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SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Despite Long Hours, Illness, and Trials, SGA-Sponsored Pastors Press On



INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ◆ In Ukraine, God's call confirmed in a stunning phone call.
- ◆ Worship leaders taught to be biblically deep and faithful!
- ◆ Hundreds of children hear the Gospel—from a single pastor.

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)

How God Called a Lost Young Boy to Become a War-Zone Pastor

The Lord used your support for biblical education as part of an amazing journey!

Sergei Alexeev
Irpen Biblical Seminary Student



Sergei Alexeev

I live in the city of Lugansk, which is in the war zone in eastern Ukraine. When the war broke out in 2014, my family moved to the Kiev region near Irpen Seminary, but in 2019 we went back to Lugansk as our family, friends and church are there.

When I was young, my mother was having some life difficulties, so she made a vow to God in front of a priest. When the Lord solved her problems, she woke up one morning and she felt a voice in her soul saying, "I did all that you asked for, why don't you go and repent?" Traditionally, all of us were Orthodox, but she didn't know that a Christian

lady who lived next door was going to a Baptist church. One day, she said to this lady, "I made this promise to God and I need to go to the church, so let's go together." **They both got on the bus, and they came to where a Baptist church was, and that is how she was introduced to evangelicals.** She came to saving faith in Christ, and that is when she started taking us to Sunday school.

Finding Living Water in God's Word

As kids, we had been taught that only priests could read the Bible, and we believed that Christians were special people. Christian kids were like angels to us. **We had reverence for the Bible even though we never read it.** So when we started coming to Sunday school, they would open it and read it in front of us. We were small kids, and we would come to a minister and touch his garment because we believed we were touching a holy thing and that we would be sanctified by that. **But instead, the pastor continued to sanctify us by God's Word, and His Word was working in our hearts.**

When I was 13, I went to a church youth group. My mother gave me an instruction – she said to "be lower than the grass and quieter than the water. Be very attentive to what you hear!" We had believed that we could not approach God because we are sinful and need a priest to be a mediator. **But through God's Word, the teacher showed us that Jesus Christ was the only mediator between God and man.** These people were not standing between us and God, but were instead bringing us to God so that we would have direct fellowship with Him.

Finding the Fountain of Life

On November 21, 1993, when I was 13 years



Graduation ceremony at Irpen Biblical Seminary in the spring of 2021.

old, I went to a meeting where the pastor opened the Psalms and said that God was worthy of praise and that we need to glorify Him. That day, I learned about God's greatness and the right way to glorify Him. The pastor called us to glorify God. I asked His forgiveness for not meeting His standards. I just praised Him for the greatness I saw in the book of Psalms, and I thanked Him because He is my Lord. The prayer ended, and the pastor took me by the shoulder. He asked me, "Do you know what just happened?" I was terrified because I thought I did something wrong in my prayer. The pastor told me to follow him, and we walked into the sanctuary. He said to the church, "Brothers and sisters, this dear soul just confessed that Jesus is his Lord and Savior!" The church said, "Hallelujah!" When I turned 21, I was baptized.

In time, I became the youth leader in the church, got married and started a family. **I always dreamed of studying**, and my difficult life circumstances brought me close to Irpen Biblical Seminary where the Lord allowed me to study in the pastoral program. In 2019, we went back to Lugansk as my wife and I realized that God was calling us back to the war zone to serve there. But Dr. Igor Yaremchuk had invited me to continue my studies in biblical counseling. When I got the invitation, my wife said that it wasn't fair for me to go back to Irpen while they stayed in Lugansk. She asked me why I thought it was God's will, and I asked her how we

could know? She replied that if someone calls from the seminary and says that it is either like air for the

"She replied that if someone calls from the seminary and says that it is either like air for the lungs or water for fish, then we will know it is from God."

lungs or water for fish, then we will know it is from God.

God's Unmistakable Sign

I saw my wife was not ready, so I refused the tickets, but then Igor called and asked if I was coming. I told him that we have many issues and difficulties, and did not have complete agreement in the family. Igor asked if he could talk to my wife. Later, she told me that Igor literally said, "Since your husband is doing ministry, **it is needed like air for the lungs and water for fish!**" He also told her that the seminary would help as much as possible so that the period of separation would be easier. So we agreed that I would come there for a session and then return home. I am thankful for God's hand at work in our lives! ♦

Your Gifts Help Draw People into Deeper Worship

Olga learned how to direct believers to offer the sacrifice of praise

My name is Olga, and the Lord blessed me with a wonderful family—my husband Alexei, daughter Victoria, and son Vladislav. Three of us—my husband, my son, and I—were baptized on the same day at the Emmanuel Church in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Each of us has a calling from God, and it is very important to be obedient to Him, and to fulfill



Olga serves in music ministry at her church.

His purpose for us. I had been serving as part of a worship group, and in January of last year, **it became clear to me that I needed to develop in this direction of music ministry.** I talked to our pastor, and he gave me the go-ahead to begin study at the SGA-sponsored Almaty Bible Institute in the Music Ministry program. The door opened for me to take classes in their Evening/Night School called “Scriptura.” The classes are held in week-

long sessions monthly. We are required to read books at home with assignments, and then to write essays on the given topics.

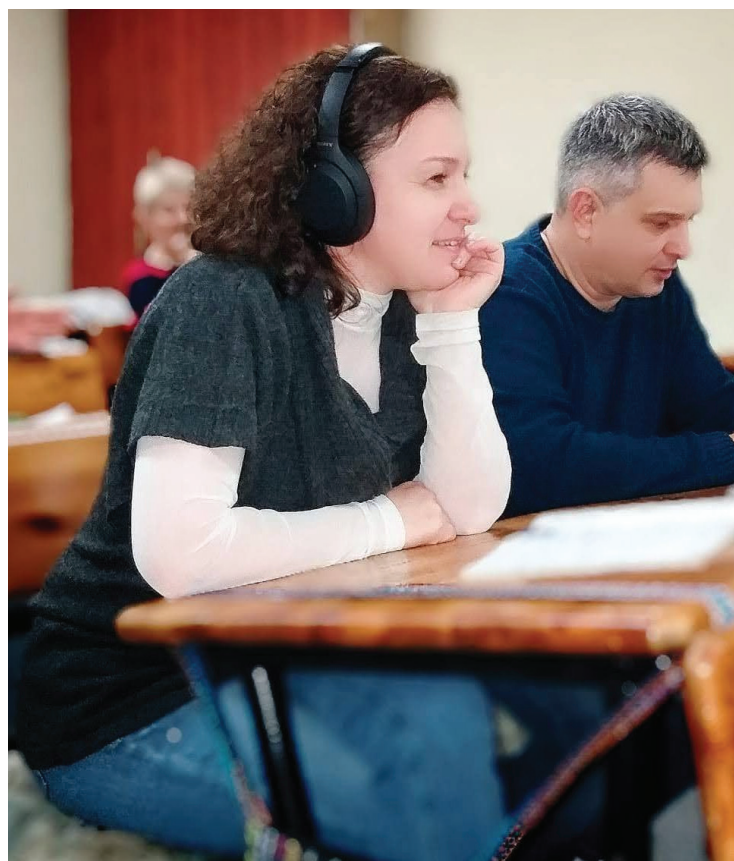
The Lord opened the way for me, and I was able to finish everything that needed to be completed, and passed. I graduated from the night program with excellent marks, and continue to study in the full music program at Almaty.

I am thankful to the Lord that through training at Almaty, He showed me how much He loves me and cares about my spiritual growth. **It was within the walls of this wonderful theological educational**

institution that I realized it is necessary to have humility before the Word of God—the Bible—and that having a correct understanding of the biblical

“Having a correct understanding of the biblical texts directly affects my ministry in the church.”

texts directly affects my ministry in the church. This ministry of music has been entrusted to me by God, and I must carry it out with a humble heart. I am grateful to each of the Almaty Bible Institute teachers, and for God’s direction in improving our family life as well. ♦



Olga at Almaty Bible Institute.

Blagovestie's Boris Berezhnoi and Wife Raisa Now with Christ After COVID Battle

“Absent from the body, present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).



Boris and Raisa, pictured with their three children, went home to be with the Lord after a difficult battle with COVID-19.

importantly, Gospel hymns and a strong evangelistic message. *Blagovestie* has toured many times across Russia and the other former Soviet countries since the end of communist rule in the early 1990s.

Winning lost men, women, and children to Christ has been their chief hearts' desire wherever they have gone.

This is such a difficult loss for Boris and Raisa's family, as well as the group, coming all at once like this. Please be in intercessory prayer for them, asking for God's blessing and comfort. And join us in praise and thanksgiving to God for

their extraordinary lives of service to Christ through the years. ♦

In late June, we received word that Boris Berezhnoi, founder and leader of the SGA-sponsored *Blagovestie* music group, went to be with the Lord after a battle with COVID-19. His wife Raisa also passed from the illness, and according to their family, their homegoing was only a few hours from each other.

Blagovestie means “Good News,” and the group blessed audiences on multiple continents with traditional Russian folk/Gospel music.

SGA began sponsoring Boris and *Blagovestie* many years ago under the presidency of Dr. Bob Provost, and we have continued the fruitful relationship through the years. Boris and the group toured in the United States to share their unique blend of traditional Russian folk, and most



Blagovestie has performed around the world.

Your Prayers are Working to Reach Hundreds of Children in Kineshma . . . But More Prayer is Urgently Needed

Pastor Dmitri Rastrigin

SGA-Sponsored Missionary Pastor in Kineshma, Russia

God has blessed our town and local children in a miraculous way. He sent us wonderful ministers—people of prayer—and I mean YOU! Glory be to God for your diligence, persistence, generosity, and help. You share in the Lord's cause in Russia, and we thank God for the opportunity.

My wife Oksana and I came here from another region of Russia. Most people here treat evangelical believers negatively. We meet aggression when we try to reach people around us, and many parents forbid their children to come to our Christian “Superbook” club. Even so, God still does unbelievable things. Our children's club has been working for two years, and it continues to develop and grow. **We have had about 100 children of varying ages from unsaved families, and some are regular visitors. Usually, about 20-25 children attend our club per month.** These are children who have never heard of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and salvation. They have never read the Bible and do not know how to pray. Our main goal is to teach them all these things and lead them to Christ!



Children's club.



Trip to Moscow with the children.

Our children had a surprise in January—a trip to Moscow. The children were very happy as many had never been to Russia's huge capital. Several had never traveled by train. Churches in Moscow helped us to make this a reality. While there, we had Bible meetings, visits to Red Square and the Aqua Park, the Moscow Experimental Center, and many other activities. Also in January, I had the opportunity to visit the village of Sobolevo to meet with Christian youth from Ivanovo, and to reach other youth with the Gospel. **We were able to share the true meaning of Christmas and the Lord Jesus—the Savior of the world.** The following month, we visited Sochi for a workshop on Christian children's camps during the summer. We learned much and received certificates after completing the workshop.

We have had challenges. In the middle of January, I had battled COVID and had heart-related complications. **I had to go into the hospital for urgent heart surgery, and they found three vessels seriously damaged.** This was the first of three planned surgeries, so I am on medication and have to limit physical activity. This is one of our prayer needs. **We thank you once again for your prayers and help for us.** May the Lord reward you richly and abundantly! ♦

CIS IN THE NEWS

Russia Facing Surge of New COVID

In the wake of a new surge in COVID-19 cases across Russia and other parts of Europe, the Russian government said earlier this summer that workers who fail to get vaccinated could be forced to take unpaid leave. According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Russian labor minister Anton Kotyakov said that the government is proposing mandatory vaccinations for service workers.

Nearly half of the third wave of infections appeared in the capital of Moscow. **Russia is the**

hardest-hit country in Europe with more than 129,361 deaths recorded by the government. This ongoing crisis clearly underscores the need for outreaches such as the SGA-sponsored Christ Over COVID ministry, where pastors distribute food and other vitally important aid to needy families afflicted by the crisis. Please continue to lift this outreach in prayer, asking for God to open the hearts of these families to the life-changing Gospel as they experience His loving provision for them. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP



Students and teachers from Almaty Bible Institute.

One thing we have seen repeatedly is that solid Bible training and fruitful ministry go hand in hand. For many years now, SGA has had the great privilege of sponsoring **Irpen Biblical Seminary** in Ukraine, **Minsk Theological Seminary** in Belarus, **Novosibirsk Biblical-Theological Seminary** in Russia, and **Almaty Bible Institute** in Kazakhstan. These schools help train pastors and workers for advancing the Gospel in their home regions.

As new churches are planted and missionary pastors reach more people for Christ, new generations are raised up by the Lord to train even more. We are so thankful for your part in it, and for all that you help make possible—provision of Russian language Bibles and Christian literature, children's ministry, humanitarian aid through Compassion Ministry, and so much more. Please pray about how you can help today! ♦

Canadian Connection

With many schools closed for the summer, the question remains, what will students return to this fall? School boards across our nation are grappling with new protocols in keeping our students safe as they return to classrooms or continue learning online. We pray for wisdom and discernment for all teachers.

We are blessed to have some fine Bible schools in the former Soviet Union where men and women can be taught with excellence. Besides the schools mentioned in this Good News Report, we also support UBTS (Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary) in Lviv, Ukraine, led by President Slavik Pyzh. This year over 850 students are registered for the 2021-2022 school year.

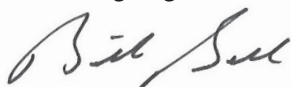
To see all these places of higher education training leaders for Christian ministry is a reality that came to be beginning in 1991. When the Iron Curtain came down, we made it our aim to train nationals to do the work of the ministry. Now 30 years later, well over 6,000 have succeeded in this plan, faithfully serving in thousands of villages, communities, and cities. They are reproducing fine servants of the Lord willing to sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel.

COVID-19 has infected numbers of these pastors and workers with debilitating results. We ask you to pray for healing to those who have lost loved ones or been hindered with ongoing health issues. Life has changed in a large number of churches because of sickness and concern, but the work has not stopped. People obeyed the government-imposed restrictions, but health care was not always readily available. God has protected many others in miraculous ways.

Today we even have SEMBEQ, our French seminary in Quebec, training our Russian students in Volgograd. This partnership came about a few years ago and now has a wonderful expression of the body of Christ working together. They are learning how to mentor one another the same way Jesus did with the disciples.

Pray with us that this school year will be a life-changing experience for each one who attends these schools that honour the Lord. It not always possible for students to afford such an education, and we seek to assist those eager to grow in the Lord. Your gifts towards a student's development can reap many blessings for years to come, influencing hundreds of lives. The cost to send a student for training is a fraction of what we would pay here in North America. Won't you consider an investment today?

Serving together,



Bill Ball

Executive Director, SGA/Canada

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