down on us, I cannot even imagine how we could carry out this project, reaching all 20 schools of the Pravoberezhny district and those in the town of Beslan.

Through *Immanuel's Child*, a miraculous event happened in my life and I cannot help but share it with you. Back in November 2018 in one of the Beslan schools, I gave a Bible-based talk on preventing alcoholism. **Halfway through my talk, the principal of the school stopped me and asked for the microphone.** I did not understand what she did not like about my presentation. Looking at the children, she said, "All our children are very good, no one has ever dishonored their parents, or their teachers, or our school. We do not need your moral teaching, and we will cope with all the difficulties without your help!" As the audience left, she declared that I would never set foot in her school as long as she was the principal. Since then, we have often remembered her in our prayers, and the ladies' prayer group also prayed for her salvation.

This past January, I visited that school again. As we do with the administration of all the other schools, I proposed to the principal our cooperation, with the first project being a Christmas concert and blessing the children with gifts. She looked into my eyes and asked, **"Are you going to do your propaganda again?"** I replied, "Yes, I am." Our conversation ran for over an hour and a half, and to my surprise it turned out to be a heart-to-heart conversation. She asked many questions, such as how I came to believe, and so on. In the end she

said, **"We will be waiting for you on Christmas."** Like in the other schools, the celebration at their school went great, and we saw God's blessings. The children and the teachers were thankful. **After saying goodbye to the principal after the performance, she told me that she liked our team very much and that she would be looking forward to our further events!**

As part of our Christmas tour last year, we visited the school that was the site of the 2004 terrorist attack that killed 333 people, including 186 children. **During the Christmas concert, the children heard about the birth of Jesus. By God's grace, we were able to talk about the meaning of the birth of our Savior for all nations.** I had a short conversation with my former teacher, who was also held hostage with her students in 2004. She thanked our team and the church for these many years we have been supporting the children from School No. 1. She added, "It is so important in these days, because if they do not have knowledge of God, and if they are not aware that God sees all our deeds and works, and if they have no fear of God in their mind, what can keep them from sin?" **Let us pray and believe that the seed sown in their hearts will bear fruit in the knowledge of the Son of God! ♦**



*Immanuel's Child* Christmas program in School No. 1.

# Being Fishers of Souls in Belarus

*SGA-sponsored missionary pastor and wife bless orphans during special lake outing*

Pavel C.

SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Belarus



Lena and Pavel

**G**reetings, dear brothers and sisters! Thank you so much for your prayers and your support of our ministry. My wife Lena and I continue our ministry in our town and other villages, where we go to tell people about Christ. We visit Svetlana and Gennady, who are the caregivers in a “family-

type” children’s home. **We visit every two weeks and share the Word of God with them.** Lena does Bible lessons for the children and each time tells a new story from the Bible. The children enjoy listening and reflecting on what they hear. Lena also helps them memorize verses from the Bible, so that the children will know and can use them for themselves at the right time. I love how excited they are to meet us, they all run out together, say hello and hug us, it is really nice. We can see how much they enjoy spending time with us. Not only do we talk to them on biblical topics, but we also spend a lot of time playing games, fellowshiping, and singing songs. At the end, we have prayer. I ask for grace, blessings, and protection for this family. We love them, they also love us back!

I recently held a **fishing tournament for the kids from the orphanage**, which I had long promised them. I went and picked them up, and we drove to one of the lakes that was a few kilometers from their home. God had moved the heart of the man who owned the lake, and he only charged for me alone and let the kids fish for free! The fish didn’t bite on that day very much, but a boy named Andrew still caught three fish. He was very happy



Fishing with boys from the children's home.

that he was the only one who caught three. He was the only winner and received a reel from me as a prize.

We returned to the home and the whole family gathered in their gazebo, prayed, ate, and talked.

**Afterward, I read them the story from the Bible where Christ, after his sermon, commanded his disciples to cast a net into the sea, to which they did reluctantly, but still obeyed. They ended up catching a lot of fish.** I talked about the importance of obeying God, even in those moments when it seems to make no sense at all. So they wouldn’t miss the point, I also highlighted the example of the disciples when, after they fished, they left the fish and followed Christ. **You should have seen the grateful and joyful faces of the children. After that meeting, six of the children signed up to come to Vacation Bible School.** Pray that the Lord will send protection and His blessing on the children. Pray also for our ongoing ministry at the home. ♦



Andrew with his fish.

## MUCH PRAYER, MUCH POWER IN ACTION

*When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5).*



Outdoor evangelistic service.

**F**or believers in the former Soviet Union, the level of freedom for the churches can vary widely from country to country—and even region to region within the same country. A country such as Ukraine—considered to be the “Bible Belt” of the former Soviet Union—allows great freedom for the church. Yet in Central Asia where the culture is largely Muslim, great pressure can be imposed on the churches by local and national authorities.

**In Belarus, which is in Eastern Europe next to the Polish border, the authorities keep a tight rein on religious activities. Yet the Lord graciously opens doors for ministry despite the official restrictions,** as Nikolai, an SGA-supported missionary pastor, shared with us in a recent report. Warmer weather has allowed a great increase in their ministry activities:

*“The warm weather allows us to hold outdoor events. We come to the village and set up a sound system in town, often near the village store. A few days in advance, we hang posters in various places across the village about the upcoming meeting. Some people arrive intending to attend the event, while others intended to go shopping but end up staying for the service. Some people have prayed on their own and others have asked us to pray for them. Sometimes we hold evangelistic services in the backyards of churches, and on the property of church members. Neighbors and other village residents come to see what is happening.*

*A teacher named Svetlana turned to God after the Christmas play in January. Together with her two children, she attends the House of Prayer*

*near her place of residence. She goes to classes for those who want to be baptized. We hope that she will be baptized soon. The kids have made friends with the other Sunday school kids. In our rehab ministry, I continue to work with people who have completed treatment and have left the center. Sergei, Danik, and Alexander are working. Danik and Alexander got a job with a farmer, but it’s a seasonal job. By winter they will need to find a permanent job, which is not easy for men with a background like theirs. We need to pray for them. I rejoice when I see God’s Word helping people endure illness and distance from their loved ones. Some want one-on-one fellowship. It is important for them to express what is troubling them and pray together. Please pray for these people as well. We continue working and preparing for camp ministry this summer. Please pray for the upcoming events.”*

Nikolai’s report rather reminds of the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19, where the presence of Jesus creates a stir. He and his church teams visit villages, and the news spreads that they are in town. There is a buzz in the air that something is going on. It might be in the yard of a church member’s home or on the grounds of the church. Things are being said over loudspeakers. “What is it? What is happening? What are these people saying?” Men, women, and children amble by, maybe coming out of the store in town, and are drawn to stop and listen. And then God moves.

Svetlana, Danik, and Alexander all heard the Gospel in different ways, and in different places. Each one heard the Lord’s call to them, although they were not up in a sycamore tree like Zacchaeus. **The Gospel is being proclaimed with every opportunity, and some of the opportunities might not fit neatly into the structured little boxes we like to construct. We praise and thank the Lord for this, and for the wonderful fruit being gathered for eternity.** May He grant us the same opportunities and the same eagerness to tell others of the Savior’s great love! ♦

# An Eyewitness to War Sees God's Great Compassion

Lydia serves as one of SGA's Compassion Ministry Coordinators in Ukraine. She was recently able to travel to one of the aid distribution locations to meet incoming food aid cargo. **Below, Lydia speaks from her heart of what she saw and experienced.** Please continue to pray for the people of Ukraine, who are trying to regain some kind of normalcy after having lost so much, and even now still face the possibility of more destruction. Pray and join us as we . . . *weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). And may many continue to be reconciled to God even within the destructiveness of war:

*Blessed is life when it is under the Lord's protection! I realize this all the time when I see and hear terrible news from different dangerous places in our country. This time I had the opportunity to visit Chernihiv, a city that was under siege for 40 days at the beginning of the war and is now slowly recovering and coming to life. It was wonderful to meet the cargo from Chelm, Poland, to talk to the team and volunteers who helped unload the cargo. I also had the opportunity to meet with Volodymyr, the regional pastor, and talk to him. I rode through some of the streets of Chernihiv, where the consequences of the shelling were clearly visible. Most of the houses are still unrepaired, and some houses or buildings are not repairable at all. Even so, many people have*



Many homes and businesses are not repairable.

*already returned to their homes in Chernihiv, although there is a great lack of jobs for many people in the city.*

**One of the churches in Chernihiv holds two services every Thursday for all those in need, for those who fled away from the border with Russia.** *These people are always invited to the meetings, where the Word of God is read and food packages are provided. You can see the grief in the eyes of these people who will never forget the horrors of those days. So much of what people valued and had in the past has now turned into ruins and a pile of stones. I cannot feel what they felt and experienced. But my heart weeps and sympathizes with them!*

*The following information was provided by Pastor Volodymyr, who says it is difficult to tell the exact number who have fled for the whole region. Those Christians who fled during the war are now returning to their homes. Volodymyr and his team travel to the villages that are close to the border and where people have remained, and witness to them on the streets, distributing food aid and New Testaments. A humanitarian center was opened in the downtown area of Chernihiv, in a rented building. This is how people who needed help during the war*



Meeting with Volodymyr.



The Second Baptist church was damaged by three shells.

*received aid during the shelling. There is a lot of work and ministry, and it is constantly growing. The number of people in need is not decreasing, but increasing.* Another great challenge is that the houses of some Christians and some churches have been destroyed. For example, the Central Church in Chernihiv was partially destroyed when a shell hit the courtyard of the church. The Second Baptist church was also damaged—three shells hit it: the first and second floors were destroyed.

**Pastor Volodymyr adds,** "People certainly have become more open and vulnerable during the war.

*There are those who repented during the war and are preparing for baptism. When we ask them what motivated them to turn to the Lord in repentance, many of them respond with one word—war! During the war, they heard about the Lord, they received the necessary food aid, and many hearts were touched by God. Therefore, we understand that for many people, this war brought reconciliation with God, and this is the most important thing for us, His servants. I am grateful once again to all of you and sponsors for your help! May the Lord be glorified in everything!"* ♦

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

In the many years since SGA began supporting *Immanuel's Child* ministry across the former Soviet Union, our hearts have rejoiced as thousands of needy children heard the Gospel and received special Christmas gifts you help provide. Each Christmas, the Lord has graciously enabled us to reach more children, and for that we are deeply thankful. Your support helps do so much more throughout the year—providing Bibles and Christian literature, doctrinally sound Bible training,



Immanuel's Child in Russia.

children's ministries, Compassion Ministry, and so much more. Please pray about how you can help today! ♦



Providing internally displaced people with food aid in Ukraine.

# Insight FROM MICHAEL

**In every circumstance, the *only* answer is the Lord Jesus. Let us cling to that . . . and preach Him!**

In looking through this issue of the **Good News Report**, I am struck by the contrast of the ongoing ministry taking place in vastly differing circumstances. As we near Christmas and the eagerly anticipated *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreaches, there is that joy of anticipation over what God will do. Yet in the same newsletter, there is the ongoing heartbreak of war and devastation in Ukraine, coupled with what your prayers and support are helping the churches there to accomplish for the sake of the Gospel.



**Yet isn't that part and parcel of what our lives are like in a fallen world?** At one location on our planet, daily life carries on with little to disrupt the daily routine. Many live lives that seem happy and carefree, in relative prosperity, and what happens elsewhere doesn't get their attention. In another part of the world, poverty, war, and oppression are daily companions. People in those places seem to know little of peace or joy. Daily life is a hard grind, and they go to bed at night not knowing if a rocket or bomb will bring their lives to a sudden end.

We know from God's Word that we always ought to be mindful of how brief life is in comparison to eternity. Luke records the parable of the Lord Jesus illustrating that lesson . . . *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul will be required of you; and who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who stores up treasure for Himself, and is not rich toward God* (Luke 12:19-21).

Here in North America and in the former Soviet Union, life and ministry goes on each day. Life is filled with many trials, although each of us do not experience the same kind of trials. Yet every trial the Lord allows in our lives has a purpose—to bring us closer to Him, to teach us to rely on Him for everything. He alone is our source of peace and joy, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal life in Him. **That is the message our faithful brothers and sisters in the former Soviet Union proclaim with every opportunity the Lord grants.** Your ongoing prayers and faithful support help sustain them and their ministries. I can never thank you enough!

For our Savior,

Michael Johnson  
President



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