



SLAVIC GOSPEL ASSOCIATION

Good News Report

SHARING THE GOSPEL ♦ EQUIPPING THE CHURCH ♦ HELPING THE FORGOTTEN

Orphans with No Hope are Suddenly Introduced to their Heavenly Father!

INSIDE: YOUR PRAYERS AND GIFTS AT WORK

- ♦ "I don't recognize my grandson!" Read what changed . . .
- ♦ At the church door, children were lined up to seek God's truth
- ♦ An old man—beaten and cast from home—finds more than he lost



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)

Sasha was Abandoned, Lonely, Hopeless. Until . . .

God is using your support to radically change this orphan's life

Diana
SGA-Supported Orphans Reborn Ministry in Central Asia

Sasha is 12 years old. We met him this summer when we held a football camp for boys from a village that we visit some distance away. Sasha lives with his grandmother in this village. His parents are alive, but his mother abandoned him in the maternity hospital. **When she gave birth to Sasha, on the same day she wrote a renunciation statement and left.** Since then, no one has seen her. **Sasha's father abandoned his mother even before Sasha was born.** He left for another city . . . and started another family!

Thank God, Sasha's grandmother intervened and took him straight from the maternity hospital. She has been raising and caring for him ever since. Sasha has never seen his parents. When he was little, he did not understand anything. **When he began to grow up, he realized that every child has a mom and dad, and saw that he did not have either.**

When he reached adolescence, he felt even more abandoned and unwanted. Sasha's grandmother Galina said, "Not long ago, Sasha sat by the window every day and cried—cried about how no one needs him. He asked, 'What is the point of my life if no one needs me in this life?' Sasha began to suffer from deep depression. He did not communicate with anyone."

Around this time, our team visited poor, large families, widows, orphans, and the disabled. **One day, we visited Sasha and his grandmother.** Their story really touched our hearts. Sasha was very withdrawn and would not leave his room. But when he heard that we were going to have a summer soccer camp for boys, he came outside to meet us. For the first time, he showed interest in something. Grandma was happy and happily let him go with us. **"I don't recognize my grandson!"**

When Sasha arrived at soccer camp, his

shyness, brokenness, and lack of self-confidence were visible. But the camp had a major impact on him. In addition to learning sports skills, Sasha received a lot of mentoring about the character of an athlete, about love, compassion, and a unified team spirit. Sasha started smiling and getting to know other kids, and he changed a lot. **He looked like he had come alive.** Sasha told us, "This football camp is very special. The people here are especially kind and very friendly. I found a real friend here, his name is Joseph. He became like an older brother to me. And now he is my coach. I am very happy. I don't want to miss training. **I want to be like the biblical characters that our mentors tell us about.**"

After the soccer camp, we started holding lessons every Sunday. This idea came from our Joseph, who is our eldest son. He holds soccer training for more than 20 kids from different villages. Sasha started coming to these lessons every Sunday. Two hours together. Training, mentoring, games, and treats. Sasha's grandmother joyfully told us about the impact on him:

"I don't recognize my grandson! He has become active and cheerful. Every day he does the sports exercises that they are taught during training. He started communicating and helping around the house. Reading the Bible. Every day he



Sasha at the soccer camp.



Children at the soccer camp.

counts how many days are left until he can see all the guys again."

We believe that this is the beginning of good

changes. Please pray for Sasha, asking God to come into his life, that he will become a faithful and devoted Christian, and never feel lonely again. ♦

Equipping Stewardship

Garland Gould
SGA Vice President of Partner Engagement

In past installments, we have discussed the four steps of *Biblical Estate Design*; **Setting Priorities; Becoming Familiar with the Rules, Tools and Vehicles; Gathering the Necessary Data; and Seeking Competent Council.** Now we are looking at the 5 **Biblical Principles**:

- **God is Owner of All**
- **The Priority in Estate Distribution is Dependency**
- **The Motivation for Estate Distribution is Love**
- **People are More Important than Dollars**
- **It is Required That a Servant be Found Faithful**

We have discussed the first three, so now we will look at *Principle #4—People are More Important than Dollars.* Our Scripture to consider is the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Remember the Lord Jesus showing that the father clearly placed the value of his son's return over the

value of the inheritance that he squandered? The application is that we want to be earnest—as we pray and consider our distributions—that we will place the value of keeping relationships intact over the value of the money. Or consider it this way—after we have received our hug from the Father, we want our loved ones still here to also be hugging, not quarreling. One question to ask is, "What will this distribution of money do to the relationships I am leaving behind?" And while there are no guarantees that your loved ones won't quarrel, you can make decisions that will make it far less likely.

This is a principle where many families get "stuck." If a conversation would be helpful, please call me at (407) 718-1076. Also, we have two booklets to help you, the *Estate Planning Guide* and the *Estate Inventory*, at no cost to you. We look forward to speaking with you and serving you as you consider God's plan of stewardship for your estate. ♦

Children Are Waiting at the Door for the Gospel

Your gifts unlock the truths of Scripture for a group of boys

Mikhail M.

SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Belarus

All summer long we had a construction project going forward in our church. In the midst of the construction, we had opportunities to meet with youth, and one of these meetings was filled with special events and repentances.

I asked a brother from town to help us gather the kids from the neighboring villages and our town to bring them to church. By the grace of God, many kids gathered for the meeting. At the entrance to the church, **our son Leshka saw other children waiting outside and he asked if he could invite them in.** I said yes, although the format of the meeting was not for kids in their age group—from four to six years old. Ten minutes after we arrived with Leshka at the church, six kids who had just crawled out of the sandbox all dirty came, but the good thing was that my wife was near, who suggested that the boys go to the church and wash!

The older guys we had invited were high school students and they refused to go by car. Instead they came on motorcycles, for which I scolded them because they had no license to drive. Due to the diversity of ages, our meeting centered around **obedience to parents during the school year, and how to keep ourselves and our hearts from bad company.**



Sitting around the campfire.

At the end of the meeting, we had a table for refreshments around the campfire with songs and contests. God was with us and with everyone who traveled to come to the meeting. The guys who came on their motorcycles went home and there was a lesson for them to take home and study.

However, one of them named Dima did not make it. On the way to church, his bike's frame had broken in half and the back end dug into the ground in an accident!



Boys with their motorcycles.

Coming to the scene of the accident, I told the guys that God loves them. With Dima, it was evident that if the speed had been greater at 37-43 miles per hour, and if there was an asphalt road, Dima would have been in the hospital! God preserved Dima's life—and the young men had that example to ponder as they studied the lesson we gave them.

Pray for these boys, who were interested enough in God to come to our meeting. Pray for the enrollment and Christian education of children and youth, for more opportunities to reach fellow villagers, for youth meetings, for heat this winter, and for those with whom we are sharing the Gospel. ♦



Studying God's Word.

MUCH PRAYER, MUCH POWER IN ACTION

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

We each walk different paths through life. Each life is filled with times of ease and times of hardship. Too much ease and we become complacent, apathetic, and selfish. Too much hardship and we can become fearful, anxious, and angry. As long as we are distant from God, our worldview is shaped by these experiences and our desires. But regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, and life experiences, Christ can make us His and make us new. In Him, we have a new identity, a common hope, common promises, and a common future.

Vladimir is an SGA-supported missionary pastor who recently shared the story of a couple in his church. *“Alexei and Daria were both imprisoned. He spent 14 years in prison. They used hard drugs. Daria had already begun to live in entrance lobbies and lost practically all her teeth. Alexei’s body was blue because of tattoos. Daria was deprived of parental rights because of her imprisonment. Her son Ivan, was adopted by a family. It seemed like it was the end of their lives, but when a person loses all hope and is unable to change anything, God is able to change everything and make a useful life out of a useless one. They believed in God, got married, and loved Jesus Christ and His Church with all their hearts. God returned Ivan to them after 10 years of separation. He is going to be baptized. God gave them four more children. He gave them a four-room flat. They serve God and do not stop to thank Jesus for His wonderful grace!”*

A different and horrible journey for Alexei and Daria, yet by God’s grace, they have been made new in Christ. Indeed, God’s Word promises . . . *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).* The good work of which the Apostle Paul speaks is to fully conform each follower of Christ into His image. Alexei and Daria, in God’s time, believed on Christ and then



Alexei and Daria with their family.

were united in marriage. God’s good work was initiated in them, and now they know a completely different life because they are new creatures in Christ Jesus. Thank you for praying for the advance of the Gospel in the part of Russia in which Pastor Vladimir serves! ♦

Ukraine: You Provided Sanctuary for Two Cast-Aways

Brutalized refugees find a new home and eternal life

Myhailo M.
SGA-Supported Missionary Pastor in Ukraine

Peter is 85 years old. He and his daughter Svitlana are from Ukraine's Kharkiv region, which has suffered heavily during the war with Russia. In fact, their native village is only a few miles from the Russian border.

Peter went through an extremely difficult period during the six-month occupation. When invading troops came, he was beaten and abused. One day, a soldier hit him on the back of the head with a rifle, after which Peter fell down and the other soldiers thought he was dead. However, by a miracle of God, Peter survived. He recalls how his body was



Svitlana and Peter

bruised blue for six months after the beating he received. Food was also a major problem—he had only crumbs of bread and raw potatoes to eat for survival.

Under fire, Peter and Svitlana managed to escape. And God was leading them from an old life to a new, eternal one. In the town of Tatarbunary, they were warmly welcomed by the pastor and the church, which provided support during this difficult time.

“Today, Peter and Svitlana are surviving despite very hard conditions, and spiritually they are growing!”

Today, Peter and Svitlana are surviving despite very hard conditions, and spiritually they are growing! They were forced to look for new temporary housing, as they had to move out of the place where they had been staying. **Yet despite all these difficulties, Peter and Svitlana continue to find comfort in their faith.** They regularly attend church services, with **Peter participating in men's fellowships and Svitlana with the women's fellowships.**

They are being disciplined and are getting to know God more and more every day. Despite their hard circumstances, they express their sincere gratitude to SGA partners and to all those who did not leave them in their troubles. Said Peter, *“We are very grateful to God for all the people who care about us. Your help is a real blessing. Without it, we would not have been able to survive these difficult times.”* ♦

Paul Erdel Now With Christ

The SGA family was saddened to hear of the passing of Paul Erdel, the husband of SGA senior missionary Ruth Deyneka Erdel. Paul went to be with the Lord Friday, December 13, after a short illness.

With his first wife Chloetta, Paul served for decades on the mission field primarily in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, from 1953 until Chloetta's passing in 1991, with Paul carrying on until 1998. They were both career missionaries with the Missionary Church (known now as World Partners). Paul founded a short-term Bible institute in Ecuador that eventually became El Seminario Biblico del Pacifico and a Christian school, and he helped plant some 60 church congregations. He spent many days and weeks in rural evangelism. Paul served for a time as president of the Inter-Mission Fellowship in Ecuador, and then led the global ministries of the Missionary Church Association. After eight years, he returned to his first love—front line mission work in Ecuador. In 1996, he married Ruth, whom he knew from Ruth's service at HCJB radio in South America, where she served alongside her late husband Jack Shalanko as missionaries of Slavic Gospel Association. After his retirement, Paul led Bethel University's semester abroad study program in Ecuador, occasionally taught at Bethel, and after he and Ruth moved to Indiana, he continued to



Paul and Ruth Erdel.

encourage Missionary Church Latino pastors in the Michiana area.

Memorial services were held Saturday, December 21, at 2 PM at St. Mark Missionary Church in Mishawaka, Indiana. In lieu of flowers, donations to Bethel University in Indiana or to World Partners of the Missionary Church were encouraged. Please join the SGA staff in praying for Ruth Erdel and their family at this difficult time. ♦

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Reaching orphan boys and girls—among the neediest of children—is one of the most moving, fruitful outreaches of the churches SGA serves across the former Soviet Union. Through *Orphans*



Distributing clothing and shoes to orphans and social orphans in Ukraine.

Reborn, you help reach thousands of children each year with the saving, life-changing Gospel. Your support helps accomplish so much more—provision of Bibles, Christian books, and theological works, Bible training, Compassion Ministry, and other wonderful children's outreaches such as *Immanuel's Child* and *Summer Camps*. Please pray about how you can help today! ♦

Insight FROM MICHAEL

God Gives Orphans a Sure and Eternal Home!

With the spotlight this month on the SGA-supported *Orphans Reborn* ministry, I think it would be good for a moment to consider the plight of orphan children, and how each one of us has something of the orphan inside—that is, until God steps in.

We have shared the stories of so many boys and girls from orphanages across the former Soviet Union. The vast majority come from homes where there is great dysfunction of some kind, whether it is from abuse and neglect, substance abuse by one or both parents, or sheer economic want. Some are true orphans who have lost both parents. These deeply needy children, whom we often call lonely and forgotten, feel completely adrift in the world. They do



“ . . . these children are hearing of Christ, and they have a bright future and hope when they pursue Him.”

not know what future awaits them, and many sorrowfully end up in similar situations as their parents or caregivers. Crime, drugs, alcohol, and other woes destroy so many lives. We rejoice in God’s provision for the *Orphans Reborn* ministry because these children are hearing of Christ, and they have a bright future and hope when they pursue Him. You have been a part of all

this through your prayers and support.

But what about this orphan inside of us? In God’s Word, the Apostle Paul spoke of God’s eternal love and kindness for lost sinners such as we once were. He wrote . . . *In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:4-6). Before Christ, our sins had separated us from God. We were all truly adrift in the world with no hope on earth or in eternity. But God stepped in and sent His Son to pay the price for our sins through His death on the cross, burial, and resurrection. He lovingly and willingly paid on our behalf, making us part of His forever family by adoption. The Lord Jesus said . . . *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you* (John 14:18). So in that light, perhaps we all can identify with the orphan children to whom we are ministering. We have something in common. And we all can have the same eternal hope in God’s adoption—an adoption we can never lose!

For our Savior,

Michael Johnson
President



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Slavic Gospel Association

6151 Commonwealth Drive
Loves Park, IL 61111

www.sga.org

E-mail: goodnews@sga.org

Phone: 815-282-8900

Fax: 815-282-8901

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