



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION
Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Preparing for 2024, Looking Back on 2023, We See How God is Moving . . .

INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ◆ SGA schools and churches pass the torch!
- ◆ Turning a playground into a mission field.
- ◆ Unlocking different kinds of prisons.

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)

Perpetuating The Truth: The Result of Your Support

How do we pass truth from one to another . . . and the next generation?

By Rev. Larry Duncan
SGA Director of Training Ministries

The Apostle Paul provided Timothy, his son in the faith and fellow servant of Christ, with the key principle for perpetuating God's revealed truth from generation to generation. He said . . . *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Timothy 2:2). It is clearly stated that faithful men who have had the truth invested in them are to train faithful men, who in turn will train other faithful men.

At the fall of communism, the leaders of the Russian Baptist Union asked SGA to assist them in building up their leaders. Their ranks had been depleted during the 70 years of atheistic communism that had reigned in their country, and in the other former Soviet nations. Faithful pastors, missionary pastors, laborers in the local churches, and teachers for their schools needed to be raised up and equipped with the truth. **That process began and it continues! And it's my joy to tell you about it.** Through *your* faithful partnership, SGA is blessed to be engaged in training faithful men to correctly handle the Word of God, and to reproduce it in their local ministries.

In the 32 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, **SGA has invested in training ministries throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union.** Church-based training now known as the *Antioch Initiative*, along with investment in **strategically located seminaries and Bible institutes**, has resulted in the equipping and training of *thousands* for a variety of ministries in and through the local churches. **At the core is a clear commitment to the truth of God's Word.** These are *faithful* men who are now equipping others to perpetuate the truth of God's Word among the

peoples of the former Soviet Union.

Their individual stories speak to the equipping they received, and now the investment of these men in ministry in whom they are beginning to equip the next generation of believers for ministry. This is the template that Paul gave to Timothy. One story—among many—speaks to the faithful training of men for ministry. **A brother named Ivan tells us that as a teenager the question arose before him—why do I live?** For seven years, Ivan wrestled with the question. He had no motivation to pursue any direction in his life until the question was settled. **He wrestled with this question until he met Christians who studied the Bible.** This is the first instance of faithful believers passing along to others what God says in His Word. As a result, Ivan understood that only God could give meaning to his life. He repented and trusted in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Ivan subsequently realized that he wanted to invest his strength and life to Christ and serving His church. **He enrolled in the SGA-supported Novosibirsk Biblical Theological Seminary and studied from 2014-2018.** He told us, *"Thanks to the training, I received a comprehensive acquaintance*



Ivan and other students at the seminary.



Ivan with his family.

with the Bible." In 2020, God directed Ivan to start a new church in the large Siberian city of Novosibirsk. **The new church began with two families, and now**

the Novosibirsk Evangelical Baptist Church has 20 members. According to Ivan, *"Being engaged in the development of a new church, I understand how difficult it would be to do this without getting an education at the Novosibirsk Seminary."* Ivan is now entrusting what he has heard to faithful men and women in his church, and equipping the next generation of faithful servants of Christ.

The investment into all of the men and women since 1991 continues to bear fruit! The investment of faithful SGA partners enables the template given by Paul to Timothy to continue among the people of the former Soviet Union. And we give all the glory to God! ♦

Remember to Pray in Advance for Immanuel's Child!

You are a key to bringing the Gospel and God's Word to children He loves

Lord willing, in only a few short weeks many churches across the former Soviet Union will be prayerfully launching this year's *Immanuel's Child* Christmas ministries—outreaches you help make possible through your support of SGA!

Last Christmas in the small village of Marina Gorka in **Belarus**, Pastor Gennady remembers the excitement of the children as the church teams visited home to home . . .

"In addition to the general church service, we greeted the children in person by visiting them and their families. During the Christmas season, people are more open to hear God's Word from believers. On ordinary weekdays, they would not listen and perhaps would not even let us into their homes. But on these days, they are happy to accept us and hear the Good News. There are even parents who ask us ahead of time, "Is there going to be a children's event at church?" One mother said that her children were eagerly asking in advance if there would be anything at church this year—a performance, a puppet program? One woman brought her sons and her friend's children. As a child, she had attended Sunday school



Children with stars and gifts from the IC outreach.

and remembers what a wonderful time that was, but then she stopped going to church. Now, wishing good for her children, she wants them to be in church all the time. Our church is very grateful to you for your participation and support for Immanuel's Child!"

This year, **we are praying to set yet another record** for children reached over the Christmas ministry season from December 25 to January 7. Pray with us that God will open young hearts for the Gospel, as well as their parents and caregivers. ♦

Your Gifts Sent Christ's Love to a Russian Playground

Children and Families See the Rays of God's Sunshine

Valentin K.
SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Russia's Altai Region

I want to express my special thanks for your support for our **summer playgrounds**. While praying and planning our ministry, we decided to invite children and their parents to Christian festivities in our church house. Several parents had come together with their children on Easter and Trinity Day. **They were pleased to see how their children who attended Sunday school sang songs and recited poems.** Two young women attended, and they used to be little girls in the 1990s and were in our Christian camp ministry back then. Now their children attend Sunday school!

As we talked, we offered to **organize festivities for children by their homes with games and a biblical lesson.** They agreed. So our church organized two meetings by different homes beginning in June. **We called the activity "Festivity of the Bee."** The children who attend Sunday school invited their friends from unsaved families to come and play games with them. As we taught about wonderful bees and how they collected honey, the children also heard lessons about God Who created the world and the bees. We sang songs about our great God and were treated to different kinds of honey. **About 30 children and their parents visited two different playground sessions.** We invited the people to organize one more four-day playground, which made the children happy even though we had to postpone the playground until July due to several days of heavy rain.

A team from the church in Kemerovo came here to help us with the playgrounds. **We had two playgrounds together, with 38 children of different ages playing games, craft lessons, singing songs about God, and listening to biblical truth about Noah, Noah's salvation, and an opportunity to have salvation in Jesus.** Some children came



Children and their parents listen to the Bible teaching.

together with their parents, who also listened attentively to the biblical lesson. **That meant 35-45 adults and children were listening to the truth of Salvation daily!** Even the rain and 95 degree heat didn't make a difference.

At the end of the playgrounds, we invited the attendees to the Sunday service. **Several children came to the service, and one of the boys invited his mom to come!** Children recited the Bible verses that they had memorized in class and sang the songs they learned. Then we had fellowship at the table and saw the team from Kemerovo off. Eugenia was one of the members of the team from Kemerovo. She has completed the rehab course and is going to be baptized. She has a daughter, Julia, of 15. It was her first acquaintance with Christians. We saw that Julia was happy, and on the third day of the program, she began to take an active part in the activities. Eugenia said that when Julia came home, she began to stay with her mom and began to attend church. **In such a way, God united a mother and a daughter thanks to their visit to us.** Glory be to God for His wonderful deeds! Dear friends, I thank the Lord and you for your support of my ministry. ♦

He Was *in* Prison, Yet God Set Him Free From the Prison of Sin!

Your support and prayers are vital to impact!

There are many kinds of prison, including physical and spiritual.

Across the former Soviet Union, many SGA-supported missionary pastors have engaged in prison outreach through the years. Several were even former prisoners themselves, coming to faith in Christ through similar ministry that reached them either in prison or after their release.

One such ministry where a great spiritual harvest is taking place is in the Russian city of **Novosibirsk**. Alexander and other faithful servants **continue to visit local prisons in search of those who are lost and in need of the Gospel.** Whether it be through personal conversations, group studies, distributing Bibles and literature, or staying connected through written communication, these men and women make a daily sacrifice to love as Jesus loves—in action and in declaring the Gospel. The **story of Semion** is just one example of how difficult the battle is to turn away from the old life and put on a new life in Christ . . .

*Semion is one of the Roma people group. He was released from a local Penal Colony after a huge challenge. In 2016, Semion came to a group meeting at the Penal Colony where he was serving a sentence for the third time. **He was seeking the truth because everything in his life was ruined.** He attended the group meetings for two years, repented, and **upon release from imprisonment in 2018, he joined our***



Semion and Pastor Alexander.

church in Novosibirsk and was baptized. We all rejoiced! Semion began preaching to his fellow Roma and started singing in the choir.

*Then, like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, he was put in prison again. His relatives had forced him into a dark situation, and it all ended with Semion being sentenced to another three years at the colony. But as the Lord searches for His lost sheep, so we tried to return Semion to life. And the Lord was glorified. He gave Semion a second chance. Upon arriving at the colony, Semion called us and asked us to come. When the brothers and I came, Semion confessed all of his sins, repented, and declared his firm desire to follow the Lord and restore everything. **During the past three years, Semion attended services, but he was transferred two more times to other colonies where he remained faithful to God in serving and preaching the Gospel message.** We helped him as much as we could. Praise God, at the present time, **Semion is going through the process of restoration in church membership. In the colonies where he had served, a few Roma have turned to the Lord thanks to his witness!***



Semion with other newly believing Roma men in the colony.

We praise God for Alexander and his faithful teams as they go into these dark places to reach the lost. Please continue to pray for this ministry as they shine the light of the Gospel! ♦

MUCH PRAYER, MUCH POWER IN ACTION

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3-5).

After the Soviet Union broke up in 1991 and communist rule ended, one thing we frequently heard was how the loving testimony and faithful example of Christians moved even hardened prison guards, KGB agents, and other dedicated atheists to pause and rethink the Christian faith. Many came to faith in Christ themselves in subsequent years. While official atheism is gone, the gentle, loving witness of believers still has the same impact on the unbelieving.

Pastor Ivan in Russia wrote to share how the Lord is opening doors for ministry in their region through their church-based rehab center, and how **attitudes are changing.**

“I had gone away on a visit to another town. While I was away, an elderly Christian lady of 82 died. Her children are unsaved people, but they invited believers at our church to lead the funeral. I was glad to know that I have such support. People used to call us a ‘sect.’ But after some time passed, the attitude to the church and our rehab center changed. The villagers and people of the district became positive toward us. A man named Valery in a neighboring town committed a crime under the influence of drugs. The court sentenced him to 80 hours of correctional labor. The believers in Valery’s town advised him to go to our rehab center. They sent the necessary documents and his passport to the local police. A police officer called us and asked about Valery, and whether he was in the rehab center. I confirmed his arrival. Then the officer said that Valery could work 80 hours in the rehab center in the village, if the head of the village administration and the secretary agreed and will oversee his work. I cautioned Valery, that if his desire to change his life is

genuine, then God would bless his stay in the center. My younger son Ruvim prayed and went to the police office. The secretary, together with Valery, completed the paperwork.



Valery working at the rehab center.

To our great surprise, all the people were positive about his stay and work in the center. Now the secretary calls Ruvim twice a week, and asks about the way Valery works and records his labor hours in a time book. Valery did not expect such a turn in his life. His father and mother came to visit him. They are happy that their son now does not drink or smoke, and works. His wife with his mother-in-law also visited him and were also pleasantly surprised. Valery will soon celebrate his birthday. Former rehab graduates and our church members want to congratulate Valery, as well as his relatives. God’s answer to prayer was so evident! Please, pray for our ministry here and for our visits to Lisichansk. God is good! Glory be to Him. I thank you for your material support, and for your prayers!”

There are many situations that take place in everyday life that demonstrate God’s abundant mercy and grace. But perhaps the most moving and gripping are those when He has rescued a man, woman, or youth from enslavement in the deepest sin. We know from God’s Word that the temptations

that hit us are . . . *common to man* (1 Corinthians 10:13). We all do not face the same temptations necessarily, and our way of stumbling and falling might not be like someone else’s. But all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All without Christ face an eternity separated from Him because of our sin. But praise God, the Lord Jesus took the sins of His people upon Himself, and purchased our pardon on the cross. Then He gloriously rose again from the dead for our justification, defeating death, hell, and the grave. It is this wonderful truth that Ivan and his fellow believers are proclaiming daily through the church, and through the rehab center they operate. **There is indeed hope for even the most destitute, sin-scarred person because Christ loves them and can set them free.** Let us together praise and thank the Lord for the salvation He has lavishly bestowed on us, and pray fervently that many more people will come to know Him as Savior as the Gospel is proclaimed. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Whether it be a student or faculty member at an SGA-supported seminary, faithful missionary pastors out laboring in God’s harvest field, or men and women dedicated to children’s ministry service, all are united in the paramount

goal—reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Your faithful partnership helps accomplish so much—Bible training for pastors, church workers, and worship leaders, children’s ministries including summer camps and orphan outreach, provision of Bibles and Christian literature, as well as Compassion Ministry. We are so deeply thankful! Please pray about how you can help today! ♦



Students and faculty at Irpen Biblical Seminary in Ukraine.



A baptism in Ukraine.



Children in Central Asia with Immanuel’s Child stars signed by partners in the United States.

Insight FROM MICHAEL

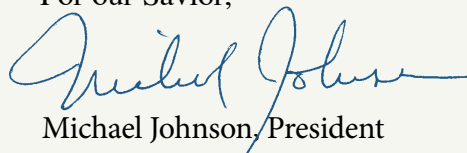
Great Needs Can Lead to a Great Spiritual Harvest

It is hard to believe that we are approaching the end of yet another year. At Slavic Gospel Association, **the pace of ministry activity has increased exponentially as the needs across the former Soviet Union have also increased.** The war in **Ukraine** continues unrelentingly, another humanitarian crisis has surfaced in a region called **Nagorno-Karabakh** that is disputed between **Armenia and Azerbaijan.** At this writing, thousands of Armenian refugees are fleeing the region into Armenia proper, and we are seeking the Lord's direction about how best to help the churches reach them with help and the Gospel. Then in October, a horrible war broke out between **Israel** and Hamas terrorists. SGA's director of Bible training lives in southern Israel near Gaza, and his family has been in the direct line of fire from Gaza for years. Our hearts grieve for the lives lost as we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. On top of all this is the regular pace of daily ministry—Bible training at the seminaries and Bible institutes, children's ministries—and of course SGA-supported *Immanuel's Child* Christmas ministries are right around the corner! **It truly never slacks off or eases up.**

But I wouldn't have it any other way. I remember what Scripture has to say about our Lord Jesus Christ as He carried out His earthly ministry, seeing the great physical and spiritual needs. ***Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd*** (Matthew 9:36). Jesus then commanded His disciples to pray for God to send out more workers into the field. **The field was—and still is—ready for harvest and there is so much work to do.** There remain thousands of lost men, women, and children across the former Soviet Union who need to hear of the Lord's great love, and how He lovingly paid the price for their sins on the cross. They need to know that through repentance and faith in Him, they can have His full and free forgiveness and eternal life. **They just need someone to tell them.**

Our work is by no means finished until the Lord returns or calls us home. That is why we continue making the need known, and why we keep on serving the faithful churches Christ is building across the former Soviet countries. **The fruit being gathered for His glory is worth the hard work, fervent prayers, tears, and occasional obstacles.** We couldn't do it without you, and I am thankful for each and every one of you as you help sustain this great work—in Jesus' name!

For our Savior,



Michael Johnson, President



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