



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

# Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

## Christians in Slavic Nations Endure COVID Crisis, Reach Out to the Unsaved

### INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ♦ *Christ Over COVID: Much Prayer, Much Power*
- ♦ Reaching the hurting, sick, and lonely with Jesus' love and salvation
- ♦ Former despondent orphan . . . now on fire 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)*



# Christ Over COVID:

## *Much Prayer, Much Power*

Michael Johnson  
SGA President



SGA-sponsored missionary pastors and SGA staff are committed to proclaiming the Gospel and bringing help in Jesus' name across the former Soviet Union, and now the need is even greater!

Christ is sovereign over COVID. And SGA is not slowing down. In Christ's power, SGA and our partner churches intensified our ministry.

The SGA staff, along with the churches we serve across the former Soviet Union and the faithful partners who help make our ministries possible, have all been impacted. Like many of you, we have had to work remotely from home with the office operating only with a skeleton crew, and only as absolutely necessary. We have been praying unceasingly that God will continue to reveal Himself to you during these challenging days, while trusting God's protection for you and your family.

As supporters of SGA know, our founder Peter Deyneka had a motto that is always at the

forefront of our minds. ***Much Prayer, Much Power!*** Our staff prays for you and for our brothers and sisters overseas every morning before we begin the workday. **As I pray through what is happening as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic, I have come to believe that this represents one of the greatest opportunities for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in modern times.** As I write this, the nations of the former Soviet Union are seeing the pandemic spread and, like many countries, are trying to limit impacts with the closing of borders and shutting down of their infrastructure.

While the economic impacts of the pandemic are severe here in North America, things will be



much worse across Russia and her neighboring countries. SGA-sponsored missionary pastors and church leaders there tell us that they expect **significant shortages in food, humanitarian aid, and medical supplies.** But in the midst of this, God has used them to establish a network of thousands of faithful churches that are **committed to minister to the people in their communities, helping to meet urgent needs and share the life-changing Gospel.**

### ***Announcing Christ Over COVID: Much Prayer, Much Power!***

In response to this global crisis and the call of our brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), SGA has issued an international call to prayer that we are calling ***Christ Over COVID: Much Prayer, Much Power.*** We want to pray not only for the nations of the world, but also to lift up the churches of the former Soviet Union and Israel so they can be a light for the Gospel! We are asking God to draw many to Himself in repentance and faith. As we minister in both word

and deed, by God's grace and provision we will have all of the resources in place to reach out to the poor, orphans, widows, victims of war, the sick, and those who are forgotten from the cities to the far reaches of the earth!

We know that these are difficult times for many of our partners. The needs of the faithful brothers and sisters remain, and we are so thankful to the Lord for you and your ongoing faithfulness to help meet these urgent needs. We trust that God will do great things, and that many will come to Him in saving faith as they hear the Gospel proclaimed. Our Lord is the only certain hope we have in times of trouble.

The Lord Jesus said . . . *And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come* (Matthew 24:4). Nothing will stop Him from building His church—not even a global pandemic. May He be glorified through His people in the days ahead! ♦



Significant shortages in food, humanitarian aid, and medical supplies are expected in Russia and her neighboring countries, but SGA-sponsored missionary pastors are mobilizing to meet urgent needs.

# Your Love Touches the Most Forgotten

## *Compassion Ministry Transforms Lives Now . . . and for Eternity!*

**A**cross Russia's 11 time zones, thousands of individuals and families are living in heartbreaking poverty. Things are especially severe in small villages away from huge urban population centers. The global coronavirus pandemic has strained supply chains to the limit, yet the evangelical churches we serve are committed to reaching out in the love of Jesus and meeting urgent needs.

In the Ivanovo region, SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Alexander Spichak regularly reaches out to needy individuals and families, and asks that we pray for them to respond to the Gospel:



*One lady we met has had a physical disability since childhood. She has two children but no husband, and she is illiterate as she did not learn at school. Because of this, she cannot find a job and her family needs food and clothing. A team from the church visited them and brought them aid. We began having meetings with them and helped as we were able.*

*Another lady I had met had a husband who was seriously ill. He refused to go to the hospital, and I*



*was worried that he would die unreconciled with God. After prayer, I went to see the family. I told the husband that I didn't want him to die, but if that was what he was facing, I wanted him to die forgiven. I shared that he needed to repent and ask Christ for forgiveness of his sins. The man thanked me, and I knelt by his bedside to pray with him.*

*Some days later, the husband died. The family including extended relatives came together for the funeral. Some of the relatives insisted that his widow had to call a priest for prayer, but she replied that she wanted me to pray instead. So I shared the Gospel, telling them that God does not want us to die without being forgiven, and that He had allowed me to visit this village and meet this family. Then I told them about Christ and prayed. The results are in God's hands.*

As the physical needs are certain to increase across Russia and her neighboring countries in the days ahead, it is all the more important to keep missionary pastors like Alexander supplied with resources for their ministries. Thank you for all that you do! ♦



# Tortured for Following Christ

## *The Cost of Discipleship in the Caucasus*

The nations that lie in the Caucasus mountain range have had difficult, even bloody histories. Even during Soviet times and in the aftermath of communism's fall, armed conflicts have broken out and claimed many lives. In Russia's Caucasus region, much of the area is dominated by Islam. Christian ministry can be extremely dangerous.

SGA-sponsored missionary pastors make occasional visits into this region yet must do so very discreetly. One of them recently shared the heartbreaking story of a faithful woman who has paid a high price for her faith in Christ. We have changed her name for security reasons . . .

*One day, Anna was taken from her apartment to a police station. Her husband was not at home as he had been in a car accident involving a drunk driver and one of his fingers had to be amputated at the hospital. The police ordered Anna to put on her coat and follow them, but she told them her husband was at the hospital and she had two small children. The police then called Anna's husband in the hospital, and they informed him that Anna had*

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***“The police informed Anna's husband that she had attended a “sect” meeting and she had to be interrogated.”***

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*attended a “sect” meeting and she had to be interrogated. They forced her to ask a neighbor to look after the children.*

*When Anna got to the police station, the interrogation began. They began torturing her, using electric shocks. She lost consciousness four times and they struck her in the head. They kept asking her questions about her faith. While she was in custody, the authorities aired a television report*

*accusing Anna and other women of being witches. After this interrogation and public shame, they let Anna go home. But her troubles were not over. Relatives including her oldest son began calling, accusing her of discrediting her family.*

*After a few days, we decided to take Anna and her family to another region so they could rest from their ordeal. We thank God for brothers from Azerbaijan who helped us financially. Anna thanked us, saying that they had both physical and spiritual rest. She prays that she will never have to “return to that prison.”*

We are thankful for the faithful missionary pastor who shared this story with us. He ministers in a very dangerous region. Please also continue to pray for Anna, who is physically frail with health problems and seven children. These brothers and sisters are a vivid example of why your support for SGA ministries is so important. Thank you! ♦

(B) Anna serves in the dormitory.  
(R) Anna and her family enjoyed a much-needed rest following their ordeal.



# God Used You to Reach One ... Then Many

*Your Support Helps Transform an Orphan Boy into a Man on Fire for Christ!*

**Irina Orlova**

***Orphans Reborn Team in St. Petersburg, Russia***



Visiting an orphanage.

**W**e visit three orphanages on a regular basis. About a year ago, a young man named Alexei came to our church and got acquainted with Ludmila on our team. At first, Alexei attended the church rarely, telling us it was because of his studies. Yet because he was living at the school, he was allowed to leave the facility. We happened to know that he was an orphan. Then we saw Alexei in a navy uniform, so we could guess where he was studying.

In general, this young man behaved quite secretly and hardly talked about himself, which is a typical behavior for orphan children. In order to be allowed to leave the school more often, Alexei had improved his grades. Gradually, he started showing up at the church every Sunday, communicating with us and having talks with the pastors. Then six months later, he repented. Alexei is now a different person, changed completely and loving God with all his heart!

**At college, Alexei is a leader, a bold and committed person.** He started sharing about the Lord with his peers, many of whom have responded to the Gospel. Then Alexei approached the headmaster of the school to ask permission to set up a Bible study

group. To our great surprise, the headmaster gave his permission!

At first, the group was attended by six young people, then eight, and now 14 students who come regularly.

## Leading Others in Christ

**We realized that Alexei needs to grow spiritually, and we began meeting with him three times a week, or even more often, to help him prepare for the Bible study group.** He and those who attend the group read from the Gospels together, then he leads them through verse by verse, covering the studied passage. Before the group meeting, we go through every topic with him. The Lord opens up the truths to him, and he deeply understands the Scriptures.

Recently, two brothers came to the Bible study and told Alexei that they are from a Christian home but were not ready to openly confess it at the school in fear of being mocked. But when the two brothers saw Alexei boldly sharing about the Lord, they were encouraged and decided to openly join the Bible group!

Alexei is a true orphan with no family at all. We help him when we can, buying clothing and providing food. **He is almost 19, and is graduating in June, and we continue helping him with preparing for the Bible study group that he leads.** We do not know how it is going to be after he graduates. We are thankful to the Lord for everything that He presently provides. Please continue to pray for him, and for us as we keep reaching out to these young people with the love of Christ! ♦

## CIS IN THE NEWS

### A Ray of Hope in Azerbaijan!



After 25 years of prayer, effort, and waiting, Baptist Union members in Aliabad, Azerbaijan, are able to meet for

worship and prayer. While the governmental agency overseeing religious organizations has not granted official legal status, **Pastor Hamid Shabanov received a letter stating that the agency had “no objections” for the church to meet each Saturday morning for two hours.** Ilya Zenchenko, president of the Azeri Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (UECB), said that this was

God's reply to their prayers and those offered around the world, adding, “though officials say it is a response to our appeals to the president of Azerbaijan.”

This is a wonderful development in light of the severe oppression faced by this church. **Pastor Shabanov had been held in prison in 2008-2009, and Pastor Zaur Balaev spent nearly a year in prison on false charges.** Other pastors have also faced official punishments. Church members have faced raids for holding prayer meetings in their homes. Please pray that oppression of churches in Azerbaijan will cease, and that more existing churches will at last be able to gain registration. ♦

## HOW YOU CAN HELP



As the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic continue to be felt around the world, SGA is calling for international prayer through our ***Christ Over COVID: Much Prayer, Much Power*** campaign. In addition to ongoing sustained prayer asking the Lord to bring swift healing and recovery, we are also seeking His gracious provision to help evangelical churches across the hard-hit former Soviet Union as they respond to the needs of their people.

**A fellow supporter has offered a \$75,000 Matching Grant. The grant will**

**match—and therefore double—all gifts up to the combined total. Praise God!**

Your support is so vitally important for this and all of SGA's ministries—Bible training, compassion ministry, support for outreach to orphans and needy children, provision of Russian-language Bibles and Christian literature, and so much more. Thank you for your faithful prayers and support! Please pray about what you can do today. ♦



# Canadian Connection

One of our supporting partners wrote, “Despite the uncertainty of a pandemic event, we together have a certainty of God’s sovereign, immutable and majestic nature . . .”

This worldwide challenge has shaken many and we pray for those on the front lines fighting this virus. Schedules have been altered, and life as we knew it has changed for the next number of weeks and months.

Our family of God overseas are dealing with similar pressures minus the high level of care we receive medically. There are minimal external resources to fall back on and they are asking for prayer right now.

Plans are still being made for a summer ministry should this pandemic clear. Resources are being gathered and your gifts are so appreciated by the brothers and sisters.

We come together in this campaign – **Christ Over COVID: Much Prayer, Much Power!** God has not been taken by surprise in this global pandemic. It knows no borders or boundaries created by man and people everywhere have been affected, including those in the former Soviet Union.

Your support is needed now more than ever. As we connect by Skype and Zoom with our partners overseas, the question is asked, “Will you be there for us?” We have assured them that God hasn’t left them, and neither will we. Though our travel plans were curtailed, we have not forgotten them. Only God knows what ministry will look like in the days ahead.

Our overseas partners know what it is to live with uncertainty and upheavals far better than most of us. They are the ones who are now encouraging us to remain strong and faithful. Their faith is steadfast and certain in our God who changes not.

Donors have generously stepped up with matching gifts. We are greatly encouraged during these difficult times. Many have suffered job losses and reduced income, yet the needs are even greater. We seek God and know the truth: Much Prayer, Much Power!

Thank you for your part in this unprecedented time of human history that will forever be etched on our minds and hearts.



Bill Ball  
Executive Director, SGA/Canada



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