

RUSSIA May 2005

Interest in the true Gospel continues in Russia, where economic growth and more cash in the economy is only resulting in a greater gap between rich and poor, and the rural areas are lagging further and further behind the cities.

A major trip was undertaken to visit and baptize contacts in some remote areas of northern Russia. We began with a rather difficult experience. We travelled about 2000 km.- involving a 33 hour train journey and then a 7 hour car charter- to a village on the banks of a huge river in northern Siberia. The other side of the river was a village where a man was awaiting interview and hopefully baptism. Transport there for much of the year involves driving over the frozen river; but now the snow has melted and the river is in full flow. The village is only accessible by ferry or a 30 year old Antonov aircraft. But the plane had crashed, leaving just the once weekly ferry- which we'd just missed. On a calm day, small boats occasionally risk going over the river; but the winds blow up suddenly and it's very dangerous as the currents after the snow melt are so strong. The boats are usually used for fishing or travelling along just one bank of the river. So we got to the great river, and immediately checked out the boats and the fishermen. Two people had drowned a few days before trying to cross over, and nobody was willing to take us. The boats are so small that one big wave would finish them.



Photo:
Checking out the boats



Photo:
The river

One somewhat drunk man offered to take us there and then for 1000 rubles. Our driver pleaded with us not to. Whilst talking with him the sun was shining and everything looked quite calm, but the strong currents meant that it would take about 3 hours to cross the river. Looking to the other side of the river and knowing the contact was waiting there, we felt it was really a test of our faith, whether we were willing to risk our lives in the Gospel's service for another's salvation... or not. Feeling rather bad about our decision, we declined, and sat awkwardly in a café drinking coffee and doing the day's readings and praying for guidance. About an hour later, rain came down and the winds started blowing strongly. If we'd have gone, we'd likely not be here to tell the story. We'd have been in the middle of that fast flowing huge river. So we wearily trekked back to our start point. But our prayers continue for our contact, Ivan, and we hope that we can get to him.

There are another couple in a similar situation, in north central Russia, and to cut a long story short, 3 days later SERGEJ and IRINA were baptized into the Lord. They live in poverty and we were able to give them some welfare support. Many of these highly remote areas were settled during the Soviet period in an attempt to 'open up Russia'. People went to live in places that really can't sustain much human habitation, and were largely supported by state subsidies. Now the subsidies have gone, but the people are left living in remote places, attempting to survive by subsistence farming. The growing season is so short. Sergej and Irina are out in the fields planting potatoes at the moment, hoping for a good harvest by the end of the Summer,

which they will store and live off through the long Winter, rationing them and their children a few potatoes and carrot each day. However the long Winter and sudden rise in temperatures has resulted in major flooding which is making their sowing very difficult. Please pray for them in this.



Photo:

Floods in northern Russia

The collective farms [kolkhoz] where people once worked are now all broken down and not supported by the State any more, so there is no employment there, subsistence farming is the only way. With Winter temperatures averaging -45 degrees centigrade, life is miserable and alcoholism rampant.



Photo:

Broken down collective farm in northern Russia

We drove and flew down to southern Russia, near the Chechnaya border. We met with an active ecclesia in the area, and were pleased to baptize NATASHA. With all health care now having to be paid for, so many have urgent requirements for operations and medicines which they just can't meet. Sis Natasha has a baby who is very sick; she returned from the doctor's with an X-ray scan and prescription for an operation, but she has no money to pay. She is partially deaf and there is little work in the poor village where she lives.



Photo:

Sis Natasha after having received the diagnosis for her child, with no money to pay for the required treatment

We were able to give some help, and also to Br Sasha for treatment required for his wife. We can only do this through the generosity of your continued support and we and they so appreciate it.

Bro Sasha reported further about Bro Vladimir, who he says has been persecuted by Orthodox priests and unfairly imprisoned on a trumped up charge. He asked if we could send food for him to our brother's wife, as conditions in the prison are awful. Any who'd like to send some food parcels should please contact us. Br Sasha also reported re the problems of our brother Nikolaj in Chechnaya. His house was totally destroyed in the fighting but the State won't give him compensation as the house was in the name of a relative who was killed. He is apparently living in a ruined house in Grozny, but recently visited our brother Sasha.

From southern Russia we flew via Moscow to Udmurtiya, an autonomous region next to the Moslem republic of Tatarstan. Here there lives ANDREJ, a long term contact with an excellent knowledge of Scripture. Andrej had attended the Winter Bible School in Kazan but had chosen not to be baptized then as he wanted to be more sure about the issues of the devil and the non pre-existence of Jesus. Now he is sure, he has carefully researched all the doctrines of the Truth

in great detail, and it was a pleasure to visit and baptize him. We promised to pray for his unbelieving family.

We give thanks and ask for your continued prayers and support as the Gospel spreads literally into every corner of the earth.

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks Christadelphian Ministries