



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN



Despite COVID, with Your Help the Churches of the Former USSR Prepare for *Immanuel's Child!*

INSIDE: GOD USES YOUR GIFTS TO DO THE “IMPOSSIBLE”:

- ♦ Your *Immanuel's Child* gifts are used to change a young boy and his family!
- ♦ Food and Christ in the Ukraine war zone—and churches grow!
- ♦ See the stories and faces of people you are blessing 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)

A Christmas Story Still Being Written . . .

Your Support of Immanuel's Child Has Year-Round Impact

Maksim is seven years old. Last year, he received a gift provided through SGA partners through *Immanuel's Child* at Christmas. He and his mother Olga were **a family without a father**, as Olga had left the father two years ago. Maksim was very fond of



Maksim and his mother.

his dad and missed him badly, and this began being reflected in his behavior. He began his first year of school last September, and quickly became the talk of his class for his **temper fits and gloomy attitude**.

Olga herself was suffering and lost after a breakup with her boyfriend and was looking for new friends. The mother of a girl in Maksim's class invited Olga and Maksim to a birthday party around Christmas. At the party, Olga met several God-loving people and had many questions for them.

So she enrolled Maksim in the Sunday school of the **New Moscow Bible Church**, while she herself began attending an adult Sunday school class at the same church!

The church held an *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreach. Maksim was there and received his gift bag. First, he ate the candy from the bag, then began to read the enclosed book about Jesus. **Maksim's grandmother visited the family a month later to find him sharing the Gospel with her, having a childlike fervor.** She was wary at first at the new teaching about this Jesus of whom she had never heard. Yet she went back home to her town knowing much more about the God of the Bible than ever.

An Unexpected Young Mission for a Child:

Then Maksim's story took a surprising twist—but not surprising to God.

When summer came and the coronavirus pandemic shut normal life down, Maksim was sent to his father in faraway Kirov, which was halfway to Siberia. His dad worked during the day and drank every night, yet Maksim was very happy to see him at last. Maksim's father didn't receive his son's talks

about Jesus well. They annoyed him. Undaunted, Maksim began inviting his friends from the street over for a cup of tea, and together they perused the children's Bible and the book he got from the

“Maksim began inviting his friends from the street over for a cup of tea, and together they perused the children's Bible and the book he got from the Immanuel's Child event.”

Immanuel's Child event. The friends liked the message! It sparked many, and deep, conversations.

As this story was being written, the plan was for Maksim to attend a church children's camp with a local Baptist church where his mother had enrolled him. His grandmother will take him there every morning, and he will meet more Christian friends with whom he can talk.

Preparing to Reach More This Christmas:

This wonderful testimony, shared with us by SGA-sponsored missionary pastor Vlad Treskin, is a vivid reminder of how your support of **Immanuel's Child** does far more than impact children and their families at Christmas. The Gospel seeds planted, coupled with the loving care and witness of the

churches and children's workers, continue to bear fruit all year long. While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact lives across Russia and her neighboring countries, the churches plan to push forward, reaching more children than ever—we are asking God for 50,000! But the new interest in communities stirred by the **Christ Over COVID** campaign has opened that wide a door!

Churches will innovate and be flexible in how they will distribute gifts and share the Gospel with needy children and their families this Christmas. Many will plan events. Others will go door to door. God's Spirit will be in every outreach. Please pray for God's continued provision for this vitally important outreach, and that we will be able to reach even more needy children and their families with the Gospel. Join us in also praying for Maksim and his family, and to bring God much glory through their lives! ♦



A father and son read the name on an Immanuel's Child star.



Children at SGA-sponsored Christmas outreaches in the former Soviet Union.

SGA Teams with World Challenge to Help Ukrainian Churches with Compassion Ministry

... that we may be fellow workers with the truth (3 John 8).



The ongoing fighting has uprooted many families. Apartment buildings and businesses have been completely destroyed.

In the six years that have gone by since the war broke out in eastern Ukraine, thousands of people have joined in prayer and in giving to help provide urgently needed food and other aid to devastated families. We are also deeply thankful for the



Preparing aid packages for needy families.

involvement of **World Challenge**—the internationally known ministry founded in 1971 by the late Pastor David Wilkerson. Two years ago, **World Challenge began providing generous grants to help purchase aid for distribution by SGA-sponsored missionary pastors and church teams in the war zones, and these resources have profoundly impacted many lives.** Today, this ongoing aid continues to encourage these needy families now dealing with the coronavirus in addition to the war.

Pastor Gary Wilkerson, the son of David Wilkerson and president of World Challenge, said that there is great harmony with SGA's approach to ministry. *"Our approach is sympatico—we have a very similar approach to missions, bringing mercy and*

some aid relief alongside our primary call of transforming lives through serving the church. Next year, we celebrate our 50th anniversary and our mission statement is ‘To transform lives through the message and mission of Jesus Christ.’ We always love hearing reports of spiritual hunger where there is a famine for the Word of God, and people wanting to be fed!”

Eric Mock, SGA vice president of ministry operations, said that the contributions of World Challenge have been nothing short of profound. “When I’ve been in the war zone, **I have seen the distributions in action along with the proclamation of the Gospel while visiting single-parent homes and the elderly.** These needy individuals are almost the

“... churches are filling, and these people would not have heard the Gospel any other way.”

only ones left remaining in the war zones and they have nowhere else to go. The church teams we help supply deliver the aid at great risk, often in the midst of sniper fire. In one area, the village gathered at the church including widows and young women with children. **Empty churches are filling, and these people would not have heard the Gospel any other way.”**



Many families are struggling due to the ongoing war.



SGA president Michael Johnson added, “The underlying philosophy of World Challenge and that of SGA are indeed very similar. Their work—like ours—is coordinated through the local church, and this opens doors for them to **meet both physical and**



Delivering aid to families near the front lines of the conflict..

spiritual needs. We all share a passion for the Gospel, which transforms lives. Their contribution has helped provide more than **8,500 food packs for families**, out of which came an estimated **376,000 meals**. Almost 4,000 food packs were provided to **needy widows**, or almost 176,000 meals. In addition, assistance was rendered through **Operation Winter Warmth**, with about 35,000 meals along with warm clothing and heaters for those struggling with the cold last winter. All in all, about **600,000 meals** were provided. **And most importantly, open doors were created to share the Gospel with these families!”**

As the fall begins, most global health experts are predicting a renewed spike in COVID-19 cases, and peace remains elusive in eastern Ukraine. **Please pray with us for the ongoing resources the churches will need to keep reaching these families with the love of Christ and the physical help they will need to survive.** ♦

Taking Christ's Love Into Ukraine's War Zone

Editor's Note: The following stories were sent to us by SGA-sponsored missionary pastors who are regularly traveling into the war zones in eastern Ukraine—often at great risk. They are examples of the ministry you help make possible.

Vanya is nine years old.

He lives in a poor and dysfunctional family. His mother works all day long, and when comes back home, she does nothing but get drunk. She spends all her money on alcohol instead of food—a common situation. **They live in a strange house that resembles a barn. Vanya's**



clothes are in terrible condition. He literally lives like a little tramp. He can be away from home for several days, just wandering around the city. And when he returns, he gets regularly beaten—not only by his mother, but also by his elder brother and his mother's frequently changing drinking partners. **Vanya has never seen his father.** They say he was killed because of a gambling debt, but no one knows the truth.

Although Vanya is only 9 years old, **he is already working.** People had been paying him some money and giving him food for his work, but the COVID pandemic and related quarantine ended that. **This past winter, Vanya started visiting church, where he got new clothes and food packages a few times.** Also, church members invited him to a cafe and entertainment center. But what this young boy really needs is loving communication, especially with men. **Here in the church, he has received what he lacks at home—love and acceptance.** Each time when there is an opportunity, he comes to church himself, helps everybody, packs the tables, and cleans up. We hope that God will change the life of Vanya and his family as well. The greatest need for now is food (we know that he starves) and spending time with him.

Valentina is 70 years old.

She recently came to faith in Christ. After the

horrors of the war in 2014, **she gave her heart to the Lord.** Her life is full of challenges. At the beginning of the year she suffered a stroke, resulting in paralysis of her right side. She has buried all her relatives. Her husband and daughter died. So there is absolutely no place from which to expect help. This is why the body of Christ exists. Valentina has a really small pension, which is only enough to buy medicines for 10 days. **We support her as much as we can, visit her often, and buy her medicines. We pray for the best and will not abandon our people in trouble.**

Lera is 38 years old.

She studied to be a salesperson. Lera has two children. Her son Sasha is five years old. His father was killed during the war in 2014, and his body was not found until 2017. Her daughter Lilia is four years old, and her father is alive but does not live with them and does not help. Lera has worked as a janitor for a long time, being paid 2,000 rubles a month (\$28). **We began to help her with food. Her son visited our Christian camp recently.** Now Lera brings her children to **Sunday school** and began to attend church herself!

Nadya is 15 and pregnant.

Her parents have gone to Moscow to work and are not planning to come back home. **In this photo, she is holding three cans of stew in her hands and the Gospel under her arm.** This is the main point of our ministry. Not only delivering food packages, but sharing the Gospel with people and leading them to Christ. **Your generous support of Christ Over COVID has helped make all this possible! ♦**



CIS IN THE NEWS

Fighting Resumes Between Azerbaijan and Armenia

The longstanding conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over a region known as Nagorno-Karabakh erupted into violence again recently. **After heavy artillery fire, both sides reported casualties including soldiers and one civilian.** According to Deutsche Welle news service, the hostilities are the worst since scores died in violent clashes over four days back in 2016. **This border region has been the scene of repeated, deadly fighting for years.**

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region of Azerbaijan controlled by ethnic Armenian forces backed by the government in Armenia. Armenians are the

majority population in the region, but Azerbaijan has built up its forces in the region and is threatening to use military action to regain control if necessary. **Both sides have blamed each other for the escalation, and the United Nations called for an immediate cease-fire.** As always, our concern is over loss of life and the safety of the evangelical churches SGA serves in both nations, as well as that of the general population. Pray for peace to come at last to the region, and that doors for the Gospel will open up as people seek the . . . *peace of God that passes all comprehension . . .* (Philippians 4:7). ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Across Russia and her neighboring countries, our brothers and sisters continue to minister and serve in the midst of incredibly challenging conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting their nations very



A grandfather and granddaughter look at a children's Bible the young girl received.

hard, and they have had to adjust their normal ministry operations—as we have—in the face of quarantines, lockdowns, and illness in their midst.

Yet God is still declaring His power and sovereignly working through them to bring men, women, and children to Himself. Your support and encouragement means so much to them, and makes all their ministries possible—Bible training, children's ministries, Compassion Ministry, provision of Bibles and Christian literature, and so much more.

Thank you for all that you do, and please consider a gift today as SGA-supported churches are already preparing for this year's *Immanuel's Child* outreach! ♦



Children watch a play during an *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreach in Belarus.

Canadian Connection

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand (Proverbs 19:21).

Consider with me the reports you see in this package of information you have received from SGA. Now, think of the above verse in Proverbs and bring those thoughts together.

A few months ago, we had developed all kinds of plans, but God's purpose has prevailed as the best way. We have been so humbled to see God change our plans through a pandemic on a global scale. While our hearts ache to see so much suffering, we must trust God.

Life as we knew it has changed and we are adapting, focusing on the "purpose of the Lord." Our missionary pastors across the former Soviet Union are figuring out what is acceptable in their country and region going forward. The Gospel is being shared in greater capacity despite new restrictions. Food packages distributed by the thousands have opened more doors than imaginable.



Now as we ramp up the *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreach, we are trusting God to do what He desires. Most likely, it will be very different in many locations. Perhaps instead of bringing large groups together, many more homes will be visited.

Partnerships with organizations such as World Challenge have reaped untold blessing to many. I remember back in 1972 as a new believer, reading David Wilkerson's book, *The Cross & the Switchblade*. The movie starred Pat Boone as David Wilkerson and Erik Estrada as Nicky Cruz in a troubled neighbourhood. Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would be connected with an organization that serves alongside World Challenge blessing people in Ukraine.

Together we will serve the Lord and His purposes will be fulfilled. We are grateful for your prayers and gifts. May you know the blessing of the Lord even through tough times as we remain faithful to Him.

Bill Ball
Executive Director, SGA/Canada

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