



SERVING CHURCHES — REACHING RUSSIAN SPEAKERS December 2016

Building Christ's Church in Challenging Days

As the summer of 2016 was winding down, Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko made a special announcement that should have grabbed headlines around the world. Next year in 2017, Ukraine will officially observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In his remarks on the upcoming event, President Poroshenko said that these days should be observed at a “high level.”

Considering that 25 years ago, official atheism still ruled the day as the Soviet

Union collapsed, such a statement from a national leader is beyond remarkable. But our God and Father is sovereign in His creation, and the author of the remarkable and miraculous. For the Bible-preaching churches we serve in Ukraine, this announcement brought great joy. While the country celebrates 25 years of independence, the churches are celebrating 27 years of freedom since the fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989—the most of any former Soviet republic when it comes to preaching the Gospel.



Independence Monument in Kiev's Maidan Square is dedicated to the nation's independence. Maidan was also the center of the violent uprising that preceded the ongoing conflict in the east.

In Russia, a different story must be told. As reported earlier, President Vladimir Putin signed a new anti-missionary bill into law—a law that sharply increases restrictions on the churches. Some regions of Russia have already begun using the new law to levy fines on missionaries and pastors; thus far, none who are SGA partners. But that is likely to change over time, and we must be prepared to help the churches in this new reality, as God enables.



Peter Marchenko's church celebrating each new baptized believer!

Celebrating Freedom and the Fruit of Effective Evangelism

In Ukraine, SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Peter Marchenko and his church are celebrating 25 years of being a local church. From six members when the church began, the Lord has blessed and the church has flourished . . .

Under the theme, "25 Years of Service to God and to People," we are celebrating the anniversary of our church. The atmosphere of this festive worship service was wonderful. We showed a short film about the history of the church, and how six unbelievers who wanted to hear the Word of God gathered together at the start of the post-Soviet era. And it is this small group that laid the foundation of

Transfiguration Church. Today—at the end of 2016, we have grown to 600 members!

In the afternoon, our church went out and shared our celebration with people in a public park near our House of Prayer. Many times we have held evangelistic events in this park, and this day was a great opportunity to tell the people of Kiev about the glory of the Lord, and to share the Good News with them. We held a concert and gave an evangelistic message. Among those attending were Roman Ovcharenko, who serves as the advisor to the district government on religious issues, and Mikhail Andrashko, regional pastor for the Kiev region. Ukrainian UECB president Valery Antonyuk then preached on the topic of following the Lord in life, and then he lifted up a prayer for the people of Ukraine.

We rejoice with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, where celebration is tempered with deep concern over the continuing armed conflict with Russian separatists in the country's east. But nothing will stop the Lord from building His church!

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Please keep praying for the advance of the Gospel. People are waiting and wanting to hear!



A Christmas of Both Celebration and Urgent Prayer

As faithful churches and children's workers across Russia and the CIS prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior January 7 (Russian Christmas), teams from the churches are also busily getting ready to reach thousands of children through SGA-sponsored *Immanuel's Child* outreaches. These preparations are taking place under the shadow of the new anti-missionary law adopted in Russia over the summer.

As we do not yet know how fully this new law will be interpreted and enforced across Russia's 11 time zones, it is especially important that we make intercessory prayer a vital, urgent component of our

Christmas observances. Last year, SGA partners made it possible to reach more than 17,000 children with the Gospel, which was a significant increase from the previous Christmas season. This year, we are praying to reach many more with the Good News of Christ's love.

In addition to inviting more churches across North America to participate in *Immanuel's Child*, SGA for the first time is opening up this wonderful ministry to individual participation. Even now, it's not too late to pray for this year's outreaches, and any gifts received will be applied to the *Immanuel's Child* program for 2017-2018. If you want to find out more, please visit SGA's website or call us toll free at 1-800-BIBLE-50.

Please pray with us that the new law will not be used to hinder or stop the churches from holding Christmas ministries to reach needy children with gifts and the love of Christ. Pray with us for more partner churches across North America to get involved for the coming year, as well as for individual participation. Above all, pray for the precious children who will hear the Gospel. Pray that many will come to saving faith as they hear of the Lord Jesus Christ—the greatest gift of all.



Please pray that Russian churches will be able to continue *Immanuel's Child* ministries.

Like a beautiful mosaic or seamless patchwork, our Lord and Savior continues to work through His people and build His church across the CIS. We joyfully share these brief reports from the harvest fields where God is sending workers to . . . *gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad* (John 11:52).

It has become harder economically to live in Russia. Many people have been laid off from their jobs or are receiving lower salaries. Prices grow and people become poorer. But the situation in our church has begun to change for the better in a miraculous way. People who had stopped coming are returning. We pray, asking God to reach people with the Gospel. A sister in our church named Ludmila asked us to pray for a neighbor who was an alcoholic. For a while, things worsened. The neighbor got drunk and beat Ludmila up. Regardless, Ludmila invited her over to read Scripture, and she accepted the invitation. Then, this neighbor began inviting her relatives to come and read also. Ludmila is so inspired and thankful—she prays that they will keep coming, and we pray that God will begin a spiritual revival!

—Pastor Dmitri
Berezhnuk
(Russia)



This past June, there was a terrorist attack in the town of Aktobe near the Russian border. Despite the tensions caused by this tragedy, our church was still able to hold a youth outreach for teenagers. We had a total of 101 young people in attendance. The theme of our event was “There’s an Appointed Time for Everything,” as the Word of God tells us in Ecclesiastes. A meeting was also held with the parents of the teens. This was a very timely subject, given the circumstances in our region. We continue working with the youth, and our Bible-based drug rehab center. Over the summer, we baptized two new believers.

—Pastor Berik (Kazakhstan)

Thanks to the support we receive through SGA, we continue our ministry among refugees who were forced out of their homes due to the war in eastern Ukraine. People are receiving the food and other help with thanksgiving. We present the Gospel to them in many different ways. We visit the families, giving them Christian literature and sharing the Gospel, praying that God will work in their hearts. Earlier in the year, we held Easter outreaches and a one-day children’s camp. That was a long-awaited day for our whole village—children and their parents, school teachers, and kindergarten workers. We had 55 children of different ages. All the children and their parents were invited to the church, and many of them were already attending our other gatherings. We express our heartfelt gratitude to SGA partners for your long-term support and prayers for our ministry!

—Pastor Oleg (Ukraine)

The Quiet Witness of an Elderly, Blind Sister in Christ

Alexandra is 86 years old and lives in the small village of Petropavlovka. She has been blind since childhood. She loves the Lord dearly, and rejoices in Him



always. She never complains or is sad. Other villagers come to visit her, and they even ask her to pray for their needs! The Lord uses this to give Alexandra an opportunity to tell her neighbors about Christ. She listens and shares with whoever comes. When we visit her, we become so filled with love and even we do not want to leave! Please pray for Alexandra, as well as for our church. We have many needs. Thank you for your participation in our ministry and for your prayers!

—Pastor Gennady
Peretrukhin, Russia



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Russian Believers Undeterred by New Anti-Missionary Law

Even though the specter of the new anti-missionary law looms in the background in Russia, the Bible-preaching churches SGA serves are pressing on, preaching the Gospel and seeing men, women, and children come to saving faith. Thus far, little difficulty has been encountered. In St. Petersburg, missionary pastor Anatoly Orlov's church is also celebrating 25 years of fruitful ministry. The Lord has especially blessed their drug rehab outreach . . .

As we celebrated our anniversary, the church was filled. Many of them were people who came through our Bible-based rehab course, bringing with them wives, relatives, and friends. Many said the same thing as they testified—I was at the edge of death. But Christians



Pastor Anatoly leading new believers in prayer.



Pray that public baptisms will be able to continue in Russia.

took me to the rehab center. Dying, but raised up for a new, righteous life. Some are now serving in the church, including one man who is a deacon. The local town administration sees how young people who once were drug abusers now live a holy life after the rehab course. They gave us a piece of land to build a new church and rehab center—15 men came together in May and built the church in two weeks!

Please rejoice with us over what God is doing, and will continue to do, through His people in Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and even in Israel. The days ahead will be challenging, and today's freedom is not guaranteed for tomorrow. There are tens of millions who have yet to hear the Gospel. Will you keep standing with us as we help churches reach them—no matter what the cost?

CIS in the News

Russian Officials Begin Enforcing Anti-Missionary Law

In late August, local officials in Russia handed down the first known prosecutions over alleged violations of the new anti-missionary law signed by President Vladimir Putin earlier in the summer. In the first known case, an unregistered Baptist pastor was fined in Noyabrsk, which is located in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region. In two other cases in Tver and Oryol, two individuals legally resident in Russia—one American and one Ghanaian—were heavily fined, but

neither was ordered deported. Thus far, no SGA partner churches have been affected. The man from Ghana was fined 50,000 rubles, which represents about six weeks' average wages in Russia.

Please continue to lift our Russian brothers and sisters in prayer as this situation continues to evolve across the country. Our prayer is that the Gospel will continue to advance, and that the Lord will work in the hearts of officials to not hinder churches and their ministries.

How You Can Help

2016 has truly been a momentous year in more ways than one. With the adoption of new anti-missionary legislation in Russia and Christian churches under increasing restrictions across the CIS, we are entering yet another new time of challenge for the churches we serve. Please remember the many *Immanuel's Child* and other Christmas outreaches sponsored by SGA, asking the Lord to protect them from hindrance. For nearly four years, our brothers and sisters in Ukraine continue to deal with the human toll of the armed conflict in the eastern part of the country. But the Gospel will never be stopped by man, and the Lord is using your faithfulness—providing Bible training for pastors and youth leaders, children's ministries, provision of Bibles and Christian literature, and compassionate aid such as food and clothing. Please prayerfully consider how you can help today!



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Canadian Connection

By Bill Ball

How many of us begin thinking at this time of the year about events that have transpired, and New Year's resolutions? Often we contemplate both highs and lows, as well as the joys and sorrows that have impacted our lives.

Life and time march along at a steady pace, which seems to accelerate the longer we live. Whether our days are memorable, monotonous, or momentous depends upon decisions we make. Some philosophers will tell us that "life is what you make of it." God's desire is that we live life to the full (John 10:10) and we do so in the strength that He provides (1 Peter 4:11).

Much of what we do at SGA/Canada is assisting those who need a partner in ministry. We come alongside church planters, orphanages, regional pastors, church-based drug rehab leaders, and teachers. With new anti-missionary laws now in Russia, we continue to encourage fellow



Pastor Stretevich

believers for as long as the door remains open.

May I ask you to consider a verse in relation to a new year and what we can accomplish in 2017 for His glory? *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done* (Proverbs. 19:17).



Pastor Tyskra

Perhaps you would consider lending a hand to an orphan, refugee, child at summer camp, rehab participant, church planter, or student? The investment we make will be rewarded by the Lord. While some will receive a trophy, plaque or gift on earth, which is commendable, the greatest reward will be in heaven. In 2017, let's store up treasure in heaven!

Contact us and we would love to share about opportunities that abound in the Commonwealth of Independent States today.



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