

Our Rock of Certainty in Uncertain Times

By Dr. Bob Provost
SGA President

And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge . . . (Isaiah 33:6).

Time marches on and world events hurtle forward at sweeping, ever increasing speed. Looking back just one year ago at this same time, who would have expected the former Soviet country of Ukraine to become a hotbed of bloodshed and unrest? To date—although there have certainly been moments of political tension—Ukraine has been the freest of all the former Soviet republics in both a political and a spiritual sense.

But all that changed in a few days beginning last November, when former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich abandoned an agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia. Violent protests broke out, and in a matter of weeks the sitting government

was overthrown. And then something happened that had never happened before in the history of Ukraine—indeed, the history of the entire former Soviet Union. A previously unknown member of parliament named Alexander Turchynov—an evangelical Baptist—was chosen to govern temporarily as Ukraine’s speaker of the parliament and acting president.

Even more remarkably, Easter 2014 will be forever known in Ukraine as the Easter when—for the first time—the Ukrainian people heard their acting head of state preach a Gospel message at Kiev’s Central



Alexander Turchynov preaching at Kiev’s Central Baptist Church.

Baptist Church, reminding his hearers of Christ’s resurrection and how His death

was necessary to save His people from their sins. On hearing the report, I sent out a prayer alert to SGA partners with praise and thanksgiving to God for such a momentous occasion. My assistant in



Sergei Omelchenko

Ukraine, Sergei Omelchenko, was there to see it with his own eyes, stating . . . *“To see the president of the country being in a crowd of ordinary people—we’ve never seen anything like this before. We’ve never seen the president of the country to even attend a service in a Baptist church!”*

Warning Signs

As remarkable as these events were, they also heralded new days of challenges for Bible-preaching churches. Governments

across the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) began to increase their scrutiny of Baptist churches because of Ukraine’s political turmoil. Baptists and other evangelicals have long been singled out for pressure and persecution dating back even to Tsarist times. But noting Mr. Turchynov’s Baptist background—some government leaders, especially in Russia, began wrongly blaming Baptists as the cause of the unrest. Some have even been saying, “Baptism produces fascism.”

Choosing not to run for president himself, Mr. Turchynov signed a decree calling for a special election, and on May 25, the Ukrainian people elected a billionaire confectionary magnate named Petro Poroshenko as their next leader. What this means in the long run for evangelical churches remains to be seen, yet we know one thing from Scripture and church history—great persecution and great advance of the Gospel often go hand-in-hand. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared . . . *I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matthew 16:18).*

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Churches in Ukraine were filled as believers prayed for their nation.



And the Lord Was Adding to Their Number . . .

Viktor Kolesnik
SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastor in Ukraine

As SGA-sponsored missionary pastors faithfully fulfill their ministries day-by-day, we often think of how God’s Word describes the early church and the reported results in those first days of Gospel preaching . . . *And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).* Unlike today’s Western-style crusade evangelism, where large numbers of people are televised coming forward after an invitation, the work of missionary pastors in the CIS takes place a day at a time, and one life at a time.

Missionary pastor Viktor Kolesnik labors in several villages in Ukraine. He wrote to share the story of how the Lord is raising up a harvest in his region . . .



Outdoor baptisms are often held, and provide public witnessing opportunities.

Last summer, we held a baptism service for new members of our churches. We had five altogether from two different villages. One of them had been enslaved to alcohol for more than 20 years!

We also held children’s camps attended by more than 100 kids. In the village of Kopytkiv, we have 30 attending Sunday school, while in Dubyny we have 20. It was a great way to prepare for the 90th anniversary of the Kopytkiv church founding in December. We invited the head of the village and other authorities, and several other churches came together to join in the celebration. Our evangelistic efforts continued on into the new year in Kopytkiv, Novosilki, and Vyshenky. We are sincerely thankful to you for your prayers and your financial support of our ministry to the Lord. May He reward you a hundredfold and generously provide for your every need!

We are blessed to receive similar joyful reports from across the CIS—a busy summer of children’s camp and VBS ministries, evangelism, baptisms, and sharing Christ individually with families. And now, with fall soon turning to winter, the churches are busily planning for Christmas outreaches and prayerfully contemplating what God will do as the Gospel is proclaimed. This is what you are helping to make possible through your faithful partnership. And in His mercy and grace, the Lord continues to add to the number of those being gloriously saved!

You . . . have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful (James 5:11).

Evangelical churches and SGA-supported missionary pastors across the CIS continue to profoundly impact the lives of poverty-stricken individuals and families in many ways—especially through the ministry of compassion. As urgently needed food items are distributed to these families, doors are opened for the Gospel and Christ's love is demonstrated in a personal way. Here are a few wonderful reports from Ukraine and Belarus, with thanks to you—our faithful partners who help make it possible.



Parcels of food are tangible demonstration of Christ's love for needy families.



In the first quarter, we worked with ten families, visiting them twice a month. We talk to the families about God, their concerns, and needs. Their hearts are touched and they become more open and sincere. God is glorified through it. Basista is a grandmother caring for her grandson. They have been attending the church services for three months now. The grandson, Maxim, enjoys Bible lessons at our church. Another woman, Lida, has three children. She was deeply touched that her family received help at this difficult period in her life. She was amazed that there are people ready to encourage and take care of her and her children. May God richly bless you, your families, and your churches in His mighty ways!

—Viktor Bobrovitsky (Ukraine)

The political crisis in Ukraine and related fatalities, coupled by uncertainty about what lies ahead, has caused people to begin calling on God. Christians have been emboldened in our faith, but those who don't know the Lord have experienced hard times and real trials. Compassion ministry has assumed even greater importance for the church. For needy unbelievers, it is an unexpected display of God's love and kindness. Nadia's family from Volytsia is a real delight for us. She had started praying aloud at services we held at someone else's home. Then some time later, she invited us to conduct services in her own home so that her mother and husband could hear God's Word! Recently we have started helping ten new families. Both the men, and especially the women, expressed their appreciation for the aid, which really came at the right time!

—Alexander Chernyak (Ukraine)

The Reach of SGA-Sponsored Compassion Ministry

BELARUS:

Twenty-four missionary pastors visited 184 families twice per month, totaling 1,104 visits and food parcels in the first quarter of 2014 alone. Lord willing, if current distribution levels remain the same, we project that the compassion ministry teams and missionary pastors will have distributed more than 11,000 food parcels. Significant numbers of children are now in Sunday school, and several families have come to faith and have been baptized.

UKRAINE:

Eighteen missionary pastors visited 165 needy families twice a month, totaling 990 visits and food parcels in the first quarter of 2014. By the end of the year as God allows, we project this number to total almost 4,000 food parcels! The pastors visit homes, sharing Christ's love and mercy with parents, children, and grandchildren. Many are reluctant at first to grant admission to their homes, but after the second visit, many become open to discussing the Gospel!

CENTRAL ASIA:

An interesting opportunity was afforded SGA in providing goats for several missionary and impoverished families. Through providing something as simple as a dairy goat, a family is given a source of sustainable and durable food. Excess can be provided to other church families. For many who live in villages, such sustainable means of support is vital for their survival. Goats have already been purchased for needy families in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.



I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the ministry you help make possible. This ministry opens many doors for the preaching of the Gospel to needy families. I visit people and read to them from the Bible. We talk about God and have a small Bible study. Some are now attending the church, and children from these families now attend our Sunday school. Please pray with us for all of these who have been reached with the Gospel. May the Lord reveal Himself to them.

Please pray with us, asking the Lord to send us more people who have sincere spiritual and physical needs. May the Name of the Lord be glorified through our ministry!

—Valery Pereshein, Belarus

Today, the evangelical churches of the CIS face the strongest opposition in the Muslim-dominated countries of Central



Islam dominates in Central Asia—a challenge for evangelical churches.

Asia. We desire to tell the stories of these courageous believers and their churches, and to share the wonderful things that God is doing through His people there. But we must be mindful of their security and not unduly draw attention to their ministries—like the Apostle Paul, often in “tentmaking” types of situations. In Belarus, the churches minister under very close scrutiny and tight restriction. In Russia, which spans both eastern Europe and Asia, the situation can vary from

region to region. Many pastors say there are few problems in their local regions, while pastors in the Central Asian and Caucasus Mountain republics and oblasts (states) where Islam is dominant must be very careful.

Whatever the future may hold, SGA’s mission has not changed since Peter Deyneka founded us 80 years ago. We exist to serve the churches that Christ is building in Russian-speaking lands, and now even among Russian-speaking congregations in Israel. The Lord’s faithful, sovereign hand blessed our labors during the darkest days of atheistic communism, and we trust that He will continue to provide until His certain return. Until then, our work is not over and there is much, much yet to do. We are deeply thankful to God for you—our faithful partners—and pray that you will continue to stand with us for the sake of the Gospel. Countless men, women, and children are wanting to hear . . . and waiting to hear. Imagine! Pray that we’ll be able to help get the Gospel to them.



In restrictive countries, even the simplest of crosses can be a quiet, bold witness.

CIS in the News

Refugees: A Hidden Crisis in Regions of Conflict

This past spring, as the Ukrainian political crisis continued to unfold, a crisis of another type also began to unfold—how to deal with thousands of refugees fleeing from the Crimea region annexed by Russia in March. Some estimates put the number of refugees at 20,000, with a significant number of them being Crimean Tatars, a largely Muslim ethnic group. The Tatar refugees expressed fear of persecution now that Crimea is under Russian rule. In addition, regions in eastern Ukraine reported provocations aimed at alarming the Jewish residents, with unidentified armed men handing out leaflets on Passover Eve requiring all Jewish people to register with local pro-Russian

governments.

The evangelical churches SGA serves in Ukraine have been doing their best to help the refugees as Scripture directs . . . *as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion* (Colossians 3:12). An SGA-related church in central Ukraine reported that it is costing them more than \$2,000 a week to feed, house, and provide medical care for more than 80 frightened Crimean Tatar Muslim people. They feel that the opportunity to help the refugees and lovingly share the Gospel is one too vital to miss. Please pray with us for the resources to help not only churches in Ukraine, but in all CIS nations where humanitarian needs are great.



How You Can Help

Conditions on the mission field can be very fluid, with periods of great progress and periods where the work seems to proceed very slowly. Moments of tremendous openness and freedom are sharply contrasted with times of great oppression, persecution, and even martyrdom. But the Gospel call remains, and our faithful God continues to fulfill His certain Word in building His church. Your prayers and support for SGA ministries accomplishes so much, providing Bible training, compassion ministry and humanitarian aid, helping to send forth missionary pastors, children’s ministries—the list is endless. Thank you so much! Please prayerfully consider how you can continue helping to advance the Gospel across Russia and her neighboring countries.

Canadian Connection

by Allan Vincent

That is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you (Titus 1:5).

While the reference to “put in order” seems to refer to correcting wrong doctrine and practices in the Cretan churches (Titus 1:6 – 3:14), no record remains of the work “in every town” and of the elders who were ordained.

Centuries later, by God’s grace, and thanks also to our electronic age, we know what the Lord is doing in cities and towns where SGA ministry partners have integral involvement with pastors and churches.

Church leaders in Ukraine are committed to providing a Gospel witness and a Bible-preaching church in every major city and town. To that end, Pastor Dmitri Bazelyuk serves in the town of Lenkivtsi and neighbouring villages in the Chernivtsi region of southwestern Ukraine.

Googling “Lenkivtsi” tells you very little. By contrast, Pastor Dmitri recently reported many aspects of their fruitful ministry.



- Many unbelievers attended Christmas and New Year Festive Services.

- **One young man recently ordained as a deacon** will lead the church in a

nearby village.

- A **three-day evangelization** was held in Lenkivtsi. Every family and home was visited. Please pray for the Word of God to bring forth fruit.
- They **visit aged brothers and sisters** who can no longer attend services.

Future Plans:

- Easter ministry in two nearby **orphanages** with a total of 300 children.
- Gather and distribute **humanitarian aid** (clothing) to mentally ill people, plus hold services for them.
- Repair and, if possible, replace the roof on their **House of Prayer**. The exterior also needs some repair.

Ministry in every city and town is important. **We want to keep you informed and up-to-date.** *Canadian Connection* and *InSight* provide only a segment of what the Lord is doing. And regrettably, once something is in print, it is already dated.

For that reason, we are grateful for the privilege of providing some reports by email. With your help, we would like to provide some reports electronically. **If you would allow us to send you the occasional supplementary electronic report, please email us at info@sgacanada.ca.** You will not hear from us often, but when you do, it will be important, current, and cost-effective.

AI’s Itinerary:

15 - SGA/US Board Meeting

18-22 - 9 Marks Weekender - Capitol City Baptist Church - Washington DC

24 - SGA/Canada Board Meeting

28 - Maple Avenue Baptist Church - Georgetown ON



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Slavic Gospel Association
— Canada
55 Fleming Drive, Suite 26
Cambridge, ON N1T 2A9
www.sgacanada.ca
E-mail: info@sgacanada.ca
Phone: 519-621-3553
Fax: 519-621-7571

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