



# EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

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## Moscow's Russian-American Institute: Instilling "Character, Competence, and Christian Worldview"

An Interview with President John Bernbaum

*Editor: When was the Russian-American Institute founded and what circumstances led to its formation?*

The original vision for a Russian-American Institute in Moscow was first articulated in 1988 by Peter and Anita Deyneka and their colleague, Professor Ivan Fahs, from Wheaton College. When the Deynekas cultivated a friendship with Dr. Evgeny Kazantsev, Minister of Science and Education in the U.S.S.R., and encouraged him to send a delegation of Soviet educators to the States to learn about Christian liberal arts colleges and universities in September 1990, the seed was planted.

My wife Marge and I, as representatives of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), were asked to host this delegation for ten days. We took our guests to three Christian colleges (Messiah College, Eastern Mennonite College, and Eastern College) and organized seminars for them on private liberal arts education.

The following month, October 1990, I led a delegation of 12 Christian educators from CCCU member schools to the USSR on a reciprocal visit. After visiting Russian universities in various cities, we all came back to Moscow before departing for the U.S. On October 26, 1990 – a date I will not forget – I was instructed to meet with the newly appointed Minister of Education, Vladimir Kinelev, who described all of the radical reforms he was going to implement in higher education on behalf of Boris Yeltsin. Then as our meeting came to a conclusion, he said, "Dr. Bernbaum, will you come here and establish a Christian college in Moscow like those Christian colleges in the States?" For me, this was a "Macedonian call" – it changed my life!

*Editor: Why did the Institute choose business and social work as its first two majors?*

During the first meetings of the newly-formed Board of Trustees in 1994-95, we asked the Russian trustees and Russian members of the Board of Advisors what academic programs they would like to see developed during the early stages of the Institute. They offered persuasive arguments for two "very pragmatic" programs – business, so graduates could create businesses and hire employees who would bring their financial know-how to their churches and communities; and social work, because there were so many pressing social needs that were not being addressed, even by seminary graduates.

*Editor: The Institute utilizes Protestant and Orthodox faculty. How has this worked?*

The Institute's uniqueness is its multi-confessional character. Our faculty, staff, and students come from Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic backgrounds and they have learned to enjoy and appreciate these diverse backgrounds and worship traditions. Because the Christian community in Russia, as defined in large part by weekly church attendance, is about two percent of the population, cooperation among Christians is essential. Every day we are demonstrating the power of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion – important building blocks in civil society.

*Editor: The Institute appears to be a unique institution within the Russian Federation. What are the similarities and differences between the Institute and Zaoksky Adventist University and Lithuanian Christian College?*

When the Institute opened its doors in September 1996, it was the first private, faith-based, liberal arts college in Russia, as far as we knew. There were approximately 125 Bible colleges and Bible institutes that had been formed since the late 1980s preparing young Russians for church leadership roles, but there were no schools educating the laity to be the "presence of Christ" in the marketplace. That was the niche we were trying to fill.

Unlike Zaoksky Adventist University, which is a quality educational institution, the Russian-American Institute trains students from various Christian traditions. We had three offers from American denominations to build a campus for our school if we would become their denominational institution – and these were tempting offers because we had a very small support base – but we chose not to do this. We have learned a great deal from the Adventists, but we view our mission differently.

Lithuania Christian College (LCC) is another quality school and we have also learned from it, since this institution had a five-year head-start. But again, our mission is different. Our Institute is a bi-national school with instruction in both Russian and English, and the undergraduate students must be people of faith. In contrast, LCC offers an all English-language curriculum and admits non-Christian students. Rather than offer a Western education, as in the case of LCC, the Russian-American Institute seeks to combine the strengths of both Russian and American educational systems.

*Editor: The Russian-American Institute has now*

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The Institute is a great effort of many people working together as a team – Russians and Americans in partnership.

## Moscow's Russian-American Institute *(continued from page 1)*

*moved to its own new building near Babushkinskaya Metro. What advantages will this location bring to the Institute?*

The beauty of the new campus facility, its size, and its capacity to handle diverse programming requirements will enable the Institute to offer a wide range of courses and seminars at various times. Before, in our rented facilities, these possibilities were only a dream. In addition, the rental income previously paid out is no longer a financial drain. In a relational, Slavic culture, putting concrete into the ground and constructing a building of this quality makes a very strong statement to Russians that we are committed to partner with them in education and we are here to stay. The new building also allows the Institute to grow over the next few years and to gradually fill the entire facility with up to 500 students, if the Board decides to pursue this strategy.

*Editor: What part has your personal faith played in your leadership of the Institute?*

My sense of calling has been absolutely central to my leadership role at the Institute. For years I have had a passion to educate Christian young people, to challenge them to be “salt and light” in their society. God gave me a desire to be a teacher, an educator, even when I was in junior high school. Of course, I had no idea then that I would become a college president in the Russian Federation. I love what I do, even though my work has been difficult and challenging, and I do not know what I would rather do.

For me, God is the hero of the Institute's amazing story, and I have had the privilege of being used by Him to see this work develop in a tough context. I have seen so many miracles, so many extraordinary events, that I cannot imagine a more exciting job! Pressure-filled, yes. Stress-filled, yes. But relying on the Lord on a daily basis has gotten me through all the challenges and I am thankful for this opportunity for service.

*Editor: What work experiences have contributed the most to your present leadership of the Institute?*

I look back over my life and see how the Lord used various experiences to prepare me for this role – which is not a role I aspired to or even imagined! My Ph.D. in European and Russian history gave me the academic credentials and exposure to Russian society. Four years at the Department of State gave me additional credentials and diplomatic experience. Then my 20 years at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, during which I gained experience working in non-traditional, off-campus program creation in various parts of the world, was another piece in this puzzle. I am an educational entrepreneur and this is how I am wired. Yet the Institute is not my creation, but rather a great effort of many people working together as a team – Russians and Americans in partnership. That's what has been so encouraging during these last 20 years.

During my last few years at the CCCU, I had a number of opportunities to apply for various college presidencies, but I turned them down because I felt a calling to work internationally. I never imagined

that I would be offered the job as president of a new college in Russia, with no students, no faculty, no buildings, and no resources. As one of my daughters has said, “That's what we expected from you, Dad! That's the way you have chosen to live – on the edge.”

*Editor: What other key factors contributed to the development of the Institute over the last 13 years?*

The Russian-American Institute would not exist today were it not for the Board of Trustees who have helped to shape its development and have generously funded it over the years. I have worked in higher education for over 30 years and I have never seen a Board of Trustees like this. The members have played a major role in fund-raising and have recruited numerous volunteers to partner with us. The Board has helped me to identify key supporters who have become dear friends, faithfully contributing monies for scholarships and for construction costs.

In addition, we have a great staff of mostly young Russian Christians, who are carrying major responsibilities despite their youth. This outstanding staff, together with our gifted faculty, has helped to shape the quality of our Institute. Then we have to add the full-time American faculty who serve at the Institute and the more than 100 American faculty who have taught at our school during the summer modules or for a semester or a year on sabbatical leave. We are truly engaged in a team effort!

*Editor: With the beginning of a new decade, do you have a new “Five-Year Plan” for the Institute?*

While the Board and staff have spent much time over the years discussing various scenarios for the future, we have learned that in the Russian context long-term planning has limited value. The post-Communist transition has been difficult, much more difficult than most analysts in the West expected, and the dynamics in Russian society have proved hard to predict. As a result, we have had to be flexible. We are committed to be a constructive factor in this context, whatever that means over time.

The political context does affect the Institute, so as relationships between the two countries warm up or turn cold, government officials from top to bottom take their signs from the Kremlin and we are treated accordingly. While there was a great openness to Western educators in the early 1990s, for example, this spirit of cooperation has largely disappeared. The same is true in the States. For many U. S. government officials, Russia is no longer of interest.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that Russia and the United States will once again become good friends and that there is much that brings us together. Today our relationships are normal in so many areas (arts and culture, scientific exploration, technology, education, etc.)—all except the political and military spheres. When these political and military obstacles are overcome over time, the Institute will be well-positioned to be a bridge between these two great nations. ♦

*Editor's note: For additional information on the Russian-American Institute consult its website: <http://www.racu.org>.*

# Protestant Theological Education in Central Asia: Embattled but Resilient

Insur Shamgunov

*Editor's notes: The first two portions of this article were published in previous issues of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 17 (Fall 2009): 5-8; and 18 (Winter 2010): 10-13.*

## Problem-Based Learning

Changes should be made without sacrificing fundamental biblical and theological knowledge and exegetical skills, which are particularly important in a region that has little evangelical theological tradition. But instead of following the traditional, fragmented formula of a theological encyclopedia, schools could integrate the academic element of theological study with the development of students' skills in exegeting biblical texts, research, and preaching. To do so, faculty could use the problem-based learning (PBL) approach, advocated for use in theological education by Toivo Pilli.<sup>1</sup> For instance, students could start by describing a certain problem arising in their ministry, discussing possible reasons, and looking for solutions. They could proceed by researching biblical texts, reading the relevant literature, and discussing it with their teachers and other students. They could conclude the process by writing a paper, developing a sermon, and preaching it to their congregation, or by developing material for a small group study. In this process students could learn a number of important skills in an integrated way: understanding a biblical text, applying exegetical and hermeneutical principles, learning critical and reflective skills, learning to do research, communicating ideas in writing and preaching, and devising and implementing practical strategies in ministry.

## Residential Versus Non-Traditional Training

One theological college did attempt to redesign its master's of ministry degree curriculum in line with contemporary adult learning models. It provided short residential courses and required most of the subsequent learning to be done by the students off-campus, by corresponding with their mentors. However, graduates both praised and criticized this approach, and much is to be learned from their comments. The first point of criticism was that this method placed a significant level of responsibility on the learner, which is simply not to be taken for granted in the post-Soviet Central Asian educational environment. As a result, as the current dean of the program explained to me (22 September 2008), many students dropped out of the course because they did not have enough diligence and skills for doing independent study. I suggest that this problem might be solved by changing the training format: teachers should be in much more frequent physical contact with their students, both helping students to think through their issues and holding them accountable. For instance, they could adopt a format in which students spend a half week in class, and another half doing actual part-time ministry, as is the case with ministerial training at Regent's Park, Oxford University.

Another graduate expressed a second criticism, pointing out that in an evangelical context it might be dangerous to encourage students with

little prior theological and exegetical training to construct their own "little theologies," which could be methodologically undisciplined and biblically incorrect. This is a valid warning. Therefore, such a program might begin with several introductory courses in systematic theology, exegetics, and hermeneutics.

## Recommendation: Strengthen Practical Training

Although this research shows that graduates were mainly positive in their evaluation of the instruction they received, they considered practical ministry involvement to be one of the most important factors in their learning. Unfortunately, instead of strengthening this key aspect of their training, most colleges are currently moving in the opposite direction – relaxing practical requirements in the hope of attracting more applicants. In response, I would recommend that the colleges dramatically increase the amount and quality of practical training. It should become an indispensable part of the curriculum, and this should be reflected by a significant increase in the proportion of time allotted for practice, mentoring, and supervision by staff. As M. Eraut and W. Hirsh maintain, the rule of thumb for effective professional training is that every hour of formal training requires two hours of intensive coaching for the effective transfer of knowledge in the workplace, and seven hours to implement that learning in actual performance.<sup>2</sup> Although such a proportion of formal training, coaching, and practice is very far from the current practice of ministerial training, significant changes in that direction should be undertaken. Closer links with local churches could provide institutions with better opportunities for developing such models of training.

## Recommendation: Stress Mentoring

Teachers played a pivotal role in the graduates' learning, serving as models to imitate, providing practical wisdom, and, as mentors, helping graduates deal with current issues they faced in their personal lives and ministry. However, this influence was unintended, happening, so to speak, at the margins of the educational process. Therefore, I suggest that institutions develop appropriate learning opportunities involving modeling and mentoring as an integral element in the curriculum. For instance, some of the teaching staff could work with designated small groups of three to five students throughout the duration of the training program. Mentors could help their students to reflect on their learning, help them to make connections with actual practice, and participate in ministry together with students. Mentoring should move from the outskirts to the center of a missional model of training.

For example in the Eurasian College, Kazan, Russia, where I worked from 1999-2004, the one-year residential program consisted of four cycles of six weeks "in-the-class" followed by three weeks

I suggest that institutions develop modeling and mentoring as an integral element in the curriculum.

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## Protestant Theological Education in Central Asia: (continued from page 3)

“in-the-field.” During the three-week modules, mentors spent a significant amount of time with their designated teams of students on the mission field, both participating in ministry and helping students reflect on their experience. During classroom periods mentors continued close interaction their students, working with them in local ministry projects and providing personal spiritual mentoring.

### Recommendation: Hire Faculty with Practical Experience

In this paradigm shift, the selection of the right teachers is of paramount importance. As much as the institutions in question would like to transfer teaching responsibilities to nationals as soon as possible, the emphasis should be on spiritual maturity, the depth of pastoral and teaching experience of the teachers, and their ability to relate to students, regardless of nationality. Although it would be ideal to have teachers who are both nationals and highly experienced (in my study the graduates did identify a few gifted national teachers), it will take considerable time before sufficient numbers of such individuals are in place. Students want role models who are wiser, older, experienced ministers, not their own peers who finished seminary only a few years before and who, despite having degrees, cannot offer much practical wisdom. Besides, as Peter Penner points out, expatriate teachers help students broaden their perspectives in an increasingly globalized world,<sup>3</sup> a notion that was also expressed by several students in my study, who desired a healthy mix of national and international faculty. This mix seems to be the best solution at present.

One also has to take into account the harsh reality of shrinking religious freedom in Central Asia that makes the expulsion of foreign missionaries a real possibility, just as has already happened in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Therefore, individual selection and customized training of national teachers and mentors with high potential remains an important priority.

### Recommendation: Increase Admission Standards

It seems that when the colleges lowered their standards in order to attract more students, they created a vicious cycle: Pastors did not like the new graduates who were not motivated to engage in ministry and were not trained in ministry skills, further reducing their desire to send people for training. Therefore, despite the temptation, colleges should, perhaps counter-intuitively, increase admission standards, something that in the long term will attract more quality people.

### Recommendation: Enroll Students Called to Ministry

A particularly important quality for applicants is a sense of calling to ministry, especially for the long-term sustainability of their ministry. Many graduates interviewed emphasized that their conviction that they were called by God, even before they started training, later proved to be of immense importance when they were faced with the temptation to quit the ministry. Therefore, it makes sense to give preference to applicants who have a distinct sense of calling. At the same time, many graduates were skeptical of the

ability of their colleges to motivate students who did not already have distinct signs of calling. Often, these students failed to graduate or failed in ministry.

### Recommendation: Develop Close Ties with Local Churches and Other Stakeholders

Finally, it should be emphasized that some of the problems described in this study, such as the decline in church growth, pastoral salaries, and increasing government restrictions, clearly cannot be addressed by the training institutions alone. Discussions of how to deal with these problems need to also include denominational leaders and mission agencies. Therefore, institutions must make a significant and sustained effort to increase the level of communication with local churches and other agencies involved in church development in Central Asia. Without such an effort not only will the quality of training continue to suffer, but the very existence of the institutions will be in question.

Admittedly, strengthening school-church relationships is easier said than done – three out of four principals of the institutions interviewed pointed to difficulties they faced in this regard. Some church leaders do not value theological training or are suspicious of it. Some are afraid of competition from young graduates. Others simply do not have a long-term vision for leadership development, and therefore send to the colleges not their best people, but “idlers” who have nothing else to do. These problems seem to persist across denominational lines.

Another important activity from which the institutions might benefit is organizing a forum for regular communication with local churches and other Christian agencies. Such a body would not need to offer formal accreditation, although this could help gain better credibility for institutions in the face of a worsening political climate. Rather, the forum would serve primarily to develop relationships, share experiences, and discuss issues such as enrollment decline and improvement of local church participation in training. ♦

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Toivo E. Pilli, “Toward a Holistic View of Theological Education” in Peter Penner, ed., *Theological Education as Mission* (Hagen: Neufeld Verlag Schwarzenfeld, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> M. Eraut and W. Hirsh, “The Significance of Workplace Learning for Individuals, Groups and Organisations,” SKOPE, ESRC, [www.skope.ox.ac.uk/WorkingPapers/Eraut-Hirschmonograph.pdf](http://www.skope.ox.ac.uk/WorkingPapers/Eraut-Hirschmonograph.pdf); accessed 31 January 2009; p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Penner, “Introduction,” in Peter Penner, ed., *Theological Education as Mission* (Hagen: Neufeld Verlag Schwarzenfeld, 2005).

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# The Current Crisis in Protestant Theological Education in the Former Soviet Union

Mark R. Elliott

*Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Winter 2010): 16, 14-15.*

## Reevaluating a School's Purpose

In coming to terms with the dire straits of most residential programs Sergei Sannikov, E-AAA Executive Director, recently noted, "There was no strategic plan when these schools were founded—they were spontaneous creations. People were enthusiastic, Western support was available, and so they began."<sup>1</sup> Lack of careful deliberation and forethought does appear to best characterize the launching of many schools. Thus, Moldovan professor Oleg Turlac's advice for a first step forward is for seminaries to "reevaluate their mission and vision. Each school should meet with its association or union of churches to discuss the purpose for the existence of the school and the issue of ministry placement."<sup>2</sup>

## Academic Versus Pastoral Training

In a sentence, should theological training be academic, pastoral, or both? Many church leaders in the former Soviet Union would second the conclusion of evangelical Anglican theologian Alister McGrath that "The growing gap between academic theology and the church has led to much theology focusing on issues which appear to be an utter irrelevance to the life, worship, and mission of the church."<sup>3</sup> Estonian Baptist theologian Toivo Pilli quotes McGrath approvingly, but he also sees a vital role for "academic" theology in "the prophetic task" of producing "contextually relevant theological reflection" on pressing social and cultural issues.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt, some post-Soviet theological educators have become mesmerized with academic learning at the expense of pastoral training—as can happen in the West as well. Still, Pilli seems justified in rejecting the "growing tendency to see 'faith' and 'knowledge' as contradictory terms."<sup>5</sup> Whatever one concludes on the perennial question of the relationship of faith and knowledge, the point is: Each school and all its stakeholders must think through the question in order to champion a common vision and purpose for each institution.

## Responses to Declining Enrollment

As the enrollment crisis has deepened, theological schools have responded in a variety of ways. The most common adjustment to the disappearance of full-time residential students has been to expand non-formal programs—which may prove to be the salvation of many institutions. The subject of non-formal theological education in the post-Soviet context is so vast that it deserves its own paper or monograph. After enumerating other responses, I will return to this topic.

## Closures and Mergers

Lacking students, some programs, as noted, have closed, and more will follow. Even Sergei Sannikov concedes, "The number of theological schools will and must decrease."<sup>6</sup> It would make sense for some schools to merge. Full-blown theological education is arguably the most expensive enterprise the church undertakes. The development of facilities, faculty, libraries, and textbooks is enormously

costly and time-consuming. Given the small number of Protestants in the former Soviet Union (perhaps one percent of the population), minimal indigenous funding, and the trailing off of Western interest, school mergers would seem a logical necessity.<sup>7</sup> However, tenacious allegiance to denominational and doctrinal distinctives works against such unions.

For those in the former Soviet Union who hope for the miracle of cooperation, the dream of the Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute (BETI) deserves note. In 1999 in Sofia six denominational schools (Assemblies of God, Baptist, Church of God, Congregational, Methodist, and United Church of God) made common cause. While less successful than one would desire, it nevertheless is an attractive model.<sup>8</sup>

## Finding a Niche

Another seminary survival stratagem will be to develop unique educational specializations.<sup>9</sup> The College of Theology and Education in Chisinau, Moldova, with a focus on outreach to Muslims, has more Central Asian than Moldovan students.<sup>10</sup> Some schools have expanded their English language programs to attract additional students. More ambitious has been widespread consideration for the introduction of liberal arts programs parallel to theological studies. Two Central Asian schools in Insur Shamgunov's study were considering this option.<sup>11</sup> Names of seminaries such as St. Petersburg Christian University (SPCU) and Donetsk Christian University (DCU) certainly indicate their intentions to offer non-theological courses of study. In recent years seminary administrators have frequently approached Moscow's Russian-American Institute, modeled on liberal arts programs in U.S. Christian colleges, seeking advice on the formulation of a liberal arts curriculum.

Perhaps the institution with the most successful expansion beyond theological studies in the former Soviet Union has occurred at Zaoksky Adventist University. Housed in, arguably the most impressive, faith-based campus in Russia, Zaoksky offers degrees in theology, music, English, social work, economics, accounting, law, public health, and agriculture.<sup>12</sup> Whatever one thinks of Adventist theology, this institution deserves close study for its commendable strides toward self-sufficiency and for its exceptional breadth of program.<sup>13</sup>

One niche a Protestant seminary might consider would be studies in Orthodoxy from an evangelical perspective. Perhaps such an undertaking could be developed in tandem with Orthodox institutions open to working with Protestants such as St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute headed by Andrei Bodrov or the Orthodox Research Institute of Missiology, Ecumenism, and New Religious Movements headed by Father Vladimir Fedorov.<sup>14</sup>

## Strengthening Church-School Ties

Of course, to survive, seminaries must strengthen ties with the churches in which they hope to place graduates.<sup>15</sup> As far back as an E-AAA conference in 1998 theological educators were recommending

One niche a Protestant seminary might consider would be studies in Orthodoxy from an evangelical perspective.

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correctives to the school-church divide. Alexander Karnaukh (Odessa Baptist Theological Seminary) urged seminary professors to find teaching opportunities in churches. For his part, Rudolfo Giroi (Euro-Asian Theological Seminary of the Church of God Cleveland), at the same meeting, suggested “that students return to their churches in the middle of the [seminary] program.”<sup>16</sup> In his thought-provoking dissertation on Protestant theological education in Central Asia, Insur Shamgunov warned that without close, vital links between school and church, “not only will the quality of training continue to suffer, but the very existence of the institutions will be in question.”<sup>17</sup>

### Overcoming Western Dependency

To deepen the bonds between seminaries and churches, schools will have to decrease their dependence upon Western funding. To that end, enthusiastically or not, seminary administrators will have to become increasingly entrepreneurial because budgets have to start balancing. This is beginning to mean, and increasingly will mean, some combination of administrative and faculty cuts; sharing faculty with other institutions; charging students “meaningful” tuition;<sup>18</sup> selling some buildings; and leasing some space.<sup>19</sup>

More and more seminaries are designating space or retrofitting facilities to generate income from all manner of undertakings: an auto repair workshop (Donetsk),<sup>20</sup> weddings (St. Petersburg Christian University),<sup>21</sup> dorm rentals for tourists (SPCU), and hotel and conference centers (DCU, SPCU, and International Baptist Theological Seminary).<sup>22</sup> Donetsk, as an example, has hosted revenue-generating conferences for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the New Horizons English program, Eastern-Rite Catholics, and the East European Summit for Children at Risk.<sup>23</sup>

In the past, seminaries sometimes turned down Western offers to help establish profit-making enterprises to help underwrite expenses—but no more. Donetsk raises its own vegetables and at Zaoksky students not only grow the food served in their cafeteria, they can vegetables and fruits and help staff a printing operation on campus.<sup>24</sup> In addition to creative uses of campus facilities, seminaries must teach stewardship and must teach churches to teach stewardship. Sadly, tithing runs counter to practice in the former Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup>

Many times one hears that Christians in post-Soviet lands are too poor to support their churches, much less seminaries. It is true that decades of Soviet persecution and discrimination meant minimal education and low-paying, menial labor for most believers. But Christians in Slavic lands are not the world’s poorest. Many believers in the global South who contend with economic plights as bad as or worse than those of the former Soviet Union support churches and sometimes even seminaries without the level of Western support that frequently obtains in the post-Soviet context.

### Expansion of Non-Formal Training Programs

As noted, the most concerted response to falling full-time residential enrollment has been the expansion of non-formal programs. After

the closure of their last Bible school in 1929, Protestants for many decades had no choice but to rely upon clergy mentoring of aspiring pastors, an unmistakable example of non-formal education. Then beginning in 1968 Soviet authorities grudgingly conceded a correspondence program to the only recognized nationwide Protestant denomination, Evangelical Christians-Baptists (ECB). Pastors enrolled in correspondence courses were permitted to travel to Moscow for brief periods of fellowship and instruction. Over the years the length and importance of the on-site intervals steadily increased, so that by the end of the Soviet era, the on-site modules of the correspondence program had taken on much of the coloration of a traditional residential seminary program.<sup>26</sup>

Another precedent was the consortium of visionary East European missions (Campus Crusade, Navigators, InterVarsity, and Slavic Gospel Association) that in 1979 launched Biblical Education by Extension (BEE), now known as Entrust, to provide pastoral training in Soviet-bloc countries.<sup>27</sup> Thus, non-formal theological education is nothing new in the Slavic context. It is being expanded, not invented, in response to the residential enrollment crisis.

### Elusive Statistics

In the Soviet and post-Soviet cases reliable enrollment figures can be elusive. Nevertheless, as incomplete and debatable as statistics may be, they do underscore two indisputable points: 1) non-traditional theological instruction has long been significant; and 2) non-traditional programs and students now account for the majority of pastors in training.

In 1992 the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kyiv had 335 non-traditional students, compared to 214 full-time residential students. As early as 1993 Seventh-day Adventists claimed 500 extension course students at three sites.<sup>28</sup> In 1995 the Greek Catholic Theological Institute in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, enrolled 800 extramural students compared to 480 full-time residential students.<sup>29</sup> By 2005 in the former Soviet Union the Russian Orthodox Church enrolled 5,700 correspondence students, compared to 5,155 full-time residential students.<sup>30</sup>

For all practical purposes the Moscow Evangelical Christian-Baptist Theological Seminary (MTS) no longer operates a full-time residential program, while eight extension sites and online instruction account for 600 students.<sup>31</sup> The enrollment crisis became so acute at MTS that the school’s trustees recruited consultants from the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (Sergei Sannikov, Peter Penner, and Charley Warner) to offer advice. The outcome was the appointment of ECB Russian Union Vice-President Peter Mitskevich as rector in 2007, followed by a radical shift in emphasis from residential to extension training.<sup>32</sup> A major boost in non-traditional MTS enrollment came in late 2009 with its incorporation of Bible Mission International (Frankfurt, Germany, and Wichita, Kansas), with another 700 Russian-language correspondence students.<sup>33</sup>

Moscow Theological Institute (MTI), affiliated with the Assemblies of God, presently enrolls

The most concerted response to falling full-time residential enrollment has been the expansion of non-formal programs.



700 extension and correspondence students. MTI also anticipates a significant increase in its non-traditional program following a request in 2009 from 22 unregistered Pentecostal bishops and senior pastors for four new extension sites to provide training for unregistered pastors.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond denominational and mission-sponsored non-formal programs already noted, many other evangelical leadership training efforts serve additional thousands of students. With 750 enrolled, Training Christians for Ministry International Institute (TCMI), based in Austria, probably has the largest number of East European Protestant correspondence students taking a master's level seminary course of study.<sup>35</sup> School Without Walls, organized by Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries (Association for Spiritual Renewal in the former Soviet Union), is providing pastoral extension courses in 62 sites in 49 regions reaching 1,813 students in 2008-09.<sup>36</sup> Other non-formal evangelical programs include East-West Ministries, READ, Precept Ministries, Bibel Mission, Leadership Resources International, BEE World, Church Leadership Development International, American Baptist International Ministries, International Theological Education Ministries (ITEM), and Theologians without Borders.<sup>37</sup> ♦

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Yoder, "Future" 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Turlac, "Crisis," 19.
- <sup>3</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Renewal of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1994), 152.
- <sup>4</sup> Toivo Pilli, "Finding a Balance between Church and Academia: Baptist Theological Education in Estonia," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 26 (August 2006), 39-41.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>6</sup> Yoder, "Future," 1.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Brown, "Progress," 10-11; Noelliste, "Theological Education," 10-11.
- <sup>8</sup> Gary Griffith, "New Bible Institute Registered in Bulgaria," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 8 (Winter 2000), 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Yoder, "Future," 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Jason Ferenczi, phone interview, 27 October 2009.
- <sup>11</sup> Shamgunov, "Listening," 277.
- <sup>12</sup> Gary Land, *Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 336-37; "Zaoksky Adventist University," *Adventist Online Yearbook*, <http://www.adventistyearbook.org>.
- <sup>13</sup> Elliott, "Protestant," 16.
- <sup>14</sup> [www.standrews.ru: http://www.standrews.ru/what/interreligious/cd31-02.html](http://www.standrews.ru/what/interreligious/cd31-02.html).
- <sup>15</sup> Shamgunov, "Listening," 286-87; Turlac, "Crisis," 19.

## Characteristics of Growing Churches in Russia: A Pentecostal Case Study

Andrei E. Blinkov

In Central Russia neither evangelical churches nor the Russian Orthodox Church are enjoying fast growth. Most evangelical congregations are very young, having been planted since 1992. But many younger as well as older congregations have plateaued and are no longer experiencing substantial growth. At the same time, Christian leaders have hope. Some churches do show evidence of health and solid numerical growth.

<sup>16</sup> Mitskevich, "Problems," 6. See also Elliott, "Recent Research," 35.

<sup>17</sup> Shamgunov, "Listening," 286.

<sup>18</sup> Jason Ferenczi, phone interview, 27 October 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ted Rodgers, phone interview, 26 October 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Ray Prigodich, meeting, 27 February 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Jason Ferenczi, phone interview, 27 October 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Sawatsky, phone interview, 26 October 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Donetsk Christian University, *On Campus Newsletter*, Fall 2009, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Elliott, "Protestant," 16; <http://www.sau.ru>.

<sup>25</sup> Mark R. Elliott, "Post-Soviet Protestant Theological Education: Come of Age?," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54 (Fall 1999), 38.

<sup>26</sup> Elliott, "Protestant," 14; Pilli, "Finding a Balance," 42.

<sup>27</sup> Elliott, "Recent Research," 29. See also <http://entrust4.org/423.ihtml>.

<sup>28</sup> Elliott, "Protestant," 22.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Sutton, *Traditions in New Freedom: Christianity and Higher Education in Russia and Ukraine Today* (Nottingham: Bramcote Press, 1996), 92.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Fedorov, "An Orthodox View on Theological Education as Mission," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 25 (August 2005), 25.

<sup>31</sup> Ted Rodgers, phone interview, 26 October 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Chapman, Theological Education Conference, 28 February 2008; Turlac, "Crisis," 19.

<sup>33</sup> Ted Rodgers, phone interview, 26 October 2009; <http://www.BibleMission.org>.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Rybarczk, phone interview, 3 November 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Penner, email to author, 9 November 2009.

<sup>36</sup> [www.russian-ministries.org](http://www.russian-ministries.org).

<sup>37</sup> Bill Arvan, Theological Education Conference, 28 February 2008; Joe Wall, Theological Education Conference, 28 February 2008; <http://www.eastwest.org>; <http://readministries.org>; <http://www.precept.org>; <http://www.russianleadership.org>; <http://www.bibel-mission.de/>; <http://www.leadershipresources.org>; <http://www.beeworld.org>; <http://www.cldi.org>; <http://www.internationalministries.org>; <http://christforrussia.org>; <http://theologianswithoutborders.blogspot.com>.

*Editor's note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Summer 2010).*

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In Central Russia neither evangelical churches nor the Russian Orthodox Church are enjoying fast growth.

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## Characteristics of Growing Churches in Russia: *(continued from page 7)*

### Three Pentecostal Denominations

Three main Pentecostal denominations exist in Russia: one led by Bishop Pavel Okara, another led by Bishop Vladimir Ryakhovsky, and the third led by Bishop Ivan Fedotov. These three denominations have approximately 110 churches in Moscow and the Moscow Region. Only a few Pentecostal churches have 500 or more members. The sad truth is that some churches in these denominations are not growing at all.

The church I pastor, the Revival Christian Center, is part of the Russian Church of Evangelical Christians (RCEC), a strong Pentecostal denomination with over 2,000 congregations throughout Russia led by Bishop Pavel Okara. According to RCEC Bishop Gregoriy Tropetz, responsible for Central Russia, the denomination has 130 congregations with a combined membership of only 7,600 in this heavily populated area. At the same time, some positive dynamics may be observed in other parts of Russia. For example, the RCEC Perm New Testament Church, which launched active missionary efforts in 1992, now has some 400 churches and fellowships in the Perm Region, Bashkiria, and Tatarstan. Other strong RCEC concentrations include the Association of Churches of the Republic of Karelia (more than 50 churches and fellowships), the Krasnodar Vifaniya Church (more than 50 churches), and the Murmansk Regional Association of Churches (more than 30 churches and fellowships).

### A Church Growth Conference

At the end of 2000, Russian Protestant church leaders gathered for a conference focusing on church growth in Central Russia, organized by the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (UECB), one of the largest Protestant denominations in Russia. Ruvim Voloshin, head of the ECB mission department, reported that in Central Russia, with a population of some 38 million, the total membership of all Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches was 23,000. Although in general some growth is taking place, very few Baptist churches have been planted in recent years. The total number of UECB churches nationwide grew from 1,320 to a little over 1,400 over a ten-year period.

### Russian Orthodox Statistics

The situation is better but very far from ideal in the largest religious institution in Russia—the Russian Orthodox Church. After the fall of the Communist regime, hundreds of thousands of adults received baptism in the Orthodox Church. For many, however, this public expression of religious observance was a sign of national affiliation rather than genuine faith. David Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson suggest that 76 million people identify themselves in some sense as Russian Orthodox, encompassing large numbers of nominal believers who, as mentioned, claim religious adherence simply as a means of cultural identification.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the fact that a majority of Russians consider themselves Orthodox Christians, Moscow Patriarchate officials admit that only four to five percent of the population is practicing Orthodox. During the conference in 2000 Voloshin quoted

Internal Affairs Ministry estimates of not more than 1.5 percent of the total population attending the largest Orthodox celebrations—Christmas and Easter.

### A Pilot Study

A preliminary pilot study in 2001-2003 surveyed 150 church leaders from various evangelical denominations, including 30 pastors and 50 church planters and key church leaders from the Russian Church of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostal). Those surveyed included leaders in the church I pastor, leading bishops and pastors from the RCEC headquarters, some senior RCEC pastors from the Moscow area, and church planters from the RCEC missionary school. All but 13 of the 150 respondents became pastors after the fall of Communism.

The pilot survey of Russian church leaders identified 17 characteristics of a healthy, growing congregation. These data became the basis for a second, more detailed questionnaire on church health administered only to the 30 pastors and 50 church planters and leaders of the Russian Church of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostal). Questionnaires collected between 1 May 2006 and 30 November 2006 helped to identify what respondents considered to be the most critical factors influencing church growth.

### Divine Intervention

The Book of Acts (2: 41-47) provides important evidence of the role of the Holy Spirit in church growth. Many authors, including Rick Harvey, C. Peter Wagner, Steven Macchia, and Jeff Patton, emphasize the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> I think Christ Himself and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the church should be called the foundational factor. If the Lord is not building the church, all the labor will be in vain. The Bible is clear: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (Psalm 127: 1).

### Seven Characteristics of Church Health

My review of published literature on healthy churches included studies by Rick Warren, Christian Schwarz, Leith Anderson, Dale Galloway, Rick Harvey, and C. Peter Wagner.<sup>3</sup> In addition, I received help in my research from pastors in a graduate student study group at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. From these sources I was able to identify seven major church health characteristics present in almost all of the above studies: inspiring worship, active evangelism, a genuine fellowship of love, maturing believers, dynamic lay ministry, strong leadership, and effective, functional structures.

The first five of these factors are identical to Rick Warren’s five purposes of the church. The last two (strong leadership and effective structures) are necessary to provide a balance for the church to be purpose driven. Schwarz adds another characteristic to the list—holistic home groups, a method used world-wide to incorporate new converts into the church family and to help them grow in Christ. Warren strongly encourages every church member to join a small group. “Small groups are the most effective way to closing the back door of your church. We never worry about losing people who

I was able to identify seven major church health characteristics: inspiring worship, active evangelism, a genuine fellowship of love, maturing believers, dynamic lay ministry, strong leadership, and effective, functional structures.



are connected to a small group. We know that those people have been effectively assimilated. The small groups championed by Schwarz and Warren may be identified with two of the seven characteristics of healthy, growing churches: a fellowship of love and maturing believers. The Asbury pastors' study group suggested another characteristic: transforming discipleship defined as "a process of growth toward Christ-likeness."<sup>5</sup> These attributes of transforming discipleship and growing personal spirituality can be seen as part of the broader category of maturing believers.

**Healthy Churches According to Russian Leaders**

Based on the 2001-2003 pilot survey of Russian church leaders, healthy churches:

1. are Christ-centered;
2. are purpose-driven;
3. have a delegating and spiritual pastor;
4. have sound biblical teaching;
5. are disciplined in prayer;

growing churches as identified in the literature review with the 17 characteristics of church health based on the results of the pilot survey of Russian church leaders.

**Personal Questionnaire**

A second questionnaire given to Russian church leaders measured personal spiritual health. Survey participants were asked questions regarding their average time for personal devotions, average prayer time, average time for Bible study, devotion to spiritual disciplines of ministry, sharing faith with others, fasting, accountability to a spiritual mentor on a regular basis, personal evaluation of current spiritual life, and personal evaluation of current health of their churches. One question asked whether church attendance during the previous year had grown, plateaued, or declined. Data from this second survey were analyzed to correlate leaders' perceptions of church health with personal spiritual health and church growth.

**Table 1. Comparison of Seven Churches Health Characteristics with Corresponding Characteristics Identified by Russian Leaders**

Seven Characteristics of Church Health	Characteristics of Church Health Identified by Russian Leaders
Worship	Churches with inspiring worship services
Evangelism	Culturally sensitive churches active in evangelism and engaged in social ministries to non-Christians
Fellowship of Love	Churches that encourage small groups and cultivate love among their members
Maturing Believers	Churches with sound biblical teaching that are disciplined in prayer
Lay Ministry	Churches that develop lay ministries including social ministries to non-Christians, based on members' gifts
Empowering Leadership	Churches with a team of devoted spiritual pastors who are purpose driven and who are willing to delegate responsibility
Functional Structures	Churches with flexible structures

6. have inspiring worship services;
7. are active in evangelism;
8. have a team of devoted leaders;
9. have a flexible structure;
10. develop lay ministries based on members' gifts;
11. develop a system of home groups;
12. engage in social ministries to non-Christian people;
13. are culture sensitive;
14. have an adequate building;
15. have financial and humanitarian support from abroad;
16. have strong teaching on tithes and offerings;
17. cultivate love among members.

Table 1 matches the seven qualities of healthy,

**Respondent Demographics and Survey Findings**

Eighty respondents completed two surveys each for a total of 160 surveys. Among pastors surveyed, 13 started their ministry more than 16 years ago, prior to the fall of the Communist regime (pre-fall), and 17 became ministers after the fall of Communism (post-fall). Most respondents had been members of underground churches all their lives. All pastors were male, which is the basic rule in the RCEC. Most of the surveyed leaders, including non-pastors (54 percent), were male. Overall personal spiritual health was perceived as growing fast (16 percent), growing to some degree (74 percent), or plateauing (10 percent).

Personal spiritual health was perceived as growing fast (16 percent), growing to some degree (74 percent), or plateauing (10 percent).

**Table 2. Age of Survey Participants**

	Average for 13 Pre-Fall Pastors*	Average for 17 Post-Fall Pastors*	Average for 50 Leaders
Age	46	35	33
Years after Becoming a Christian	32	10.1	5.8
Years in Ministry	23	9	3.8

\*Pastors who started their ministry before or after the fall of the Communist regime

(continued on page 10)

**Table 3. Participants Related to Church Growth**

	Fast Growing Churches	Growing Churches	Plateauing Churches	Declining Churches
Number of Participants	20	40	17	3
Percentage	25	50	21	4

The data in Table 3 suggest the following:

- An absolute majority of survey participants (75 percent) were from growing churches.
- Fewer participants were from stagnating churches (21 percent) and only 4 percent were from declining churches.
- Leaders paid the highest attention to Bible reading and also were very active in other disciplines.
- Pre-fall pastors were not as strong in devotions as post-fall ministers, with the exception of fasting. (Teaching on fasting was very strong in underground churches prior to the fall of the Communist regime.)

**Table 4. Spiritual Disciplines of Participants**

Personal Spiritual Disciplines	Average for 13 Pre-Fall Pastors	Average for 17 Pre-Fall Pastors	Average for 50 Leaders
Daily prayer time (in minutes)	27	46	37
Daily Bible reading (in minutes)	36	43	50
Involvement in ministry (1-10 scale)	8.1	9.0	6.7
Personal evangelism (1-10 scale)	6.2	6.7	5.1
Fasting (1-10 scale)	5.8	4.6	4.3
Existence of spiritual mentor (percent)	38.5	62.5	62.7

\*Pastors who started their ministry before or after the fall of the Communist regime

The data on the spiritual disciplines of survey participants suggest the following:

- Overall devotion to spiritual disciplines was very high.
- Post-fall pastors had the highest devotion to every spiritual discipline except Bible reading.
- Both post-fall pastors and leaders paid equal attention to the importance of having a spiritual mentor. More than 50 percent of people from these groups were accountable to spiritual mentors.
- Pre-fall pastors tended to be less accountable. Probably they see themselves more as providing mentoring rather than needing mentoring.

**Table 5. Rank Order of Church Health Characteristics Weighted by 50 Russian Ministers**

Church Health Characteristics	Average for All Ministers (1-10 Scale)
The church is Christ-centered	9.48
The church is cultivating love among its members	9.22
The church has sound biblical teaching	9.13
The church is purpose driven	9
The church develops lay ministries based on the gifts of its members	8.8
The church is disciplined to prayer	8.62
The church has a delegating and spiritual pastor	8.61
The church has a team of devoted leaders	8.39
The church develops a system of home groups	8.28
Church worship services are inspiring	8.22
The church is active in evangelism	8
The church has a flexible structure	7.51
The church has strong teaching on tithes and offerings	6.89
The church is culturally sensitive	6.8
The church has an adequate building	6.39
The church engages in social ministries to non-Christians	6.28
The church has financial and humanitarian support from abroad	3.94

Overall devotion to spiritual disciplines was very high.

## Characteristics of Growing Churches in Russia:

**Table 6. Comparison of Spiritual Disciplines and Perceptions of Survey Participants from Fast Growing Churches and Churches Growing to Some Degree**

Personal Spiritual Disciplines and Perceptions	Average for 18 Fast-Growing Churches	Average for 40 Churches Growing to Some Degree
Daily prayer time (minutes)	46	31
Daily Bible reading time (minutes)	50	39
Involvement in ministry (1-10 scale)	7.4	7.4
Personal evangelism (1-10 scale)	5.3	5.8
Fasting (1-10 scale)	4.6	4.8
Existence of spiritual mentor (percent)	83.3	57.5
Perception of personal spiritual health (1-10 scale)	7.6	7.5
Perception of church health (1-10 scale)	8	6.7

Data comparing personal spiritual disciplines with the perceptions of survey participants from growing churches suggest the following:

- Those from fast-growing churches prayed on average 32 percent more than participants from churches that were growing to a lesser degree (15 minutes difference).
- Survey participants from fast-growing churches spent slightly more time reading the Bible, although the difference was not significant.
- Significantly, the number of respondents from fast-growing churches who had spiritual mentors was 33 percent higher than for respondents from churches that were growing to a lesser degree.

Personal communion with the Lord in prayer seems to be the most important tool influencing the perception of personal spiritual well-being. 4. Russian ministers strongly correlated church growth and church health with personal spiritual health. Healthy people, they would contend, make healthy congregations. 5. In the opinion of Russian ministers, among all spiritual mentors as their colleagues from stagnating churches.

### Personal Spiritual Disciplines

Reviewing the data, I was pleasantly surprised by participants' ministry involvement and, in particular, primarily by their devotion to spiritual practices. Surveyed pastors spent on average an hour

**Table 7. Comparison of Spiritual Disciplines and Perceptions of Survey Participants from Fast-Growing and Stagnating Churches**

Personal Spiritual Disciplines and Perceptions	Average for 18 Fast-Growing Churches	Average for 22 Stagnating Churches
Daily prayer time (minutes)	46	38
Daily Bible reading time (minutes)	50	55
Involvement in ministry (1-10 scale)	7.4	7.0
Personal evangelism (1-10 scale)	5.3	5.5
Fasting (1-10 scale)	4.6	3.9
Existence of spiritual mentor (percent)	83.3	40.0
Perception of personal growth (1-10 scale)	7.6	7.0
Perception of church health (1-10 scale)	9	5.2

Data on spiritual disciplines and perceptions of survey participants from fast-growing and stagnating churches suggest the following observation:

- The number of leaders from fast-growing churches who have spiritual mentors was more than twice as high as the number from stagnating churches. A significant correlation exists between church growth and the discipline of accountability and mentoring.

### Summary of Findings

The study produced a number of significant findings: 1. The three most neglected church health characteristics from the point of view of Russian ministers were social ministries, cultural sensitivity, and flexible structures. 2. In the opinion of Russian ministers, spiritual disciplines that significantly relate to church health are ministry, fasting, and accountability to a spiritual mentor. 3. Compared to other spiritual disciplines, prayer had the strongest correlation with the perception of Russian pastors and leaders about their personal spiritual health.

and fifteen minutes daily in personal prayer and Bible study. The corresponding figure for church leaders was even higher – an hour and twenty-seven minutes. This positive finding means that either the sample of Russian ministers was not representative enough or they are very devoted to spiritual disciplines. Very likely ministers with deteriorating spiritual health simply were not willing to participate in the study. All Russian ministers surveyed agreed with church health authors on the first foundational factor, which was weighted as the most important – that churches must be Christ-centered and open to the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Social Ministries

Today, the lack of attention to social ministries can seriously weaken the incorporation of new converts into Russian churches. This characteristic is especially important in the current situation in which the Russian population is so afraid of cults, which in practice are often defined as any group that is not Orthodox. One of the best ways to fight this fear is to minister to the needs of non-Christians. Through the ministry of love

The number of leaders from fast-growing churches who have spiritual mentors was more than twice as high as the number from stagnating churches.

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many Russians can be reached. The church I pastor has launched a rehabilitation ministry for drug addicts and alcoholics. In spite of the fact that this ministry is very new, it has already brought many converts into the church, both former addicts and members of their families. Many churches in Russia today are exploring the potential of social ministries to needy people. Nevertheless, this important area is still neglected by many church leaders.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Evangelistic effectiveness can also be seriously hindered by a lack of sensitivity to the language, music, and culture of the people whom the church wants to reach. To some extent the underestimation of cultural sensitivity by surveyed Russian leaders can be explained by what may be called a super-spirituality complex. It occurs when ministers consider some areas of church life as “non-spiritual” and thus of no importance. Those areas usually include finances, church structures, planning, and cultural sensitivity.

### **A Church Growth-Spiritual Mentor Correlation**

The most interesting finding of this study was the unexpectedly high correlation between church growth and the existence of a spiritual mentor. The average number of respondents from fast-growing churches who had spiritual mentors was 32 percent higher than the corresponding number of ministers from churches that were growing to some degree. The comparison of growing and stagnating churches is even more dramatic. The average number of respondents from fast-growing churches who had spiritual mentors was more than 100 percent higher than the corresponding number of respondents from stagnating churches. In order for church leaders to minister effectively, they must first be recipients of ministry. Pastors and church leaders who are under the supervision of a spiritual mentor are healthier and much more effective in their ministry than those who neglect this spiritual discipline.

### **In Conclusion**

Church health can be improved. Apart from paying more attention to neglected church health characteristics, especially the value of social ministries, cultural sensitivity, and flexible structures, another simple but profound improvement in church health can be realized by focusing on spiritual disciplines. Consistent participation in spiritual practices leads to greater spiritual health in general and ministry success in particular. Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was the clear correlation between church growth and the existence of spiritual mentors. The potential for greater personal spiritual health and for church growth lies in the discipline of spiritual mentoring.

No one should think that human efforts or methods alone can grow a church. Just as a farmer cannot make his crop grow, so church leaders cannot make a church grow. At the same time, God is not building his church apart from the people, because it consists of people. Church growth is very much connected to church health, which in turn is related to the spiritual health of its ministers and members. Healthy people make healthy churches. Healthy churches consist of healthy members. Churches

can become healthier. Pastors can and should take full responsibility for their personal spiritual health by being consistent in their spiritual disciplines. Special attention should be paid to the discipline of accountability before a spiritual mentor. Then pastors can and should help others in the same way. Developing spiritual disciplines can be a long and sometimes painful process, but doing so truly builds the church. ♦

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> David Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Rick Harvey, “The Relationship between Church Health and Growth: A Study of Growing Churches in the Tennessee District Church of the Nazarene,” Ph.D. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2002; C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Missions and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1987); Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999); and Jeff Patton, *If It Could Happen Here* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996); Leith Anderson, *Leadership That Works* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992); Dale Galloway, “Ten Characteristics of a Healthy Church,” *Net Results* (April 1998), 20-22; Harvey, “Nazarene”; and C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies*.

<sup>4</sup> Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 327.

<sup>5</sup> Scott McKee, “The Relationship between Church Health and Church Growth in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church,” Ph.D. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003, p. 60.

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Andrei E. Blinkov, “Church Health and Church Growth in Congregations of the Russian Church of Evangelical Christians,” Doctor of Ministry dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007. Editor’s note: Andrei E. Blinkov’s dissertation is an elaboration of his M. Div. thesis, “Osnovy faktory, vliyayushchie na rost tserkvi v usloviyakh sovremennoi Rossii [Basic Factors Influencing the Growth of Churches in Conditions of Contemporary Russia],” Moscow Seminary of Evangelical Christians, 2002. The present article, in turn, is an elaboration of Andrei E. Blinkov, “Protestant Church Growth in Russia,” East-West Church and Ministry Report 13 (Winter 2005), 10-12.*

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Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was the clear correlation between church growth and the existence of spiritual mentors.

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## For the Love of God: Faith-Based Nonprofits in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Shawn Teresa Flanigan

*Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report 18 (Winter 2010): 5-8.*

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### Religion as a Service Rendered

One interview participant from a Catholic faith-based organization (FBO) and two interview participants from Muslim FBOs also described religious services that their organizations provided. Participants from Muslim FBOs explained that their organizations offered courses in Islam and the Koran for practicing Muslims, as well as introductory classes in Islam for non-Muslims and non-practicing Muslims. These courses were available to those who chose to enroll and were not incorporated into other types of service provision. The interview participant from a Catholic FBO described masses held for FBO volunteers and also services provided by priests to the ill and prisoners.

### Religious Identity and Social Service

Local FBOs from Bosnia and Herzegovina's three primary faith communities provide services primarily to those of their own ethno-religious group, whereas international FBOs and secular NGOs are more inclusive in their assistance. Nine interview participants (one from a local Catholic FBO, all four from Orthodox FBOs, and all four from Muslim FBOs) indicated that the majority of the population they served belonged to their own religious group. These were all local FBOs, with the exception of one interview participant from an international Muslim FBO. All interview participants from non-Catholic Christian FBOs and, by definition, all interview participants from interfaith FBOs indicated that their organizations served ethnically and religiously mixed clientele.

In addition, 21 of 23 interview participants from secular NGOs (91.3 percent) indicated that they served ethnically and religiously mixed recipients. Two interview participants worked with secular NGOs whose specific target population was the Roma (Gypsy) community, since this group is extremely marginalized within Bosnian society.

Of the eight interview participants who indicated that their FBOs serve primarily members of the same religious group, five indicated that they were open to serving all people regardless of their ethno-religious identity. As one interview participant from a Muslim FBO explained:

Because this is a multi-religious country, we are trying to help everyone, but it is true, I cannot say the percentage is very high. It is true that most people we help are Muslims, but we never ask any name or religion. We don't ask anything.

While most interview participants from Orthodox FBOs did not indicate an openness to helping members of other groups, one interview participant from an Orthodox FBO noted:

It is true that our organization mostly serves Serbs, because since it is part of the Orthodox Church, the Serbs feel like it belongs to them. But we will serve anyone who comes for help. I remember in the beginning Muslims from the neighborhood sometimes came and when we would ask their name they would be afraid, because their name is not a Serb name, so they would be afraid we would send them away. But we always helped them.

### Catholic FBOs—Insiders and Outsiders

All three interview participants from international Catholic FBOs mentioned their initial challenges in working with the local Catholic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Whereas local Catholics thought that international Catholic FBOs should give priority to assisting the local Catholic community, these large and highly professionalized relief agencies had policies that ensured services to all regardless of religious affiliation. As one interview participant explained, often the neediest in the community were not Catholics, but members of other groups. While this participant thought that helping those most in need regardless of religion was the most genuine expression of Catholic faith, local Catholics often thought this practice violated the solidarity that international Catholics should share with their co-religionists.

### The Role of International FBOs

International Protestant FBOs that previously were unknown in Bosnia and Herzegovina often had an easier time gaining the trust of locals than other religiously or ethnically identified organizations in the country. In contrast, international Catholic organizations in particular faced large hurdles in establishing themselves as inclusive service providers.

### Tensions for Bosnian Staff

Tensions in providing services were especially difficult for Bosnian staff members, most of whom were personally affected by the war. Many practical problems seemed to surround communication, such as the existence of taboo topics which were consciously avoided, or drastically different interpretations of past events. These dynamics presented a difficult problem for organizations that were working with war victims and, therefore, needed to be able to openly discuss these topics. One interview participant explained how her colleagues avoid talking about the war:

As professionals, how can we talk with traumatized patients about the war when we can't even talk about it ourselves? People have these small sentences. They talk about "my war" and "your war," like "My war was worse," as in my suffering was worse. As professionals, we are not able to discuss it, so how do we expect ordinary people to communicate, people who were raped or tortured or lost their children?

Another interview participant explained how different narratives of past events caused tensions during a staff training he was conducting:

I was doing my training and it was going really well. But then someone started talking about one concentration camp. This is a place where some huge massacres happened. I mean thousands of people died. And one man from that area said, "No, that wasn't a concentration camp. That was just a place where people were kept so they would be safe during the war until they could go home." He said no one died there. I mean, these massacres have been documented by many international groups. There is no doubt that they happened. Thousands of bodies were found. And some people in the training work with people whose family died in that camp. So what can they even say to something like that?

In a context like Bosnia and Herzegovina where people were so broadly affected by the war, ethno-

As professionals, how can we talk with traumatized patients about the war when we can't even talk about it ourselves.

*(continued on page 14)*



## For the Love of God *(continued from page 13)*

religious identity could not help but come to bear on workers' perceptions of their responsibilities and their interaction with clients and coworkers. As one interview participant from a Muslim FBO poignantly observed, "We are trying and I think we are successful in cooperation with others. I believe in general all Bosniaks are like this, open to others." Then, after a pause, "Well, a mother from Srebrenica who saw her husband and sons killed, maybe she cannot feel that way yet." It should be noted that in July 1995, Serb forces overtook the United Nations "safe area" of Srebrenica and in five days killed a documented 7,465 Muslim men and boys (H. Brunborg, T. H. Lyngstad, and H. Urdal, "Accounting for Genocide: How Many Were Killed in Srebrenica?," *European Journal of Population* 19 [No. 3, 2004], 229-48). The massacre has been characterized as the worst in Europe since World War II. Some researchers place the estimate of deaths as high as 10,000 since almost 40 percent of Bosnians still missing and unaccounted for after the war are from the municipality of Srebrenica.

### Inclusive Social Service

While there are anecdotal reports of evangelism by FBO workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, my data did not produce any evidence of this. It seems that the risk of coercion in providing services is low as well. The presence of and mentoring by international NGOs, particularly international FBOs, seems to have had a beneficial influence both on public opinion in Bosnia and Herzegovina and local NGO inclusiveness in serving clients of all faiths. The Bosnian public has a favorable impression of international Christian FBOs, and hopefully this positive impression can spill over into good will toward the Christian population in general. Perhaps more importantly, in spite of its initial reluctance, the local Catholic FBO in Bosnia and Herzegovina has become the most inclusive of the local FBOs from the country's three dominant faiths, thanks in no small part to pressure from its international Catholic FBO partners. While Orthodox and Muslim FBOs' clients are upward of 90 percent from their own faith communities, the local Catholic FBOs' clients are between 60-70 percent Catholic.

In spite of the picture painted above, this does not mean that the NGO sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not at risk of discrimination in serving clients. While inclusion has been protected by a highly secularized NGO sector and an active international NGO community, these are not necessarily permanent features of Bosnian society. In particular, international political, military, and humanitarian presence in Bosnian society is waning. Many international NGOs and FBOs have left Bosnia and Herzegovina or are planning to leave in the near future, both due to growing stability in the country and the needs presented by disasters in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, local FBOs from the three dominant faiths may prove resilient by virtue of their strong local roots and local institutional support. After all, these are the same FBOs who closed their doors for 50 years during Communism, only to reemerge as soon as political conditions permitted.

### Protecting Inclusion

A number of steps can be taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina to prevent religious discrimination in social service assistance. These measures include continuing and increasing mentoring by international NGOs and increasing the sustainability of secular NGOs.

### Continue and Increase Mentoring Before Leaving the Country

While the international NGO community has had its fair share of corruption and scandal in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has also benefited the local NGO sector by providing models of professional service and by assisting with local NGO capacity building. International NGOs continue to be highly involved in these activities. Staff from these organizations are well aware that they are likely to leave soon and would like to depart the country in a responsible manner, leaving behind sustainable programs. It is important that international NGOs continue to send a message of inclusive assistance and help this value become institutionalized within local NGOs as they prepare to leave the country. The influence of international Catholic FBOs on the local Catholic FBO provides an excellent example of the potential benefits of such efforts. It is hoped the local Catholic FBO will become even more inclusive in its assistance to all in need and will continue to be so after the international Catholic FBOs leave Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Increase the Sustainability of Local Secular NGOs

Perhaps the most desirable, yet most challenging, way to protect the inclusiveness of Bosnia and Herzegovina's NGOs is to increase the sustainability of local secular NGOs. Decreasing dependence on foreign funding is critical. To that end, many NGOs are beginning to promote small-scale, income-generating projects which will no doubt be of help in this regard.

In addition, it is imperative that organizations focused on the needs of the war begin to diversify their activities. Not only are war-related needs decreasing, but donors are becoming less interested in funding such programs. Indeed, several interview participants mentioned other NGOs that had ceased to exist due to their inability to redefine themselves. One interesting pattern emerging is that NGOs previously focused on women victims of war are now beginning to focus on other forms of violence against women, such as domestic abuse and human trafficking.

### Conclusion

The evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to indicate that the international NGO community has benefited local NGOs by providing models of professional, inclusive services and by assisting with local NGO capacity-building. In particular, the inclusive message sent by the international Catholic FBO community to local Catholic FBOs has helped to increase inclusive assistance in local FBOs. Continued and increased cooperation with international NGOs and particularly international FBOs may help to institutionalize a culture of inclusive service among local FBOs. Given that local church networks were one of the important faith-related benefits espoused by international FBO staff, local NGOs undoubtedly will benefit international NGOs as well with their grassroots connections and invaluable local knowledge. ♦

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Shawn Teresa Flanigan, "For the Love of God: Ethno-Religious Identity and Faith-Based Nonprofit Service Provision in Contexts of Violence," Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 2007.*

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The Bosnian public has a favorable impression of international Christian FBOs, and hopefully this positive impression can spill over into good will toward the Christian population in general.



## Healing Natashas *(continued from page 16)*

Yet in all the reading and research, the issue of trafficking for us was a faceless horror, even if it stirred our hearts and emotions. We realized the truth of the lives destroyed, but we could not grasp the reality. We soon came to discover the difference between knowing about trafficking and personally caring for its victims.

After arriving in Moldova, Nancy had a God-ordained encounter with the then-chief of mission of the U.N.-related International Organization of Migration (IOM). The conversation took an interesting turn when Nancy shared that we were in Moldova to work with churches. The chief of mission looked at Nancy and said, "What is the church going to do about trafficking?"

That simple question lit a spark that never went out, progressively turning into action. Nancy began to attend monthly anti-trafficking meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). She began to explore what was being done, what were the needs, and how the church could help. Still, our first few years were taken up with building relationships, understanding what was going on in Moldova, and learning how we could contribute to the battle.

In time, we concluded that the greatest void in anti-trafficking efforts in Moldova was the long-term work of restoration for women leaving prostitution. Many NGOs were engaged in information campaigns, warning girls of the dangers of trafficking. We also knew of a short-term residence for victims of trafficking, but two-to-four weeks was insufficient to help many of these women. Nothing existed for long-term restoration care for women who had already been trafficked.

### **A Long-Term Care Center for Trafficked Women**

Long-term care became our focus, and the first need was for a residential facility. In Moldova it was difficult to find a landlord who would rent property for the purpose of helping marginalized women. Thus, we realized that we would need to purchase a home. In 2006, we bought an unfinished building that took 18 months to prepare as our safe haven for trafficked women.

Because of the long process of construction and furnishing, we were able to train staff prior to opening the center. We were able to meet weekly to prepare staff in counseling, in the recognition of the effects of trauma, and in methods for dealing with crises. In our preparation we were aided by curriculum prepared by the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking- FFAST (<http://www.faastinternational.org>), now translated into Romanian and Russian.

We learned early on that few resources on aftercare were available, especially dealing with

the former Soviet Union. It also quickly became apparent that Moldovan aftercare would look very different from that provided in India and other Asian countries.

In October 2008, Home of Hope Moldova accepted its first residents, referrals coming from IOM. From the opening day the learning curve was steep, accelerating as we continued to explore methods for helping each girl find healing. We have faced problems that we expected as well as many we did not anticipate. But through it all we are thankful for healing that is occurring in the lives of the women.

Currently all our staff are Moldovan women: a director/psychologist, social worker, cook, two 24/7 staff who alternate weeks, a house manager (for errands, shopping, and doctor appointments), a part-time teacher, a sports instructor, and an administrative assistant. What follows below reflects the observations and lessons we have learned in ministering to victims of trafficking in our context. We do not share as experts, but only as people who have learned some lessons the hard way. Much of what we have come to understand came as the result of daily interaction with the women living in Home of Hope, causing us to rethink and retool weekly. We continue to explore new avenues and new approaches to helping the women we serve.

### **Horrendous Family Histories**

Every girl who has come through Home of Hope has a terrible family history. Some have had no parents, while others have had abusive parents. Typically the girls have relatives who have rejected them or have sexually abused them. In turn, the dysfunctional family backgrounds of the women complicate all of their interpersonal relationships. Since they have had no adequate family modeling, their conflict management consists of shouting and screaming. They have to learn how to resolve disagreements calmly without resorting to violence.

Since the only parental discipline they have seen or experienced has been abusive, this is the only method they know for disciplining their own children. It is a challenge to help them learn healthy methods for training their children. Probably the primary reason Moldovan women have been trafficked in the first place is because of missing or abusive parents. Without parental counsel and a sense of love and acceptance, they were easy prey for traffickers. ♦

*Editors Note: The concluding section of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Summer 2010).*

**Andrew Raatz and his wife, Nancy, are missionaries with Harvest Moldova, an Assemblies of God ministry in Chisinau, Moldova.**

We concluded that the greatest void in anti-trafficking efforts in Moldova was the long-term work of restoration for women leaving prostitution.

# Healing the Natashas: Observations on Trafficking Aftercare in Moldova

Andrew Raatz

## The Natashas

In 2004, Victor Malerek published *The Natashas: Inside the New Global Sex Trade* (Viking). It is not the first book written about human trafficking, but it is a well-written, emotionally powerful book. The author's gritty accounts of the horrors East European women faced after being trafficked served as a wakeup call for action.

For centuries people have thought of prostitutes as a despised class of society. People believed that women chose that lifestyle due to desire or necessity. In the last ten years, as books and articles have begun to portray the real story, people have begun to realize that trafficking is more a case of slavery, abuse, and coercion. Trafficking has become an issue addressed at the highest levels of government, indeed, an international litmus test of human rights.

Moldova found itself in the middle of the trafficking mess, along with every other former Soviet Union republic. Such a wave of trafficked women came from the former Soviet Union that the street word for prostitutes came to be *Natashas*. Desperate economic conditions, together with a well-organized criminal system, spelled a seemingly endless sale of human flesh.

But what has happened in the six years since the publication of Malerek's book? What is happening to address the problem and to end this horror? What is effectively being done to prevent women from leaving their homes and being enslaved in prostitution? What is being done to reach the Natashas?

Find below an account of the practical experience my wife Nancy and I have gained working with women who have been trafficked, the lessons we have learned as we have ministered to their needs, and the stories that have slowly emerged about their lives.

Some organizations trumpet the anti-trafficking horn because of the current flush of funding. But does the buzz about trafficking produce results?

## The Buzz

Trafficking in human beings is currently a hot topic. A Google search of *anti-trafficking* yields over two million hits. The theme of trafficking frequently appears in crime dramas, movies, and documentaries. Even in our local ministry, we receive emails weekly from people in the U.S. and Europe inquiring about trafficking, wondering what they can do to help combat the evil.

At times, it appears that everyone is keen to be a part of the struggle against trafficking. Christian ministries claim they are engaged in trafficking prevention if they deal with orphans or sponsor micro-enterprise projects for women. The buzz about trafficking is caused by both heart-felt compassion and money. When people see movies about trafficking or read actual stories, their hearts are moved to compassion and indignation. They sincerely want to help. But, in addition, a lot of money is involved. Governments have designated millions of dollars and Euros to fight trafficking and money can drive a lot of work. Money can refashion the mission statement of many an NGO and many a ministry. Some organizations trumpet the anti-trafficking horn because of the current flush of funding. But does the buzz about trafficking produce results? What progress is actually being made to eradicate this massive assault on human dignity?

A hot topic runs the danger of trendiness, falling out of favor as soon as the next tragedy strikes. Equally harmful, the buzz can become counter-productive if it simply generates sensationalism, rather than fewer victimized women.

## Trafficking in Moldova

The reality is that trafficking is still a major problem in Moldova, still an issue globally, and still a gross violation of human dignity and rights. Though some success against the evil may be noted, traffickers continue to manufacture new means of exploiting vulnerable women. While previously most girls from Moldova were trafficked to the Balkans or Western Europe, now more are trafficked to the Middle East or to Russia. A number are also trapped in brothels in Moldova, never leaving the country, but sold internally and controlled nonetheless.

## Background

In 2001, my wife and I first became aware of human trafficking. We were en route to a new life and work in the nation of Moldova. We were heading to this country in order to do our part to see the kingdom of God expand, partnering and serving together with the church in Moldova.

In researching our new destination we frequently encountered articles on trafficking. This issue shows up in every contemporary report on Moldova's problems. As one of the world's poorest countries, Moldova has the classic mixture of poverty, desperation, and an available supply of young, beautiful girls. The desperation to find work and a better life feeds the gullibility of the girls, luring them to believe "It won't happen to me."

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