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SHARING THE GOSPEL
EQUIPPING THE CHURCH
HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

The Light shines in the darkness (John 1:5)

CHRIST OVER DARKNESS

**Encouraging True Stories of Jesus Reaching Souls
Today In Russia and the Former Soviet Nations!**

www.sgacanada.ca

Christ Over Darkness

How often does the good news outweigh the bad news? For the most part a news broadcast will feature several negative events followed by one positive story that captures our heart as we move on to the next chapter of our lives.

Let us reverse that pattern with this blast of Good News! God is at work throughout the former Soviet Union countries where SGA is assisting local churches. We have a network of over 6,000 churches across 11 time zones with which to reach hurting, hungry people desperate to hear some form of Good News. SGA comes alongside these ministries by training and partnering together with incredible servants.



Read these stories of encouragement and see how God is at work. Not only have nations been infected with Covid-19 but economies have been depleted. Despite these grim realities Christ's Light is shining brightly in this darkness. Doors are open like never before with opportunities to care and share the Good News. While hostilities exist in abundance the love of God is breaking down barriers.

Sad faces have turned to smiles of hope and expectation. From children to adults many are now living with purpose and promise provided by a Saviour who loves them. Since our founding in 1934 by Peter Deyneka Sr. SGA has been spreading the Good News of Salvation to families, orphanages, prisons, and schools throughout these Slavic lands.

Be encouraged today and treat yourself to some Good News.

Bill Ball

Executive Director, SGA Canada

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Rejected by her family, Accepted by Jesus, Leading Other Children to Joy!

"My mother didn't seem happy to see me again . . . She drank several glasses of vodka that day . . ."

Sonya lives in remote Far East Russia, a bitterly cold land mass as large as the continental **United States**. In 2019, Sonya was removed from her separated, addicted parents. Then, in a shelter, she met Elena, **a faithful and loving believer supported through Orphans Reborn, an outreach of Slavic Gospel Association (SGA)** . . . and Sonya met Christ as her Lord!

"I was interested to learn about God and Christ," Sonya told us. "I first began to pray and read the Bible. I received a Bible as a gift. I now had my own Bible."

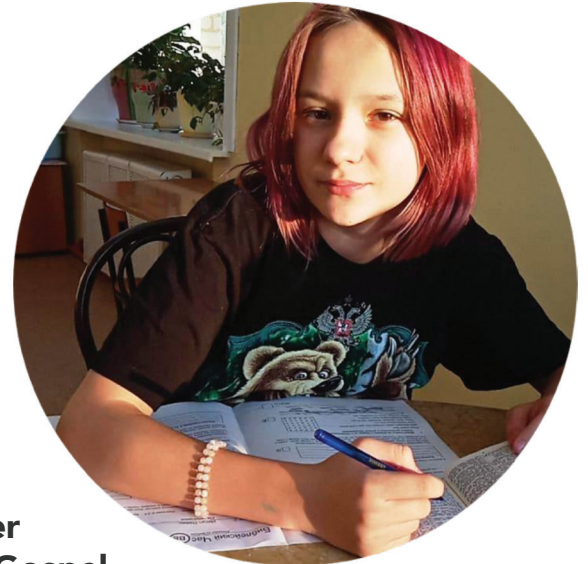
Still, she was bullied, and she felt lonely and isolated. But she says, "I was always looking for the following Sunday to come . . . waiting for our friends from the church. Every time they entered the courtyard, we shouted, **'Sunday school has come.'** It was so amazing!"

Sadly, Sonya was sent back to her mother during the COVID-19 restrictions. Sonya says:

"My mother didn't seem happy to see me again. . . She drank several glasses of vodka that day. The worst thing was that on that same day some men came to our apartment and also began to drink alcohol. I couldn't stay there any longer."

Sonya packed her bags and fled through the streets toward the orphanage, looking for Elena. "I was cold, and it was already getting dark," she says. Miraculously, the Lord crossed their paths, and Sonya was safe! Today she is in an orphanage, studying the Bible and growing due to weekly discipleship. She even helps other orphans with their Bible studies!

Sonya is one of a massive generation of orphans being drawn out of the darkness to the light of Christ through programs like *Orphans Reborn*, the *Immanuel's Child* Christmas outreach, and Summer Bible Camps. Please pray for her, and orphans like her, as God uses them to bring light into spiritual darkness.





Jesus Heals Families Through Bible Camps

Many are held on former communist “Pioneer Camp” locations

Strict atheist indoctrination from early childhood in the communist USSR included ongoing programs like “Pioneer Camps,” **where children were separated from parents for a “fun” week of intense indoctrination in atheism and worship of the state.**

Today, God is using many of those very locations to draw *tens of thousands* of young people to Christ, deepen their relationship to Him, and mend broken or strained relationships with parents. The One who created the family is *rebuilding* families and communities on the Rock!
Some examples:

God brings two sisters and atheistic parents to Christ!

Elena, a 13-year-old, said, “I went to the Christian camp with my sister. We learned that God is our Creator and Savior. What was going on at camp **shocked us with great love among people.** The place where we grew up we never had that.

When we came home my sister and I started telling about God to our parents and we began to pray at home,” she said. “We began to attend Sunday school, but my mom was not happy and finally our parents forbid us to go to services.”

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But these girls prayed, and **now even their father started reading the Christian literature, the stories, and now is serving in Sunday school!**

Yaroslav wanted to kill his father, but now forgives him

"First I wanted to kill my father because he abandoned me and I was his only child," said Yaroslav, a bitter youth whose life was headed the wrong direction. "After camp, I have decided not to be upset with my parents. The Bible is a holy book, which God left to those He loves. It teaches us not to judge others, to love everyone, and to forgive. I also learned a verse at camp—*Be not overcome by evil but overcome evil with good*. Of course, it's not easy but I will try."

God draws an entire family to church!

Often, the best words come from parents. One woman told us, "I am a mother of six children and we have a lack of money for food. My two children, Sveta and Maksim, were in the camp. The food was very delicious in the camp. My children have learned about God in the camp. And they obviously have changed . . . My children have begun to pray to God and ask me to attend with them the church and I cannot say them no. We made a decision to attend the church on Sunday."

In 2021, **more than 40,000 boys and girls**, including over 15,000 non-Christians, will spend a week at Christian camps. **Thousands will likely repent and come to know Jesus**—influencing their families and helping build strong churches. *These children are the future of Christianity in the former USSR*. And it is growing brighter.

Behold, I say to you. Lift up your eyes and look at the fields for they are already white for harvest
(John 4:3)

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From Prisoner to Pastor

The amazing story of a Christian leader changed through the blood of Christ and God's Word

Sergei was like too many men in the former Soviet nations: tough, criminal, and a prisoner. Living in Ukraine, where life can be hard, cheap, and short, he ended up in their large prison system. But God saw Sergei, and had plans to put him into another kind of institution: seminary.

How did this happen? Let Sergei's own words tell you:

"I received Christ as my Savior in 2010 while I was in prison. While in my cell, I began reading the Bible and realized that I was a lost sinner. So I turned to the Lord in a prayer of repentance.

Next, I began praying that the Lord would put me into a prison where Christians were ministering so I could receive ministry. **The Lord answered my prayers** and shortly made it possible for me to be transferred to a prison in the Zaporozhye region of Ukraine. One of the faculty members from **Irpen Biblical Seminary** was involved in prison ministry and he was visiting that prison. Currently this man is the pastor of the church where I am a member and an associate pastor.



When I got out of prison, I made the decision to stay in the same area and minister where the Lord had saved me. **The church where I minister has a rehab center for former prisoners.** I stayed at the rehab center for about a year. I was baptized, then found a job and a place to live. The Lord gave me a wife, so I have a family. And I began ministering in the same prison where I had been an inmate. Yet I felt the need for a deeper study of God's Word. That's why I became a student at Irpen. **Today, I serve as a chaplain at the prison, and we try to expand our work to follow people who are released from prison and ensure that they are connected to a church.** Our first step was to develop rehab centers, then when the prisoners are freed, we help them get adjusted to life in the normal world.

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I am in the pastoral program at Irpen. I never had a full comprehension of the New Testament. **But now, I think of the words of the Apostle Paul, who said he was preaching the full counsel of God.** Irpen Seminary develops ministers' character and provides all the necessary tools to clearly communicate God's Word to people. Irpen Biblical Seminary is one of **seven seminaries or Bible training institutes** sponsored by **Slavic Gospel Association** to provide doctrinally sound, spiritually vibrant servant-leaders for the growing church in Russia and her neighbors.

Irpen has had 2,234 graduates since 1991, and more than 340 additional students will graduate this spring.

These are serious ministers with top-notch theological and ministry training. God is at work in these nations, not only bringing in a harvest of souls, but forming a network of well-disciplined churches who speak the truth in love.

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A Child's Christmas in Ukraine

Forgotten by the World, But Not by God!

Maria tells us of answering a knock at the door to find a child in tears pleading for food.

The nation of Ukraine not only is afflicted by war, but deep poverty and illness. Much of the illness comes from the lingering radiation of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster decades ago. But Eric Mock, **Slavic Gospel Association's** Vice President of Ministry Operations, tells how the light of Christ is penetrating that darkness and growing brighter.

Eric trekked through the miles and the cold to help participate in one church's Christmas outreach which uses **SGA's Immanuel's Child** outreach. What he found kept his heart warmed all winter! Here is his firsthand account:

It had been two exhausting, wonderful days. Blowing snow and a combined 14 hours of driving. **Two orphanages, a worship service, and now an Immanuel's Child Christmas outreach in an elementary school to 100 kids. Amazing!**

We finally reached **Mlachevka, Ukraine**. The Lord showed me once again the answer to this question: What does God do when there is an impoverished village full of neglected, hungry children? Answer: **He plants a church!**

His instruments—Pastor Nikolai and his wife Maria—found themselves with 100 children nearby, **50 of which come to their small home, which has turned into a church.** Maria tells us of answering a knock at the door to find a child in tears pleading for food. **She cares for the children of a family of three, each with a different father, who suffer in deep poverty and an alcoholic mother.** Maria shares with us her broken heart for the state of these children.

Yet in this village, forgotten by most and near the dangerous Chernobyl exclusion zone, God raised up a church with love, compassion and a heart to see these children and families loved, and reached with the Gospel.

While we were there, Nikolai and the church held an *Immanuel's Child* outreach. The children were so excited for the gifts, their own Russian-language Bible, and the Bethlehem Star ornaments signed by **SGA partners in America** who sent funds for the gifts, Bibles, Christian literature, and much of the outreach.



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The kids couldn't believe people from **North America** cared enough to sign cheerful ornaments that said, "Jesus Loves You!" with a Bible verse in Russian. **Many heard the names of those who had sent the Star and committed to pray for them.** These precious children found out that their family was bigger than they could have imagined.

Immanuel's Child reaches more than 35,000 children. Across the former USSR, in orphanages and homes, I've seen children with those Star of Bethlehem ornaments hanging by their bedside in the summer heat. They keep them and cherish them all year long. What a testament to the love of Christ!

Through **Immanuel's Child** and the year-round ministries of **SGA**, this dear couple and their church minister to these children who have been **forgotten by the world, but not forgotten by God.** We praise God for raising up faithful servants in Ukraine and the other former Soviet nations, and for all those who support ministry to hurting and lonely children like these. **In Mlachevka, Nikolai and Maria will continue their discipleship all year.**

Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:14).

Christ Over Darkness

Jesus' Light Shines in the Most Remote, Frigid Russian Villages

"Another teacher was waiting for us and she invited us to come into her class right in the middle of the lesson. We joyfully taught a Bible lesson for her class of seventh graders."



Far East Russia is an area *beyond Siberia* about the size of the continental **United States**. Yet thousands of villages are almost unreachable—some by hours of travel on bad roads or harrowing small planes. Others are only accessible by boat until the rivers freeze. But Jesus is sending missionaries to plant churches there. **SGA-sponsored pastor Valery** serves in the Yakutsk region of Russia. **Valery and his wife moved to this frigid region in 1984, alone and isolated, but zealous for Christ. After seven years of faithful ministry with no one coming to faith, they led the first believers in Christ to faith in 1991. From that simple, faithful beginning came the first generation of believers in this vast region and their ministry continues today.**

Valery shares in his own words—My wife Valentina and I have lived in Yakutia for 36 years. **Recently, we began traveling to outlying villages and towns in the region for ministry. Our plan is to visit the existing churches in our region to encourage them, and to help them begin different ministry outreaches.** We want to help strengthen God's people so they will be able to share the Good News and the love of God with the lost. In that way, new souls will be added to the Lord's church!

One weekend in a recent November, my wife and I flew to the village of **Nyurba** located **500 miles from Yakutsk**. It was very cold in the plane, and the engines labored very loudly with a lot of vibration during the flight. Our suitcases were with us on our seats. But still it was much better than driving to Nyurba on a bad road for 16-18 hours in the cold.

One of the places we visited was the village of Antonovka where one of the ladies we met is a teacher. Svetlana invited us to her home along with three of her unbelieving relatives. We witnessed to them about faith in Jesus Christ and about miracles that the Lord has done in our lives. **Svetlana also invited us to come to her school and tell the children about Christ!**

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The church sisters also talked with the village administration seeking permission for me and Valentina to go to the local school to have a Bible lesson for children. Permission was granted, so we went to a school located not far from Nyurba.

When we arrived, another teacher was waiting for us and she invited us to come into her class right in the middle of the lesson. We joyfully taught a Bible lesson for her class of seventh graders.

We shared with the children about the Lord and sang songs in the Yakut language. All the children were smiling and were very open to fellowship with us. Then we went to another room where children were gathered together from several classes and were waiting for us. **We told them about the Lord, sang for them, and prayed for God's blessing on both the children and the teachers.**

The next day, Svetlana invited us again to come to her school in Antonovka. **About 65 older children were gathered in a large auditorium where we shared with them about God, salvation through Christ, and faith.** Then my wife had a session with the girls while I talked to the boys about Jesus and prayed a blessing over them.

We are so grateful to you for your love toward us, and toward the people of Yakutia. Thank you for your desire to participate in the work of the Gospel, and in building up the church of Christ. Thank you, and please keep praying!



When Government Officials Shut Down His City, One Brave Pastor Went into High Gear for Jesus.

When COVID-19 struck the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan, the authorities banned any movement inside the massive metropolis. Fear and silence, not people, occupied the streets.

That's when **Alexei** went into high gear for Jesus.

An assistant pastor at his church, Alexei had already invited 16 of his family members into his home. Together, they began streaming church services over the Internet. *"I preached,"* he recently wrote to us. *"My elder son led music, supported by five children playing instruments."*

His church—"Church Emmanuel"—loved it! In houses and apartments, they "logged in." Rather than being discouraged, they dove into God's Word, felt the encouragement of His Spirit, and **began sharing their faith with others**. By Easter week, Alexei and his brothers were using Zoom to preach and teach *daily*. Alexei kept in touch with his flock over the phone, listening to their joys and sorrows, giving scriptural answers, and **praying together**.

But the moving of God's Spirit was only beginning.

Soon came multiple children's Bible camps! Keeping within COVID regulations, Alexei and the church volunteers were preaching and doing theatrical performances on Jesus' life: His teachings, His parables, His miracles, His death, and His resurrection. The children loved it.

When May came, he was baptizing those who had trusted Christ!

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The three seminaries and four Bible institutes—like Almaty Bible Institute that is training Alexei— are **heavily funded by SGA supporters**. God is raising up and training solid church leaders like Alexei. These ministers are planting churches, making disciples, reaching children and families, going into orphanages, and more. They will impact people now and for eternity!

At the same time, the pressure on biblical Christianity is increasing. The possibility exists that things will get much more difficult. So please pray that we can train more leaders . . . *faster*.

For a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries
(1 Corinthians 16:9).

COVID-19 Crisis Opens Doors for Christian Faith

"If we stop giving food to these families, they will simply be left to starvation."
– Pastor in Ukraine

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Since 1934, Slavic Gospel Association has been **serving** and strengthening churches making disciples in Russia and other nations of the former Soviet Union, now partnering with approximately 6,000 churches in **10 nations** of the former Soviet Union.

But in this entire span of time, the COVID-19 crisis has opened the largest door for the Gospel since the fall of communism. The disease caused nations with already-fragile infrastructures to crater, especially in areas torn by war or other forms of social breakdown.

A pastor from Ukraine wrote this to our team: "There are many who have lost any hope of subsistence and who are especially vulnerable. If we stop giving food to these families, they will simply be left to starvation." One woman told a missionary pastor, *"I had all but forgotten the taste of bread."*

Desperate, hurting people are willing to listen. God has not forgotten such people. He sees their tears. He has raised up churches to reach out to their local communities, and partners in America enabled brothers and sisters in the former USSR to have the means to help with items such as food, medicine, hygiene essentials, and easily readable Russian-language *Bibles*.

As a result, **families, elderly, atheists, agnostics, and others are opening their hearts to Jesus.** Just a few examples include the following:

- In the Russian city of Omsk, Siberia, gift boxes have led to non-Christian families sending their children to the church's Christian club.
- In southern Russia, a struggling single mother of four named Nadezhda had no food until Christians came. She began a Bible study with them and trusted Christ.
- In Tatarstan, a man (whose name is withheld for his safety) accepted food on Easter, began a Bible study and trusted Christ as Lord and Savior.
- In the village of Mezhdurechye, a non-Christian named Rimma told a Bible study she visited that she wanted to pray. The pastor said, "She prayed, called to God in tears, asking for forgiveness, pleading with Him for help and strength."
- And in this photo, a family has just received their own Bible with joy! Christians are also providing food and medicine. We praise God for this harvest!



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Church Reaches Out to Boy's Struggling Family

An abandoned father, five children, and the witness of Jesus. What will happen?

"We are planning to meet with their father and share the Gospel with him." – Pastor Nikolai

Consider this story from **Kazakhstan** where poverty and hardship meet up with a believer with a heart of compassion and a capacity to deliver a simple bag of groceries. **Nikolai, a faithful SGA-supported pastor,** writes about a little boy named **Kostya**.

There are **five children** in Kostya's family and Kostya's mom left the family long ago. Kostya and his four siblings were **left to be raised by his father and grandmother**. But it only gets worse from there. Not so long ago his grandmother passed away and his father is seldom home. It is difficult for his father to find a job in their region, so he travels to other towns and cities in order to make money for the family.



Pastor Nikolai shares:

"We are helping this family as much as we can. When we came to visit this time Kostya ran out first, behind him his brother Denis and his older brother Artem. They were very happy to see us. We hugged them and talked about school and their health. **I told them that God himself is the helper for orphans! God would never ever leave them alone.** They told me that their earthly father is now in the village and looking for a job. **We pray that the Lord will preserve these children so that their hearts would be warmed through care and faith in our Savior.** We are planning to meet with their father and share the Gospel with him. We thank God for this opportunity to help these people."

Kostya and his siblings are a few of the many "social orphans" spread across the countries of the former Soviet Union. Many of these kids are effectively orphans and suffer more than most.

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Whereas 84 percent of the orphans never get adopted, these social orphans are hidden from sight and often suffer greatly with little or no future. But by God's grace these kids are not just passed by. God has raised up His church near them with a heart of compassion and God has raised up believers in our countries that come alongside these churches.

Together as God's family we are able to love and care for such children the world might just miss. God be praised for these faithful believers who step out with hearts of compassion, equipped with the Gospel and a simple bag of groceries.

Please pray for this family. Many such families are coming to Christ, but there are so many more.

You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:13, 15).

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Another Orphan Now Serves Her Church, Works in a Bank, and is Transforming Her Community

Nina was one of the almost one million orphans in the state-run Russian orphanage system. These can be depressing, dangerous places, despite the best efforts of those working there.



Orphans are often targeted and groomed by criminal elements, so that when they come out they become pawns to human traffickers or illicit organizations. But Christians are also in the orphanages through ministries like **Slavic Gospel Association's Orphans Reborn, Immanuel's Child Christmas outreach**, and other discipleship.

Nina began her discipleship as a believer before age nine and had a church family to guide her when she left the orphanage at the mandatory age of 18. **Now she is 26, and she lives in Omsk with her Christian husband and children.** All of them are believers and attend a strong church.

How did this happen? Weekly meetings at her orphanage, where trained Orphans Reborn volunteers held Bible study clubs and were available to the children for advice, discussion, and friendship. On Sundays, Christians would take her to visit with a church. She went to Christian camps and other outreaches for growth and evangelism.

Her Christian mentors motivated her to be a good pupil. As a result, she was able to graduate from a university, majoring in finances and credits. Then the community of believers helped her in her career choice and she found a job at Sberbank, the largest bank in Russia. They also advised her when she was looking for a flat, then with refurbishment and relocation. They inspired her in ministry and she graduated from **Omsk Bible College** as a Sunday school teacher.

Now she serves in a Sunday school and tells children about Christ. One long-time mentor says, "From a very thoughtless, careless girl she grew into a loving wife, caring mother and godly Christian lady."

Most important, Nina's story is **being repeated over and over** throughout Russia! God is changing the lives and destinies of those orphans, because He is God of widows and orphans.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress . . . (James 1:28).

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A Growing Hunger for Christ

Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38).

A recent global study by the Pew Research Center found that among all Europe-connected nations, the “importance of God” had increased 16% in the former USSR—more than any European nation. This is a remarkable open door:

(1) People in these nations are spiritually oriented. Decades of enforced official atheism could not extinguish the reality of God and a spiritual foundation to life.

(2) Atheism and other false beliefs have created a hunger for God, but no satisfying answers. For countless millions of people in these countries, atheism drove them to despair . . . but in many cases that has resulted in a spiritual desire. Millions deprived of God are searching for Him.

(3) Economic hardship and the COVID-19 crisis has further stirred the spiritual hunger. People in most nations of the former Soviet Union still struggle economically. Hard-hit families, orphanages, hospitals, prisons, and workplaces are ripening for the harvest as they look to spiritual sources for hope. Church door-to-door outreach during COVID-19 has drawn many to faith or a sincere interest to seek out churches.

(4) Increasing governmental pressure cannot stop this desire for God, but Christians in America are needed to respond to what may be a limited time window. In Russia, potential restrictions not seen in decades make it imperative to accelerate the resources and prayers for the church in the former Soviet Union. To help, contact **Slavic Gospel Association (SGA)** at:

	1991	2019	Change
	%	%	
Spain	71	45	-26
Italy	81	60	-21
Poland	83	69	-14
France	43	31	-12
Lithuania	56	44	-12
UK	48	40	-8
Czech Rep.	30	24	-6
Slovakia	60	55	-5
Hungary	45	44	-1
Germany	48	51	+3
Ukraine	50	62	+12
Bulgaria	41	55	+14
Russia	40	56	+16

Note: Statistically significant differences shown in bold.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q66b.

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