

## **Russia Field Report February 2012**

The Russia field continues to move forward with ministry. Over the past six months each of our missionary units has become more settled into their respective places and have become more imbedded in their respective ministries as God has opened doors. Details of those ministries and logistical challenges will be given here.

### **General Assessment**

We are a small team that, by God's grace, is both spreading and facilitating the spread of the gospel in Russia. We are currently trying to both grow the team and explore new territory and opportunities in the Russian Federation, with a focus on being effective facilitators of gospel ministry by the indigenous churches and church leaders.

### **Fields of Ministry**

As noted in the August 2011 report, our team feels strongly that it is both prudent and beneficial for the Russia field to diversify our ministries. This fits well with the facilitator and transformational development model of ministry we have adopted. This is also very practical as it provides a multitude of opportunities to which we can recruit and does not jeopardize the stability of the field were a couple or an individual forced to leave and one field of ministry potentially close down.

*Tuva* - Currently we have one solid and well-defined area of ministry in Russia and that is transformational business development in the Republic of Tuva. Scott continues to fulfill his studies at the university in Kyzyl, while working tirelessly alongside Vzaimodestvie (our sister organization in Tuva) to both develop small businesses and other ministry opportunities in the church.

Currently twelve small to medium-sized business ventures have been started and all are at various stages of completion. Overall the ventures have been very successful, and there has been enough revenue generated from some of the businesses to allow steady repayment of loans, as well as some surplus income for indigenous Christians to support their families and minister more freely. This was our goal, and it is slowly, but steadily, coming to pass.

In 2012 we will reduce direct support for Tuvan ministry personnel in part, and redirect some of those funds to help with transportation and theological education costs for indigenous Tuvans. InterAct will continue to support the administrative costs of Vzaimodestvie for some time to come. But with each year, as more loans are repaid locally, the organization should be able to cover more and more of its own operational expenses.

In addition to this, we have a number of other areas of ministry in Siberia that, while not as defined and intentional as the transformational development work in Tuva, are no less important and in many cases are growing. These areas are:

- Itinerate ministries to Tuva by missionaries Vanessa Greer and Lucas and Jamie Orner, involved in various personal ministries, discipleship ministries, and helping ministries.
- Continued contact and good relations with Yakutia with hopes of starting up small business development there. The plan is still to begin work through Vzaimodestvie in Tuva to fund small businesses in Yakutia, but there are a number of logistical and legal

requirements that are being worked through. It is hoped we can move forward with these plans in 2012. If we are to move forward with small business development there, it is going to be critical that the process of transferring grant funds is as streamlined and simple as possible.

- Numerous ministries in Krasnoyarsk for the Orners and Vanessa Greer as they have worked on documents to get into Tuva.

Furthermore, as circumstances and opportunities have dictated we are moving forward with two other ministry opportunities that we hope in the near future will become defined as official areas of ministry.

- *Krasnoyarsk* - The Orners were unable to obtain access to Tuva and have decided to remain in Krasnoyarsk. This city is located north of the Tuvan capital of Kyzyl with a drive time of about 12 hours between the two cities. It is a strategic hub on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and is frequented by Tuvans. The spiritual life in the city among Evangelical Christians is good, and there is a great amount of zeal among Russian Believers to do outreach ministry, not simply to other Russians but also to the indigenous peoples, including Tuvans. As providence has led the Orners to be in this city, we see this as an opportunity to explore making Krasnoyarsk a hub for ministry. The Orners plan to develop three main areas: 1) English teaching ministry, 2) Ministry to Tuvans in Krasnoyarsk, 3) Helping with regional mission trips led by local churches in Krasnoyarsk.
- *St. Petersburg, Central Asian Immigrants* - As our family plans to be in Russia for three months a year during the summer months, we are continuing to explore and move forward to potentially partner with a church in St. Petersburg that is led by Central Asians, with a focus upon reaching out to Central Asian immigrants living in the city and surrounding regions. Estimates in the St. Petersburg region alone are around 1.5 - 2 million, with very little work being done to reach them with the gospel. At present, we have already been able to form very good relationships with two church leaders, and are hoping to partner with them initially to print up to 15,000 copies of the Bible in the Uzbek language. The ultimate goal of this ministry would be to evangelize Central Asians (predominantly from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), see some of them come to Christ, equip and train them, and then see them return to their native countries as missionaries. Plans for this kind of work will involve evangelism, printing of literature, development of training materials, translation, and many other aspects.

In summary, it is our hope that if we continue upon the current path, that we can have Tuva, Krasnoyarsk and St. Petersburg defined as three regions of ministry in which we work, and to which we recruit.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment has been slow, but we are building momentum at several schools. In particular, we are becoming more and more of a fixture at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. There are currently about a dozen students there who are interested in Russia and are keeping InterAct in mind. This continues to build every year.

One of the most exciting developments that I have seen happen over the past year is an increased interest among Christian Russian-speaking immigrants to return to Russia and do ministry. These are typically young people in their early to mid-twenties who immigrated to America with their families in the mid-nineties through the first half of the twentieth century. Most are from Russia and some are from Ukraine, but all speak both Russian and English. A large percentage of them still maintain double citizenship. I am currently in contact with 8

young Russian-speaking Christians about the potential of partnering with the Russian Christian community in America. Interest is growing, and InterAct's name is getting out there as an organization that is eager to help.

One of the greatest obstacles we tend to face in recruitment to Russia is the staggering cost of a summer internship. A typical six-week trip that includes travel to Moscow or St. Petersburg, and then a subsequent trip in-country to Tuva or Yakutia is difficult to do for under \$5000. While some are still able to raise the money to go, it can be a problem for some, especially since, by the time we present the trip at colleges the time to raise money has decreased to as little as 6-8 months. It is my hope that opening up ministry in St. Petersburg would provide an opportunity to participate in a summer internship program with less cost, since the travel to Siberia would be eliminated. I am also curious to explore the opportunity to have some kind of Russian internship program in Portland, Oregon. We already have a number of good connections to the Russian Christian community in Portland. Such a trip could allow a non-Russian student to come and work in a church for a short time, and even live with a Russian family at a significantly reduced cost with much less red tape.

## **MISSIONARY REPORTS**

### **Vanessa Greer**

After a great deal of paperwork hassle, Vanessa is finally moving closer to getting a temporary residence and work permit for Tuva. She currently has plans to move down to Tuva from Krasnoyarsk by the summer of 2012. Until that time she is continuing in various studies as a student at the University in Krasnoyarsk and making itinerate trips down to Tuva.

On a personal note (and this is public knowledge) she and Scott have begun a relationship that appears to be serious. They have been open and forward with me from the beginning, and all who know them (including their families) are very supportive.

### **Lucas and Jamie Orner**

After repeated struggles to get documents in order to move to Tuva, the Orners have decided to stay in Krasnoyarsk. They are expecting their 3rd child this summer. They also are applying for temporary residence in Krasnoyarsk which would allow them to minister for three years there.

### **Scott Gilbert**

Scott's studies keep him busy at the Tuvan State University, along with his transformational development work. He continues to work with Vzaimodestvie as the main representative of InterAct with that organization. He also is applying for temporary residence.

### **Ted and Kate Mole**

The Moles are currently seconded to New Hope Counseling Center in Alaska. Ted has expressed that he is currently receiving member care and accountability with them. Their current plans still have them returning to Yakutia at some point. Details are unclear at this time.

### **Thomas and Cristy Slawson**

Our family returned to the United States in September of 2011. I have been directing the ministry in Russia from Mississippi and have traveled a good bit for the organization in various official capacities. We are currently planning on moving to the Portland area this year. At present, this will probably take place after our summer in Russia. We are currently looking to depart for Russia around the first week of May and return by the end of July.

## **Conclusion**

Scripture calls us to do everything decently and in order, and so on a day-to-day basis I see the administration, planning, strategizing, meeting, talking, etc. all as good and necessary tasks for the work of the gospel. But I'm also reminded that the power is not in these things. The power lies in the gospel. Thus it is not our administrative plans that empower the gospel, but the gospel that empowers us. With this in mind, our little team is seeking to move forward with a focus on doing everything we can to shine the light of the gospel and come alongside others who are shining it in Russia. We have seen time and time again *our* plans completely and utterly changed by our Sovereign Lord.

Thomas Slawson  
Russia Field Director