



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Celebrate the Gospel this Christmas . . . God Is Transforming Lives through SGA and YOU!

INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ♦ A young orphan gave away his Christmas gift and revealed God's love
- ♦ Pastors across Russia receive strong biblical training
- ♦ Street evangelism reaches young people for Christ

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)



Why Christmas Ministries Are So Important!

Young Nikita gave away his Christmas gift . . . trading it for something even greater

SGA-Supported Orphans Reborn Team
Krasnoyarsk, Russia

Editor's Note: SGA-supported churches are busy preparing Christmas outreaches to orphans and other children across the former USSR, in Eastern Europe, and the other nations where we serve. Friends and partners like you help believers to reach children with Jesus's love—and their hearts and lives are transformed. An *Orphans Reborn* team in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, shares this remarkable story:

Every year, our team prepares a new play about Christmas. The children look forward to it with such excitement! Last year, we held 25 performances—certainly a record-breaking number! Some of the locations were 300 miles away. We were also able to give about 700 gifts to the orphans.



Orphans Reborn team in their Christmas play costumes.

One orphan named Nikita gave away his greatest gift last Christmas! He'd been in the orphanage for about two years. Sadly, he has a skin-related illness that gives him pain and discomfort, and because of this, he felt insecure. But then, he came to Christ at an



Nikita at the SGA-supported camp.

SGA-supported camp outreach. He is now growing into an open, confident young man.

Last Christmas as we were collecting Christmas gifts, one person donated 150 expensive wireless headphones to be used as gifts for the children, but there weren't enough for everyone, and we didn't want to offend anyone. Finally, we agreed that we would give the headphones at the end of the school year to children who actively participated in Bible lessons. Nikita still lived in one of the orphanages, and it so happened that we missed one for another boy, who was very upset.

Our Nikita gave that boy his gift! We told Nikita that he acted like Jesus and like a true man, and promised to bring him another gift. Nikita said that for him, the most important thing was not the gift itself, but our friendship and love that we gave to all the children.



Christmas outreach in the orphanages.

Two hours later Nikita wrote to me, saying that he was upset to learn that the boy to whom he gave his gift sold it for nothing. He was very ashamed of the boy for treating our gift like that. This gave us a chance to talk with Nikita about the most valuable gift God gave us for Christmas—His Son. I asked Nikita

to talk to that boy about what Christmas is about and that the gifts that we brought were from our hearts and someone paid a high price for them.

God is working in the lives of Nikita and other children, changing their character and values, and it is delightful to see. Of course, we did bring Nikita another gift, but the very story of his generosity and care for his neighbor touched our hearts!

Thank you for being a blessing to our children and to us through your continued support of our ministry to orphans. Thousands of children and hundreds of adults have now heard about the Lord, His love, and mercy—but there are millions who still need to hear the Gospel. Please continue to pray for our upcoming ministry this Christmas! ♦



Children with their gifts after the performance.

Bible Training You Help Provide Brings Great Fruit

Seminary student discovers importance of theological training

Igor

Pastoral Student at Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary



Igor and his family.

I would like to share my observations, joys, and challenges.

For quite some time, I had been looking for different options to pursue a Bachelor's level degree in theology. I realized that I had a lot of experience, but I felt a lack of academic knowledge. I wanted a better theological foundation as well as to improve my preaching skills. Just at that time, the remote learning enrollment at Novosibirsk was opening, and I was able to join it. It is still difficult to combine this with my current job. I had to ask my bosses to reduce my working hours, and they miraculously agreed. I could see the hand of God in this.

As a student group, we have become close during our studies. Brothers from different churches



Igor with other students at NBTS.

I am currently a pastor and undergraduate student at the SGA-supported Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary (NBTS) satellite campus in St. Petersburg, Russia. My fourth year of study is coming to an end, and

know about each other's lives and help each other. Inter-church connections are getting stronger.

I have come a long way, and I am very satisfied with my studies. One of the most important factors is that almost all the teachers are active ministers, mostly elders. I believe there is always a danger that academic knowledge can be at odds with ministry in the church. That's why practical theology matters in the local church. Academics and ministry go hand-in-hand.

I discovered that when you receive a systematic education, many views change. Looking back, I wish I had not started a local church without a basic theological education.

So, my counsel for those who start new churches is that they should prepare themselves and their teams to be greatly balanced with those who know systematic and practical theology. Modern churches need continuity, and I would like all church members to know about it. When you are involved



Igor with his wife Olga.

in teaching the church through preaching or in a small group, you need a good theological background because it is a very demanding and responsible task. It is also important to understand the original texts of the Holy Scripture.

Please pray that graduates can serve blessedly in churches and be useful for the kingdom of God. Also, please pray for teaching staff at NBTS to grow. ♦

MUCH PRAYER, MUCH POWER IN ACTION

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went (Acts 8:26-27).

As believers, most of us have heard testimonies of "divine encounters," when a follower of the Lord Jesus meets someone who desperately needs to hear the hope of the Gospel. God sends the right person at the right time to point the way to Him, and He begins His glorious work.

Luke the physician's account of Philip and the Ethiopian royal court official in Acts 8 is a powerful example of God at work. He not only put Philip in the right place to encounter a spiritually hungry man traveling via a chariot, but also moved in the heart of the eagerly listening man to respond to the Gospel message Philip proclaimed.



Pastor Anatoly and Irina.

Anatoly is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Belarus, and he recently shared one such encounter with a young teen girl:

"Greetings, dear brothers and sisters! Once after the service, walking along the banks of the Pronya River that flows near Slavgorod and not far from our church, I saw a girl sitting alone. Nearby were noisy groups of young people, but she was alone. I decided to approach her and talk to her. We struck up a conversation. Her name is Irina, and she is 17 years old.

I asked her why she was alone and not with her peers. She replied that she had nothing in common with them. I told her that I am a believer and attend the Evangelical Church in Slavgorod. Talking with her, I invited her to church. The following Sunday, she actually came to the service, and now—for two months—she has continued to attend meetings despite the opposition of her relatives, especially her father.

She is persistent in her desire to learn about Christ and wants to get to know Christian youth better. She has made a believing friend, Karina, a young sincere Christian, and they spend a lot of time together and live nearby. Dear friends, we wish you abundant blessings from the Lord in your work for the glory of God!"

Anatoly's beautiful report did not contain the outwardly miraculous events of Philip and the Ethiopian official. But no less of a miracle took place in young Irina's heart. Anatoly encountered her seemingly out of the blue, but God knew she was there all along. He had prepared the way. Now with new Christian friends who love her and a new Christian friend her own age, Irina is being discipled.

Please be praying for Irina and the other young people like her that God is reaching through Anatoly and his church. Hearts are open to Him! ♦

Taking the Gospel to People on the Streets

Practical class on evangelism bears fruit!

Vasily T.
SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Belarus

This past summer, we held practical classes on evangelism for students at the (SGA-supported) Minsk Theological Seminary. Together, we learned to



Witnessing to a family.

share Christ with unbelievers by visiting people in their homes and meeting with them on the streets. It was a blessed time for our two evangelism teams. We ended every conversation with prayer. We also visited former church members. Everyone welcomed us warmly. A young woman named Anna, who works as a teacher, prayed and asked God for forgiveness and the strength to follow Christ. We also worked with the chairman of the village council. I gave him a copy of the book *Why Do We Need God?* and he promised to read it. We thank God for his goodwill toward the local church and pray that the Lord will give him a new birth!

In July and August, we held Summer Bible School. A total of 58 children attended, and more than half of the children were from non-believing families. We are grateful to the Lord!



Summer Bible School.

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Singing in the park.

As part of the curriculum, we went out into the city two evenings to witness for Christ. We took a guitar and percussion instruments, and sang Christian songs. We managed to strike up conversations with some of the passersby and share the Gospel with them. I remember a conversation with a young man who had come to Belarus from Russia. He was very interested. During our conversation, a heavy rain shower began, but he did not run away and continued to ask questions. The rain stopped. Soon his parents approached, and I gave them a book about the meaning of life, which they gratefully accepted. I also had a good conversation with two young men who work at the park. We had a long conversation with them. We praise God that several of the young men later attended a gathering around the campfire.

We thank God for the evangelism that has taken place. Pray with us that the Word of God that has been sown will grow in the hearts of children and adults. ♦

Equipping Stewardship

Garland Gould
SGA Senior Vice President of Partner Engagement

Do you have a giving plan? Largely because of our income tax rules and the holiday season, a major part of charitable gifts are made toward the end of the calendar year. For this reason, we have paused our look at Biblical Estate Design for the topic of year-end giving.



Garland Gould

Because there are favorable charitable giving tax laws, it is a good thing to consider your giving and seek if there are ways to leverage these laws. Have you taken stock of your income and assets, and set specific goals for supporting your church and the other ministries you love? Whether you are a planner or operate more spontaneously, there may be strategies that you can implement.

As Christian stewards and managers of God's resources, we know God calls us to be generous. As unique individuals, our plan can also be unique to fit your situation and God's leading. Trust God's Spirit to guide you and believe, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:11-12, that . . . *you will be enriched in*

everything for all liberality . . . overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

Here are five questions to ask as you consider or review your year-end giving plan.

1. Do you have a plan, or do you simply give as needs are presented to you?
2. Does your plan lead you to stretch your faith that God will supply all your needs as you invest in His Kingdom work?
3. Does your plan take advantage of opportunities to give from non-cash and appreciated assets as well as your cash?
4. Does your plan conclude with giving through your will or trust?
5. Does your giving plan include other ways of supporting the ministries you love such as focused prayer and volunteering your time?

We have a resource called A Guide to Year End Planning that we are happy to email to you. We can also print and mail it if you prefer. Please let us know how we can serve you by emailing plannedgiving@sga.org or calling me at 407-718-1076. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP

November begins the holiday season, at least here in the U.S. starting with Thanksgiving. Then, before we know it, Christmas time has arrived. The faithful churches SGA serves across the former Soviet Union are busily gearing up for this year's *Immanuel's Child* outreach, and more are celebrating



Immanuel's Child outreach in Belarus.

on December 25 as well as traditional Slavic Christmas on January 7. Your steadfast support has helped our brothers and sisters reach more children each year, for which we praise God! You have also helped us accomplish much more: the provision of Bibles and Christian literature, Bible training, other children's ministries such as Summer Bible Camps and *Orphans Reborn*, and Compassion Ministry for individuals and families in need. Please pray about how you can help today! ♦

Insight FROM MICHAEL

Jesus Christ Is the Heart of Christmas—the Reason for Everything We Do Together!

It is hard to believe that the SGA-supported *Immanuel's Child* outreach turns 23 this year. But it's true. I had the wonderful privilege of being involved in the creation of this wonderful ministry that God has used to reach thousands of children—and even adults—with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know also that the Lord has used *Immanuel's Child* to touch the hearts of faithful partners like you through the years. The photos and testimonies from the outreaches that we have been able to report back on have deeply touched many on this side of the ocean. It is always a joy and blessing for us at SGA to hear this. And we are thankful!



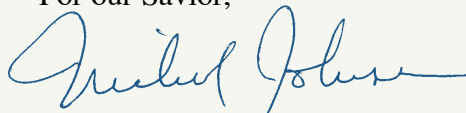
Christmas is so very important for our world. With all the commercialization and other well-known tales out there that surround the season, it's so easy for people to forget what it is really all about. It is not about trees, mistletoe, holly, eggnog, and even the gifts we give to one another. Christmas is about the greatest gift of all—the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins the eternal story and true account of who Jesus is, what He did, and why He did it. Yes, he came to earth in the form of a babe, born of a virgin in Bethlehem as God's Word foretold. The angels sang and amazed the shepherds as told in Luke 2. It was truly a glorious moment in human history as the God of the Universe intervened with the redemption of His people in view.

And that is exactly what happened—and the true Christmas story doesn't stop with the birth of Jesus. He grew and became a man. He preached God's Kingdom and demonstrated through His works that He was the true Messiah. But as the prophets inspired by God recorded, His own people rejected Him. They didn't understand that the Messiah came first to die on the cross for the sins of His people, and rise again from the dead for their justification . . . but He *did*.

We celebrate His glorious resurrection at Easter, or Resurrection Day. But the stage was set at His birth in Bethlehem. And the Christmas outreaches you help support make it possible for Bible-preaching churches to tell many this glorious truth. We celebrate and give one another gifts for the joy of giving, while also recognizing, again, the greatest gift of all.

Please continue to join me in praying for *Immanuel's Child* this season. Pray with us for a record number of children to be reached with the Gospel!

For our Savior,


Michael Johnson, President



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