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SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

War and Disease Rage On . . . But Nothing Can Stop the Love of Jesus and the Gospel!

INSIDE: MEET SOME OF THE PEOPLE YOU HELPED REACH FOR CHRIST:

- ♦ Your gifts via *Christ Over COVID* transform lives in the Ukraine war zone.
- ♦ A destitute, dying woman—and her son—find healing and eternal life!
- ♦ Churches are gearing up for a fruitful Christmas outreach—read how God will use it to reach children.

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)



Your Support of *Christ Over COVID* is Bearing Fruit!

Virus Continues to Ravage Russia, But God Keeps Opening Doors



Milana (right) and Katya (center) participated in the minicamp hosted by Artem's church.

In Russia's Amur region, a faithful SGA-sponsored missionary pastor named Artem has been **distributing food parcels and sharing the Gospel** as part of the **Christ Over COVID** outreach. He recently wrote to share with us how your prayers and gifts are helping to open doors to share Christ's love with many families . . .

*"During this challenging time, **such ministry helps open the doors of many houses to preach the Gospel to their inhabitants.** During our participation in **Christ Over COVID**, our team has helped **more than 10 families** who are in a difficult financial situation. There are two families bringing up children whom we met in a local childcare center.*

Milana's mother allowed her to attend Sunday school classes, which we are going to hold in our creative workshop starting this month. The other girl's name is Katya, who is 14 years old—we met her when she was 12.

*We managed to renew communication with Katya's mother thanks to the opportunity to distribute food parcels, and she allowed Katya to go to the minicamp that we recently had. **It was***

***the first time Katya ever had such close Christian fellowship.** She listened to the Gospel, sang songs with us, and played games. She still has a lot of questions, but there is one thing I am certain about—the Lord is working in her heart.*

We continue to pray for Katya's salvation and for the salvation of all her family. Before she left for home, I walked up to her and talked to her. It turned out that Katya has a desire not only to attend the Sunday school classes taking place in the creative workshop, but also to help other children see the Light of Christ. Based on the



Katya (right) enjoyed the close Christian fellowship.

experience of helping families that found themselves in difficult circumstances, we agreed to continue the ministry. We are very grateful for your help!”

In Russia’s Far East, zeal for reaching out with the Gospel has only increased with the pandemic. A sister in the church named Katerina was on one of the ministry teams and she reported,”

*“We often visit families who have many children. It is such a joy seeing these cute little kids, especially when they look inside food packages and Christian books. They become so vivid and merry, and it’s very good because **these kids grow up in poor families, and many of their parents have big problems with alcohol.** So, it’s also a great joy to share the Word of God with*

these families, praying to the Lord for real change in their lives. I strongly believe now that what we are doing here as Christ’s church is His will, He absolutely likes it and guides us in this compassion ministry. I’d like to praise the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and thank all brothers and sisters for helping this ministry happen in the cold land of Yakutia!”

Despite the challenges presented by a global pandemic, our brothers and sisters across Russia and her neighboring countries are faithfully walking through the doors the Lord opens for them to share His love. Please continue to pray for Artem and the many families he is reaching with the Gospel. **May many come to Christ in saving faith as they hear of His love! ♦**

A Tribute to Pastor Alexander Ivanovich Firisiuk (1936-2020)

Michael Johnson
SGA President

In Galatians 22-23, we read . . . *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

It is very rare in life that we encounter a man of God whose life personifies all of these qualities. Pastor Firisiuk was one of them. Having been spared from certain death at the hands of the Nazis, God used Alexander’s life of obedience in mighty ways as a leader, pastor, husband, and servant. For us, his **devotion to the children of Belarus**—whether they are suffering the ongoing effects of radiation poisoning, poverty, or lack of hope—inspired us and our partners here in America to support one of his greatest loves, Camp Pearl, along with so many other children’s ministries conducted through the faithful Belarusian churches.



Pastor Alexander Ivanovich Firisiuk

We rejoice in the fact that he is now with the many people in paradise who are there because of his love for them, his obedience to God, and a burning desire to see souls won to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. He will long be remembered as a man of God whose life exemplified what it means to live under the fruit of the Spirit. ♦

WAR REPORT:

On the Ukraine Front, People Struggle to Survive—Yet Christ Comes to Them Through Your Gifts!

The bloody war in eastern Ukraine that began in 2014 continues to devastate thousands of individuals and families. Many of them are elderly or widowed mothers with children who cannot afford to move. **Yet even in the midst of this ongoing tragedy, SGA-sponsored missionary pastors Dmitri and Vlad are joyful.** Their joy comes from being able to help these desperate people with the food they need to survive, and the Gospel to give them eternal hope found only through saving faith in Christ. They recently shared a wonderful report about what you are helping to make possible:

*This past July, we focused our labors on **villages and towns where people have been in dire need** due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing hostilities. **By God's grace, we were able to visit four***

villages with food and the Gospel.

*The families were among those who had lost a source of subsistence, disadvantaged families and widows. **Most of them have no family and are not even able to***

***get to a grocery store.** Your*

support has been especially helpful to families with children who are in the midst of the war zones.



Bringing God's Word to children and their families.



Delivering food packages to widows and needy families in the war zone of eastern Ukraine.



(Left) Oksana and her 17-year-old son Leonid; (Above) Liliya (middle, in white) and other ladies receive much-needed bags of aid.

One mother named **Oksana** has three sons—17-year-old Leonid, 7-year-old Timur, and 6-year-old Matvey. The father, Artem, has a job at a local factory but due to the lockdown he has not worked in several months. Leonid goes to high school but helps his mother as much as he can. They fled the war for a time, but when they returned to Andeevka, they discovered their home had been badly damaged by shelling. They are in an apartment while the family home is being rebuilt. They are very thankful for the food we gave them that will help them to get by.

Olga is 88 years old and a widow. She has no family and is taken care of by local social service workers. Her home in Mariinka was destroyed, and had to be rebuilt. After the shelling, she lost her vision and hearing. Her lone surviving son was killed at his workplace during the hostilities.



Olga

And finally there is **Liliya**, who is 65. Her son lives abroad and a daughter lives in another city. Liliya's husband worked at a coal mine (as did Liliya) but he died shortly before the war forced her out of their home. A fellow worker at the mine was an evangelical pastor and he witnessed to Liliya often, but she turned a deaf ear to his words. **But when the war forced her to flee to Zaporozhye, she remembered all that she had heard about Jesus and decided she should find Christians who could help her.** God heard her plea and she found the church. She began receiving food and other essentials, and when a

“She began receiving food and other essentials, and when a small congregation was started, Liliya was one of the first people who repented and trusted in Christ as her Savior!”

small congregation was started, Liliya was one of the first people who repented and trusted in Christ as her Savior!

On behalf of all the supported families and our team, please receive our thanks for your continued material and prayer support! May the Lord Jesus bless you abundantly! ♦

Jesus Gave Her Healing . . . and Eternal Life!

How God Used You to Bring Lyudmila Love, Health, and the Gospel

Vyacheslav Khvostov

SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastor in Zlatoust, Russia

Dear friends, I want to tell you about the repentance of a family in our town in the Chelyabinsk region! Our churches were closed because of the pandemic, but through the internet, we can still reach out in Jesus' name.

We discovered Lyudmila in one of the online social groups. She is seriously ill with a rare lung disease, and doctors had refused to help her. She needed a special breathing apparatus, and she asked for help online. **One of the sisters in our church saw it and told us, so we began raising funds to help Lyudmila be examined by a doctor from Moscow.** And this doctor put her on the list for a lung transplant! Neither she or we expected such a quick answer from the Lord! And two months later, the mayor of our town and other people raised enough money to buy the breathing apparatus for Lyudmila!



Vyacheslav, Ludmila, and Daniel

Her family is very poor and they spend all their funds to buy medicine. Lyudmila's 18-year-old son Daniel takes care of her, cooking their meals and looking after his mother at night to see that her breathing does not stop. **They readily agreed to meet with me, so I took the Gospel and came to see them.** Lyudmila thanked all the believers who helped her, and stressed to us that the answers to their troubles came quickly after we got involved. She had been knocking on many doors for years and the doors were always closed. She understood that God was at work.

I then shared Christ with them and gave them an opportunity to repent when they were ready. She answered, "If God offers me the chance to repent, why would I put it off or reject it? I want to

"If God offers me the chance to repent, why would I put it off or reject it? I want to receive His salvation now!"

receive His salvation now!" **Daniel agreed with his mother and wanted to pray with her to receive Christ.** And they both did on the spot!

The Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save (Isaiah 59:1). He saves and He does miracles! **Daniel is looking forward to coming to our church.** We ask you to pray for this family, that God will protect them and help them cope with Lyudmila's illness. I visit them regularly and their hearts are open to God's Word. **We bring them food each time as she needs to gain weight. She is so thin and can hardly move—her son carries her in his arms.** Glory be to God for this salvation! ♦

CIS IN THE NEWS

FOR PRAYER: Russia Seeks to Bar Foreign-Educated Religious Leaders from Teaching and Preaching

Church leaders in Russia are concerned about **a bill moving through parliament that would restrict the ability of Russian ministers** who have received religious education abroad to teach or preach in the country. The bill would **mandate “recertification”** in Russian educational institutions of pastors and “personnel of religious organizations,” with the purported goal of preventing the spread of “extremist ideology.” The bill had been approved for first reading back in September, but this was postponed by the Duma, or lower house of Russia’s parliament. According to the Russian Novosti news service, leaders of several

religious groups including Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, and Muslims expressed concerns over the proposed law.

It remains to be seen whether this bill will receive final adoption and become law, but the impact might be substantial given the fact that **seminary education within Russia was impossible during the communist years, and many pastors and teachers received their educations abroad.** This is all part of a general pattern of tightening restrictions that we have seen for several years, and must remain a matter of constant prayer in the days ahead. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP

With the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday seasons drawing close, **the rapid pace of ongoing ministries across the former Soviet Union will shift into even higher gear.** SGA-sponsored seminaries and Bible institutes will be taking a break from classes. **Follow up ministry from summer children’s retreats, camps, and other outreaches will continue** even while churches prepare for *Immanuel’s Child* Christmas ministries. The ongoing **Christ Over COVID** food distributions to needy families will be all the timelier, and poignant. **So much to do, yet how exciting it is to be a part of what God is doing.** We are so deeply thankful for your ongoing partnership!

Please pray about how you can help today in sustaining SGA’s ongoing ministries! Please use the enclosed reply slip and return envelope to make a gift as God leads. ♦



Delivering much-needed groceries to a family with a new baby.

Canadian Connection

It seems the escalation of both love and hate in our world captures the attention of most people. It appears that COVID-19 has stoked our thoughts into action, both good and bad. We are here to report that the love of God is winning out on so many fronts.

Politicians are in a precarious place and definitely need our prayers in leading the countries through the pandemic. Pastors as well need our prayers, but also our practical gifts in order to fulfill their mandate. This issue of Good News Report gives you a small window into the amazing work of God's love being accomplished.

Gearing up for the Christmas season at SGA is always an exciting time. *Immanuel's Child* outreaches are the highlight of the year for thousands of children. This year more than ever, we are ramping up a tremendous opportunity to change children's lives. For many, 2020 has been a difficult



Baptism in Ukraine



Russian orphans

year—especially for children in the former Soviet Union. We are wanting to bring a bright “light” into their “dark” world. The goal of 50,000 stars is attainable as we all do our part, both great and small. God loves a cheerful giver!

Travel is still restricted for us to visit our dear friends and partners in ministry. We do connect by Zoom with some and emails still flow freely. The photos in this

publication tell the stories of God's grace. Both creativity and commitment are demonstrated daily, showing Christ's love to a hurting world.

The new year is going to present certain challenges for every mission on earth. I am reminded of the Lord Jesus as He faced His opposition with love for their eternal souls. Our Saviour desires that we, too, live our lives with the love of Christ presented in everything that we say and do.

Thank you for doing your part in your community, in your circle of influence, and connections with SGA/Canada. Our brothers and sisters overseas are so appreciative of your faithfulness.

Bill Ball

Executive Director, SGA/Canada

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

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