



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

# Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

## *An Irpen Biblical Seminary Celebration!*

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*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)*



# Irpen Biblical Seminary: *A Celebration of Growth and Future Fruit*

Michael Johnson  
SGA President

Looking back, I can remember the first time I visited Irpen Biblical Seminary in Ukraine. The late Dr. Alexei Brinza was the president of the seminary then, and the campus was located in another building that now houses SGA's Kiev Regional Ministry Center. I keenly remember hearing the story of the Brinza family and how much they had endured under communism for the sake of the Gospel. I remember meeting many of the students, and how deeply impressed I was at their commitment to Christ and to their ministries.

*"And praise God, when we started we had only 57 students. Today we have over 400! We have students from all over Ukraine . . ."*

This past spring, I found myself on the way back. Back to Ukraine for Irpen's graduation ceremony, I was *more than eager* to see what God had done over the past 14 years that I had been away from SGA. On my arrival, the atmosphere was one of joy as the students prepared to receive their diplomas. When I had been there before, renovation had just begun on the former kindergarten building that would house the seminary. Today, the beautifully remodeled building that SGA partners helped make possible serves as the centerpiece of the campus. And the Word of



The former kindergarten building, which would be renovated to house the seminary.



Since the renovation, it serves as the centerpiece of the Irpen Biblical Seminary campus.



SGA president Michael Johnson and translator Sergei Omelchenko addressing the graduates.

God remains the foundation of all the educational activities that take place there.

SGA's president emeritus, Bob Provost, accompanied me to the ceremony. Graduations are always joyful for him as he has been deeply involved in the development of Irpen Seminary since its inception. As we talked, Bob spoke of Irpen's respected status, describing it as one of the best seminaries *on the planet* . . .

*"Under the leadership of Dr. Brinza, Irpen was founded on a steadfast commitment to God's Word*



Students at Irpen Biblical Seminary.

*and sound biblical teaching. That commitment remains rock solid today under the leadership of Alexei's son-in-law, Dr. Igor Yaremchuk. The students*  
(Continued on next page)





Students benefit from a diverse staff of professors, most whom are of Russian speaking nationals.

(Continued . . . ) are carefully recruited through their local churches, and they are required to be involved in the ministries of their local churches. **The goal is to either strengthen their local church or to go out and plant new churches.** Past graduates have gone on to dedicated service on the mission field across the former Soviet Union, and in far-away places like Israel and even Muslim countries in the Middle East!”

Another way that the seminary has grown since the early days is the fact that most of the professors and teaching responsibilities are Russian-speaking nationals rather than Western professors and instructors. The students enrolled at Irpen are much younger now than they were at the beginning. President Yaremchuk realizes he is building on a tremendous legacy and the growth is exciting . . .

“I have been the president of Irpen for 10 years. And praise God, when we started we had only 57 students. Today we have over 400! We have students from all over Ukraine, from other countries of the former Soviet Union, and even one who flew from

Alaska to study here! He found it much less costly to study here! Among our graduates, **95% of them are in full-time ministry**, and it’s a great joy for us to see the fruits of our labor. It’s also a great joy for me when I visit different churches here, I realize that I am visiting the churches of our students. While I’m preaching the Gospel, I am also recruiting new students to come study at the seminary, so it works both ways!”

Thanks to the support of SGA partners, more men and women have been able to access the great educational opportunities that exist at Irpen. Even more would like to be able to study, and the need is enormous with the number of new churches being planted. ♦



Graduates and staff at the 2017 ceremony.

**Please pray for God’s continued provision and direction for this vibrant, fruitful school—strategically placed in the Bible Belt of the former Soviet Union.**

## Precious Memories of a Godly Legacy in Ukraine

Among evangelical believers in Ukraine, the name Brinza carries an enormous spiritual legacy, and above all, deep personal sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel. Lena Yaremchuk, the wife of Irpen Seminary president Igor Yaremchuk and daughter of the late seminary founder, Dr. Alexei Brinza, recently looked back at her family history with both humility and thanksgiving . . .

I am so grateful for my heritage, for my parents and grandparents who brought me to the Lord, and that I could see Christ reflected in their lives. My grandfather was Gavril Brinza and my grandmother’s name was Valentina. He and my grandmother always allowed believers to use their house for meetings, and the small group there became a church. **Later during the persecution time (under Stalin), he was arrested, sentenced to death and put in prison.**

My grandmother walked two hours to the prison at Melitopol where he was initially held. She felt badly that she didn’t have anything at home to give him or to take any food to him. Later on when my father became a pastor, **she always told us that we needed to**

**always have some food ready in case Dad would be arrested.**

Then grandfather was sent to Siberia on a train. **None of the family knew he was still alive for eight years.** God took care of him—they found out he was an honest man and they let him work in the kitchen. But each night, the guards came

around with a flashlight and would point it at the prisoner who was going to be executed that night. Finally one night, the light fell on him. **As he was taken outside to be shot, the guard in charge asked, “Why are you here?” My grandfather replied, “Because I am a Christian and I allowed a church meeting in my house.”** The guard then asked him where he was from and what church, and Grandfather said “Zaporozhye. Chortitza Baptist Church.” The guard teared up, and said, “My mother is going to this church!” And because of this, my grandfather was allowed to live! Later, he was released and it was a glorious day when he finally came home!

My father (Alexei Brinza) became a pastor in 1970. He had read lots of Christian books and wanted to grow in Christ. He said that his Bible

school was the example of a doctor who had spent more than 20 years in prison. After his release, my dad would go visit him every night and study the Bible. Dad was known

for his love of young people. His life was ministry. It was hard for him to leave his pastorate in Zaporozhye to found Irpen Seminary, but God was with him and God used him. At his funeral, so many students told us that he wasn’t just our father, he was their father too. It is really a privilege, and I am so grateful for my parents! ♦



Lena's grandfather, Gavril Brinza.

*Precious memories, how they linger  
How they ever flood my soul  
In the stillness of the midnight  
Precious sacred scenes unfold . . .  
(Precious Memories, J.B.F Wright, 1925)*



## SPIRITUAL FRUIT FROM IRPEN:

# Taking God's Love to Ukraine Prisons

Denis Markin has a heart for lost souls incarcerated in Ukrainian prisons. Perhaps it's because his own path toward faith in Christ was, by his own description, a difficult one although he avoided prison himself. Sitting down recently with SGA president Michael Johnson to share his story, Denis begins by saying that his unsaved parents invested a lot into his education, but it didn't keep him from becoming "a criminal, a thief, and a drug addict."

But God had another plan for Denis, and worked through the loving witness of an elderly lady to bring him to saving faith eight years ago. **Through the support of SGA partners like you, Denis not only became a student at Irpen Biblical Seminary, but also an effective evangelist.** He visits local prisons, where he and another Irpen student are making an eternal difference . . .

*"We have begun Bible training in our area using the knowledge I have received at Irpen. The brother with whom I do ministry is in the second year of seminary, and he had come to faith while in the prison I have been visiting. One day he came to our prayer room in the prison and declared, 'I'm going to destroy the faith among you, and I'm going to stop you from doing it!' But instead he came to faith, was released from prison after 12 years, and is now a student at the seminary. He now goes back to the prison to preach the Gospel. The Lord has changed his life tremendously. He has a family and children. So without the seminary—without your financial help—we would not have had an opportunity to study God's Word like this."*

**Please continue to pray for Denis and his fellow workers as they reach their region for Christ. You are truly helping them to make an eternal difference in many lives!**

Denis is putting the biblical knowledge he has received into practice. He reports that there are 65 people in his church, and they try to take the Gospel to as many areas of life as they can . . .

*"In addition to the prison ministry, we visit schools, colleges, witness on the streets, and one-on-one personal evangelism. Our area has been affected very heavily because of the war in eastern Ukraine. The towns where I live and minister have sustained a lot of shelling fire. As bad as this is, the conflict has also had a positive impact because many people who would have never come to the church otherwise are now coming because they see it as their last hope. We have helped many people in rebuilding homes, installing glass, and fixing roofs. Refugees come to our church and so we minister to them. When it is possible, we help them financially. And of course, we try to share the Gospel with them first of all. And the seminary has helped me a lot in communicating the pure Gospel to people!" ♦*

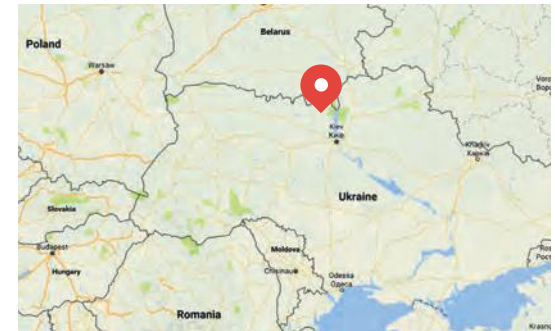


With the education he received at Irpen Biblical Seminary, Denis Markin is able to minister to those in need throughout Ukraine.

## IRPEN AT A GLANCE

The Kiev suburb of Irpen has a long history all of its own—a history mixed with triumph and tragedy. A few facts:

- ♦ Population: 42,924
- ♦ Modern city began in 1899 as a railway town founded by railway workers along the Irpen River.
- ♦ Occupied by the German Wehrmacht during World War II from 1941-1944. Most of the city's Jewish population was killed in the Babi Yar or other massacres.
- ♦ Noted Soviet writer Nikolai Nosov spent his childhood in Irpen.



The Irpen town hall.



Irpen River in winter.

- ♦ Site of SGA's Kiev Regional Ministry Center (RMC), which was once located in another suburb called Brovary.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Bible training has always been central in SGA's ministry of service to evangelical churches across Russia and her neighboring countries. It remains the top priority of the churches as new congregations are planted and the need for trained pastors continues to grow. We are deeply thankful for the prayers and support of SGA partners like you, and the needs continue. You're not only helping to prepare the next generation of Christian leaders, but also supporting missionary pastors, children's and youth workers, compassion ministry for the needy, provision of Bibles and Christian literature, and much more. Please pray about how you can help today!



# *“Tell Us What This Bible Is About!”*

## Teaching Christian Ethics in Public Schools . . . in Ukraine!

**Alona Brazhnik**

**Graduate of Irpen Biblical Seminary**

I came to Christ in 2003. I love God and love to serve Him in children's ministry. I have a Masters degree from a state university, and I am allowed to teach children in public schools. Last year, I graduated from Irpen Seminary with a degree, and will begin teaching Christian Ethics in the public school.

**God has blessed Ukraine with huge open doors to go into the public schools.** It is different than Sunday schools—we cannot call children to repent or to trust in Christ, but we can teach lessons, tell children about the Bible, biblical stories, Christian morality, and the moral Christian life. And through this, there are opportunities to invite them to the church and there we can tell them about salvation in Christ. **In addition, Ukraine's president allowed the recognition of the Reformation in its 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the state level, and this opened all kinds of doors for believers to teach about that.**

There is opposition, of course—not from the schoolteachers or administrators, but rather from other religious groups opposed to evangelical churches. **But we believe that if we teach the Bible to the children, the Word of God itself will transform children's lives.** Parents will see this transformation, and I have already heard a lot of testimonies where parents have seen changes in their children, got interested in the church and visited, and then they came to Christ themselves.

I am thankful for the opportunity to study in seminary. I have been in church since childhood, and the first president of Irpen was the pastor in our church. So as soon as I graduated from the university, I had this opportunity to study further at Irpen. It was the best time and the best place! ♦



Alona Brazhnik believes that teaching the Bible to children will open their hearts to God's Word.



*Good News Report* is published to report religious news about Russia, the rest of the CIS and the ministries of:

### **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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# Prayer & Praise

SHARING THE GOSPEL • EQUIPPING THE CHURCH • HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

*Please join us each day this month in praise for the work of Christ in the Russian speaking lands.*

*Scripture theme of the month: The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27).*

**1 Reflection:** We begin the new year with the assurance of King David . . . *Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken (Psalm 55:22).*

**2** One of SGA president Michael Johnson's main tasks is exploring new opportunities to share the SGA ministry story with more and more people across North America. Please ask the Lord to grant him wisdom and direction.

**3** With the harsh winter in full force, SGA-sponsored Compassion Ministry is all the more important in helping to provide food and other assistance to the needy. Pray for abundant resources to help the churches reach as many as possible.

**4** Pray today for SGA/New Zealand, led by director Rick Hemmingsen. Pray for more opportunities for Rick and board chairman Peter Somervell to speak at churches and acquaint people with the abundant ministry opportunities across the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).



## RUSSIA



**5** The Russian government agency Rosstat reports that average life expectancy has gone up to 71.87 years. The region of Ingushetia has the highest average at 80.8 years. Pray with us that more will have eternal life certainty through the power of the Gospel!

**6** Pray today for SGA's Moscow Regional Ministry Center, led by Valery Kazakov. Ask for continued wisdom and provision as our Reach Russia Now initiative continues to develop ways to reach the Far East with the Gospel.

**7** Today is Russian Christmas, observed by most churches in the CIS. Pray for the SGA-sponsored *Immanuel's Child* outreaches taking place, asking God to draw many boys and girls to Himself in saving faith.

**8** Alexei Boldishev is an SGA-sponsored missionary pastor in Russia's Tyumen region. Please pray for him and his church as they carry out fruitful youth ministry in the surrounding villages.

**9** Continue to pray for Pastor Alexei Smirnov and the leadership of the Russian UECB. May the Lord grant them wisdom and encouragement as they seek His direction on future ministry across 11 time zones.



**14** Pray for SGA missionary pastor Oleg Ogorodnik and his ministry in Ukraine's Radomyshl region. Oleg and others in the congregation regularly distribute Christian literature and evangelize, with several coming to Christ over the past year.

**15** Please intercede for ongoing compassion ministry taking place across Ukraine—not just in the eastern conflict zone but also in other regions where there are many needy families. Ask the Lord to provide additional resources as needs increase during the winter.

**10** The ongoing conflict with separatists in eastern Ukraine has brought sorrow to many individuals and families. Please join us in praying for peace to come at last as the conflict approaches its fifth year.

**11** Pray for Pastor Valery Antonyuk, president of the Ukrainian UECB. Pray also for the regional pastors across Ukraine as they oversee the country's largest evangelical church fellowship. The challenges are many but God is abundantly faithful.

**12** Lift the staff of SGA's Kiev RMC in prayer today. Director Ruslan Muratayev and his team are thankful to serve Bible-preaching churches and to help advance the Gospel across Ukraine.

**13** Now that the Christmas break is over, students at the SGA-sponsored seminaries at Irpen and Odessa will be resuming their coursework. Ask for God's blessing and provision as they study the deep truths of Scripture together.

## BELARUS



**16** As is the case in the other CIS nations, churches in Belarus will soon be conducting follow up ministry with children reaching during SGA-sponsored *Immanuel's Child* programs. Pray that God will open many doors for the Gospel over the coming weeks.

**17** Pray today for director Piotr Podrez and his team at SGA's Minsk RMC. May the Lord encourage their hearts and grant them open doors to help churches advance the Gospel in challenging conditions.

**18** Join us in praising God for the openings granted to SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Sergei Gormash to reach youth in the Mogilev region. Also pray for the successful completion of a children's camp that Sergei's church is building.

**19** Pray for the SGA-sponsored Minsk Theological Seminary today—its faculty, students, and support staff. We are thankful to the Lord for this sound Bible school and its commitment to biblical truth.

**20** Lift Belarussian UECB president Dr. Viktor Krutko in prayer today. Viktor has a long history of partnership with SGA, and we are thankful to the Lord for his servant leadership.

## CENTRAL ASIA, CAUCASUS, & ISRAEL

**21** In the Caucasus country of Georgia, SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Gosha is evangelizing several villages along with camps for children and youth. The Caucasus can be dangerous, so please intercede for our brothers and sisters as they share the Gospel.

**22** We praise God for the opportunities He has given us to serve Russian-speaking congregations in Israel through Bible training. Pray for our training director there, asking for God's wisdom, direction, and provision.

**23** Pray for Alexander Karyakov, director of the SGA-sponsored Almaty Bible Institute in Kazakhstan. We rejoice at the progress that has been made at this strategic school since its founding in the early 1990.

**24** Pastor Alexander in Central Asia reports that the church was able to help more than 250 needy people in his region with humanitarian aid and present the Gospel. Pray with us, asking God to open doors for evangelism through this ministry.

**25** In Russia's Caucasus region, the regions of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia are largely Muslim in makeup, and evangelism can be very dangerous. Please pray for missionary pastors and other church workers who discreetly share the love of Christ amid the dangers.

**26** Please pray for SGA's international offices in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. May God continue to bless and direct their ministries in the CIS and Eastern Europe.



**27** SGA's advancement division has been launching many new efforts to gain more ministry partners and increase Gospel resources for the churches we serve in the CIS. Please lift these efforts in prayer, asking for God's ongoing provision.

**28** Pray for the SGA-sponsored *Reach Russia Now* initiative, focused at first on Russia's Far East. This region is nearly the size of the lower continental U.S. with many different people groups who desperately need to hear the Gospel. .

**29** With this year's *Immanuel's Child* ministries now past, preparation will begin for next year's children's Christmas outreaches. Please

pray with us for more North American churches to participate in this vibrant, fruitful ministry.

**30** Pray for Cindy Beaumont, SGA's human resources manager. Keeping on top of constantly changing government regulations and insurance issues can be challenging. We are thankful to the Lord for her diligent labors

**31 Reflection:** We close January with King David's prayer . . . *I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and will glorify Your name forever. For Your lovingkindness toward me is great . . .* (Psalm 86:12-13).

## Partner Prayer Requests

*Please pray for healing from five surgeries . . .*

Surprise, Arizona

*Praising God for His protection in an auto accident . . .*

Bettendorf, Iowa

*Lift up my Ukrainian grandchildren and their walk with Christ . . .*

Vestal, New York

*For the assurance of salvation . . .*

Knoxville, Tennessee

**The SGA staff is honored to bring your request to the Lord.  
We thank you for the opportunity to serve you in this way.**



**Slavic Gospel Association**  
6151 Commonwealth Drive  
Loves Park, Illinois 61111  
815-282-8900 ♦ sga.org



**Slavic Gospel Association ♦ Canada**  
55 Fleming Drive, Suite 26  
Cambridge, ON N1T 2A9  
519-621-3553 ♦ www.sgacanada.ca