

Welcome to Mission SONlight, reporting from the Euro-Asia Division, first quarter 2008. This is Red Square at the Kremlin, the heart of Russia's political power.

When visiting Moscow, you will also find the headquarters of the Euro-Asia Division. The Euro-Asia Division was established in 1991 after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union.

The Euro-Asia Division's territory is vast and varied crossing eight time zones. It is one of the largest geographical divisions of the Adventist Church. It's borders stretch from Western Europe to Eastern Asia, from the polar regions of the Arctic Ocean to the predominantly Muslim republics in the south. If you were to travel to each country, your passport would contain stamps from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

For 70 years these countries were under the rule of Communism, which limited individual freedoms. The freedom of religion was curtailed and atheism was considered to be superior. When communism fell in 1991, new hope was kindled as the people gained the opportunity to vote and more freedoms were available.

Among these freedoms was a return to the freedom of religion. For over 900 years the Russian Orthodox Church has been the predominant religious influence in the region.

Beginning in 1991, people were enthusiastic to learn more about Christianity.

Evangelistic meetings drew thousands and many learned of Jesus and accepted Him as their Saviour.

Today, there are over 1,900 Seventh-day Adventist churches throughout the Euro-Asia Division and over 138,000 baptized members.

As a new chapter was being written in the history of the Adventist church in these countries, the flicker of hope to build a university to serve the members was growing.

The establishment of Zaoksky Adventist University was a modern day miracle. At a time when there was little religious freedom and no officially recognized protestant churches, Adventist leaders visited with local government officials. They began the relationship which opened a way to establishing a religious university. It wasn't without disappointments in the beginning. "The government officials insisted that we build somewhere other than Moscow," says Vladimir Tkachuk, President of Zaoksky Adventist University. "We searched and found a place called Tula which was far from any major city." There was fear that no one would come to such a remote location.

"When we first began this university there wasn't even one church in the area." says President Tkachuk. This was not a discouragement. Instead, the small group of families and teachers put action to their words. They began to visit house to house and make friends with people in the community. As the friendships developed, Bible studies were started. People wanted to learn more about Christ. The experiment worked and today there are seven churches in the area.

The members didn't stop with their community outreach. They have begun to travel to the outlying villages and cities. "Our goal is to open mission centers in these areas," says President Tkachuk.

A ministry that is very special and important to the students of Zaoksky is one that involves children. Currently, there are 35 homes for orphans that house 3,500

children. Every Sabbath groups of 10-12 students visit the children. It is a time of stories and activities. As the children and students become friends, the students use the opportunities to share Jesus with the children. In return the students have discovered that they themselves grow spiritually through this outreach.

During Christmas time the university students invite these same children to a special Christmas celebration. For seven days the children stay with the university students. They play, sing songs and eat meals together. The students are able to share Jesus daily. One of the special moments during the week is when the students are able to give gifts of food and clothing with the children. For the past five years the university students have told the children how Jesus wants to be their friend who will one day take them to Heaven to live with Him.

Through these outreach programs, the university has been able to also witness to government officials. “They know what we are doing with the children and our other programs,” says President Tkachuk. “They approve of what we are doing.”

The early disappointment of having to build in a remote location has turned to joy and anticipation. Today, it is evident that the location was a perfect choice. It has been possible for more land to be purchased and a publishing house and agricultural department has been established along with the university’s classroom buildings.

When the school was being built, church members from all around the country volunteered to help with the construction. Taking a tour of the buildings, you will see many different designs and construction. “This is a good thing, because it shows that everyone put their hearts into building our school,” says President Tkachuk. As the students and parents see the work they did, they feel that they are a part of the university.

Today, the university trains pastors, music teachers and conductors, computer technicians and social workers. Preparations are being made to begin a master's program for youth leaders. In the future, the university hopes to collaborate with Andrews University and offer doctoral level programs to train leaders for the Euro-Asia Division.

“I want to thank the Lord for this school,” says President Tkachuk. “Without our world church family, many things at our university would not have been possible. Because of your help, students who otherwise do not have the means, but do have the dedication and heart are able to become workers for God.”

The last time Zaoksky Adventist University received funds from a 13th Sabbath offering, they were used to construct a gymnasium. Recently, a division-wide meeting was held in that gymnasium and 1500 Seventh-day Adventist pastors were able to meet and fellowship together. It was made possible because of generous gifts from church members around the world.

This quarter, the 13th Sabbath Offering emphasis in this division will feature churches in the Southern Moldova Conference and the Eastern Siberian Conference. Mission Sonlight will bring you reports from these conferences in coming weeks.

In Irkutsk, where the Siberian mountains meet the clean, crisp natural beauty of Lake Bakaal, you'll meet Pastors Roman and Alex and learn of their hopes and dreams for the church that needs to be completed.

Fish and Nadia are new members who are filled with a love for Jesus. Their story of how they want to share Jesus will inspire you as you learn of the challenges their congregation faces.

Ellen has attended the Adventist church for 16 years but hasn't been able to be baptized. Learn her story of struggle and heartache as she continues to seek her Lord and worship with fellow believers.

Moldova is bordered by Ukraine, and lies just north of the Black Sea. 100 miles north of the Sea is Chisinea, the capital city. We have church family there who eagerly waits for a permanent church home to worship in each Sabbath. You'll learn of the difficulties they have overcome, as they have had to be flexible with their worship location. Now they face the loss of their rental location and pray that a new church can be built to shelter their church community.

While freedoms have been obtained in the former Soviet Union, there are still spiritual and socio-economic challenges. The need is great for church facilities. As a church family we can share what God has given to us with our brothers and sisters in the Euro-Asia Division. This 13th Sabbath, what will your gift be?

From Irkutsk, Russia and Chisneau, Moldova, this is Mission Spotlight.