

**OBSHEDOSTUPNAYA ROSSIYSKAYA TEOLOGICHESKAYA AKADEMIYA**  
**(The Open Russian Theological Academy – ORTA)**  
**A CASE STUDY**

*“I am very interested in the goals of the ORTA-SEAN training programme. I am very concerned about gap between church and society with its serious problems of marriage breakdowns, high divorce rate, abortion, drugs, alcohol and the problem of homeless children. I strongly believes that the church had a duty to bridge the gap, and, if necessary, pay the price that may be required to heal the sick, aid the poor and help those in prison. The church can too easily be distracted by the latest movement. We should concentrate on “train and penetrate” rather than just fill churches.”*

Gennady Ivkov, Baptist Bishop of the Primor’ye Region, Far East Russia

---

### **SUMMARY OF ORTA**

The Open Russian Theological Academy, ORTA, was founded in 2004. The mission of ORTA is to bring effective discipleship training through a Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programme based on the Latin American SEAN programme. ORTA materials are especially valuable for those churches which are situated in remote places. There are many of them in Russia taking into consideration the vastness of the country. There is a very limited number of Bible colleges or training centres in Russia and many of them are under a constant threat of being closed by governmental authorities. At the same time, the need for good theological training at this particular stage is much greater in Russia and other former USSR countries than can be met by the existing Bible education institutions. Also the majority of potential or actual Christian leaders cannot leave their families and churches and study full-time.

Considering these factors TEE materials which provide solid Bible education within the church are especially valuable and can be used by churches as long-term educational programmes to train, equip and mobilise all God’s people into service, and for some, into leadership.

ORTA works with and through the churches. Our TEE courses are Bible based and non-denominational. They are relevant and affordable. They provide an effective on-the-job training. They are not academically exclusive. Their educational technology is designed around busy working people, people with family responsibilities, people who rub shoulders with the outside world at work. Our core curriculum requires the student to do two foundational courses on the Christian faith and the Bible, then undertake a three year discipleship programme that centers on the Life of Christ. It requires the student to seriously commit around 3 hours a week home study for two semesters each year plus a further two hours for group work plus a willingness to undertake the practical ministry assignments linked to the study and local church needs. ORTA also provides special tutor-training seminar training for potential group leaders.

### **THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AN OVERVIEW**

The Russian Federation is the largest country in the world. Continental in size, it covers 17million sq km (6.6 million sq miles). It is geographically about the same size as South America. It stretches for 11000km, 11 time zones, across the continents of Europe and Asia. Its climate brings warm summers and long cold winters when temperatures can drop below –50c.

The population of Russia numbers some 141.5 million today, having shrunk from 154 million in 1992. 127 people groups are represented, the majority Slavic. During the time of the Former Soviet Union there were 80 different spoken languages but Russian was

used as the universal bridging and trade language; so in today's world over 250 million people speak Russian, 167million as their mother tongue (1).

Russia possesses vast natural resources in timber, minerals, oil and gas. It has a nuclear stockpile greater than those of all other countries added together, and its international arms sales at \$7 billion in 2005 rose above either those of USA or France (2). Cities like Moscow, St Petersburg, Khabarovsk, Nizhny-Novgorod and Kalingrad have within them some outstandingly beautiful architecture. The standard of education in Russia's state schools, technical institutes and universities is usually very high.

However, Russia's greatest resource is its people. Their culture has given the world priceless treasures through its most engaging literature, outstanding art and immensely beautiful music and song. World famous names quickly come to mind such as Akhmatova, Borodin, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Lermontov, Pasternak, Pushkin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Zhukovsky. Russia's ballet, with its inspired choreography and timeless performers such as Ulánova, Pavlova and Nijinsky, is agreed to be in a league of its own – as are the Russian chess players.

But what we see from the West is but part of the background of a traditional and endearing culture of music and song that still pervades towns and villages, not just in their cultural centres but in the very hospitality within the homes of a people who are naturally affectionate. For example, what other language has such endearing words as *babushka* for a grandmother, *kapoosta* for a cabbage, or have at least 11 different words for cat?. Russians will provide you with the warmest and most generous of friendships – yet they are a people who have been manipulated, scarred, confused and continually betrayed within an unbelievably tragic and cruel history. As the largest republic within the former Soviet Union, Russia has suffered the most severe and sustained persecution of any nation in recent history.

Apart from the persecution of dissidents under the Tsars, deaths in gulags through Stalin's purges are believed to have been more than 20 million with a further 16 million perishing en-route. Scientists, writers, artists, musicians, engineers as well as some 200 of the top military commanders were exiled to these labour camps. Many were Christian. Many were in leadership. A further 20-30 million Soviet citizens were killed in World War 2. Even during the post Stalin years Christians were imprisoned, discriminated against and their children denied educational opportunities.

## **THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE**

### **A Political/Economic Changes**

The Soviet economy and society stagnated in the post Stalin years, haemorrhaged by the demands of the Cold War, until General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-91) introduced glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) in an attempt to modernize communism, but his initiatives led to the USSR breaking up into 15 independent republics. Since then, Russia has struggled in its efforts to build a democratic political system and market economy to replace the strict social, political, and economic controls of the communist period.

### **B The Power of the Wealthy and the Vulnerability of the Poor**

Glasnost and Perestroika were not, however, the answer to Russia's deep-rooted problems. Russia has emerged from 70 years of communism only to find itself weighed down by new imperialisms that intensify the vulnerability of the poor.

Russia's vast natural resources include vast oil fields and the world's largest proven natural gas reserves. However, world oil prices are a key factor in determining economic

strength. On the surface it would appear that the Russian economy has grown sharply in recent years, boosted by high world oil and gas prices. But the benefits haven't trickled down to the general population. Recent figures indicate that an estimated 22 million Russians, 15% of the population, live on less than £78 (\$150) a month. According to the government figures, only 10% of Russians can be classified as middle class (or above), which is defined as owning their own home and having a monthly salary of at least £286 (\$350-550). (3)

Today the differentiation in Russia in terms of income and quality of life has reached extremes that threaten social stability. At a time when an estimated one quarter of the population does not even have the minimal means to even survive, a 3% section of very rich people has emerged in Russia, defined as those who own prime residences, country houses and expensive cars and whose monthly income can be equal to US\$5-8000 for just one member of the family. Furthermore, within this there is an additional thin stratum of super-rich who control about 40% of Russia's gross national product, its natural resources and enormous companies and enterprises.

The hope that reforms would have benefited all who want to work honestly and loyally has proved to be forlorn as the rich have become richer and the poor seem confined to never ending poverty. With such affluence comes power; the rich have their own agenda and dangerous situations are now brewing including unconstrained control for *the oligarchs*. Moreover, all population groups have been effected by the current socio-economic climate; not just workers, teachers, pensioners, but also many company managers in charge of small and medium-sized businesses are finding themselves on the edge of bankruptcy.

It would also appear that the rich also do not trust the Government that made them so wealthy. It is not just coincidence that they hide their capital abroad. Even six years ago Dr Anatoliy Ovannikov, of the Russian Academy Socio-Economic Research of the Population Unit, Moscow estimated that between 50 to 60 billion US dollars were being transferred abroad every year (5). Sadly many of the rich do not intend to link their futures with Russia, the country that made them rich; they remain in Russia temporary while they can still have a career.

### **The Effect of Global Free Trade**

As well as a noticeable increase in the cost of living, the economy is being plundered through the increasing domination of global free-trade. Cheap undercutting imports from vehicles to an abundance of domestic appliance, toys and clothes, especially from China, are resulting in the closing down of many factories within Russia. Then there is the increasing exportation of Russia's raw materials like oil and natural gas, metals and wood and wood products; unbelievably long train loads of timber are witnessed in the Russian far east destined for countries like Japan. The concern is if all this continues what will be the socio/economic position in the next five years or ten years?

### **The Russian Mafia Effect**

The Russian Mafia, or "Red Mafia", is a name given abroad to groups of organized criminals of various ethnicity which arose from the Soviet Union after its disintegration. During recent years they have become responsible for the fast growth in organized crime with its consequential detrimental effect on the Russia economy. The Mafia control 70-80% of all private business and 40% of the nation's wealth. Apart from traditional protection rackets, foreign companies pay up to 20% of their profits to the Mafia as the on-going price of doing business in Russia. The Mafia target commercial centers of power, especially the nation's fragile banking system (7). Russian gangsters have murdered ninety-five bankers in the last five years.

## **SOCIAL CONCERNS**

### **1 POPULATION SCRINKAGE**

The population of Russia is shrinking by an average of 700,000 people a year.(9) There are several contributing reasons

#### **A EMIGRATION**

Over the last centuries there have been several strong waves of emigration from Russia that have enhanced the economical and cultural life of the receiving nations. The most recent wave began in the 90's and is still continuing.(10)

Since Glasnost an average of 100,000 people have been leaving Russia every year. By 1998 according to the records of the various embassies concerned, already no less than 2 million people have left Russia during the previous 15 years, a high proportion being highly qualified specialists, the majority (97%) emigrating to Germany, Israel, USA and Greece. By 1998 around 1 million Jews had left Russia and the former USSR - 700,000 of whom have moved to Israel.

The reasons for such emigration included concern over the future of their children, dissatisfaction with living and working conditions and a *Cinderella syndrome*, a fatalistic belief that the clock would suddenly strike 12 and Russia would return to previous regimes.

#### **Emigration and the Churches**

There has been a haemorrhage of Russian church leaders to countries such as the USA and Germany, including those who have gone initially there to study. Operation Mobilisation recently reported the problem with Christians leaving Novosibirsk and their churches for a more comfortable life, usually in Germany or the USA.

*“Although the general population of the city has not been reduced by this phenomena, the number of Christians has significantly fallen by as much as 50% in some churches. But it is not only the sheer number of Christians leaving over the last fifteen years that has caused such a problem, but the kind of people who have left. Typically those able to emigrate were well organized, motivated, middle aged, married couples with children. --In other words, those whom you would normally expect to take leadership roles in their churches.*

*“The Russian Baptist churches these emigrants have founded in Germany and the USA have too many chiefs, but hardly any Indians. In Novosibirsk there are many Indians left, but few chiefs to lead them. For instance, in one city centre church today with a membership of about 200, around 150 of these members are pensioners. The others are mainly young unmarried people. The church has no facilities for babies or very young children because there aren't any young couples with small children. Virtually everyone of middle age has left.” (11)*

#### **B CHANGES IN BIRTH AND DEATH RATES**

The population of Russia did experience a natural increase of nearly one million annually during 1986-87. This was accounted for by a combination of prenatal policies and the anti-alcohol campaign of the 1980s However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, birth-rates and male life expectancy have suffered sharp declines. From a fairly standard 10.7 per 1,000 in 1988, the Russian death rate has risen to an disturbing 16.3 per 1,000 in 2002. The 2005 estimate is 14.65. The number of deaths has increased by 720,000 annually, while the number of births has declined by close to 1.2 million. (3) (10)

While the high increases in deaths among middle-aged men from cardiovascular disease and such external causes as murder, suicide, accidents, and poisoning has received the greatest media attention, it is the decline in the birth rate that has had the greatest impact

on population size. (9) We are told that for a country to maintain its population a birth rate is needed of about 2.4 babies per woman. Russia's fertility rate plunged from 2.08 in 1990 to just 1.17 in 2004. Abortions now outstrip live births, in 2004 at least 1.6 million women had an abortion (a fifth of them under the age of 18) and about 1.5 million gave birth. (3) Rural populations have been dying off or moving to towns and cities. Many villages are reported to have been abandoned altogether.(4)

### **C PRISON POPULATION SIZE AND PROBLEMS**

Most countries in the world have prison population rates of less than 150 per 100,000 citizens, with western European countries mostly in the range of 60-100 and central European countries around 150-225. With an estimated 680 per 100,000, Russia is second only to the United States' 690 per 100,000. (12)

Russian prisons are often overcrowded, with many jail cells far below internationally accepted standards. Some two thirds of prisoners in Russian jails are ill. The chief of the penal directorate, Vladimir Yalunin, reported that about 500,000 prisoners suffered from a range of complaints from mental illness to Aids. Russia's justice minister, Yury Chaika, recently discussed the problems of the prison system with President Vladimir Putin, noting that 97,000 inmates have tuberculosis. Chaika also reported that one third of Russians with TB are either in a penal colony or a pre-trial cell.(6)

### **D OTHER LINKED SOCIAL CONCERNS**

One major concern is the loss of family cohesion; some eight out of ten marriages end in divorce. (1)

There is the growing problem of the homeless, including street children. UNICEF report that statistics regarding street children are extremely contradictory and estimates range from 50,000-150,000 in the Russian Federation. Many children who live on the streets do have living parents and potential housing.(13)

There has been an increase in drug abuse and alcoholism. Russians are estimated to drink four billion litres of vodka a year – if correct that adds up to more than half a litre per week for every man, woman and child.(3) Experts estimate the number of drug addicts in Russia to be nearing 4 million people; but only a small percentage are officially registered in hospitals.(15) In Feb 2004 *Pravda*,(14) quoting Alexander Mikhailov, Vice-chairman of the Government's Drug Control, reported that the number of drug addicts in Russia had increased by 9 times in recent years and nearly 70,000 people were dying of drug use in the country each year.

The growing disillusionment within society was highlighted through a recent survey; only 4% trust politicians, 3% the businessmen, 13% the intelligencia, 31% the priests, 36% the teachers and 1% the police. Russia's suicide rate almost doubled between 1990 and 2003, to 40 per 100,000, twice the world average.(3)

Whereas HIV/AIDS has so far not had a dramatic impact on the burden of disease or mortality levels in the country, the officially registered number of HIV/AIDS cases appears to be increasing at a fast rate, with 100,000 of the 180,000 cases in 2001 alone. Unofficial estimates place these numbers well below the actual figures.(9)

During the Communist era there were a series of organisations linked to the communist party that sought to give controlled purpose and direction to the young, namely the *Little Octobrists* or *Octiabriata* (7 – 9), the *Young Pioneers* 10-15 ( a Scout-like organisation which had an estimated membership of 25 million in 1974), the *Komsomol* 14-18 (around two-thirds of the present adult population of Russia is believed to have once been a member) and then the Communist Party itself. These organisations no longer exist, leaving a void and lack of purpose for many. Meanwhile more and more western videos

and films with their unprincipled and unrestricted exploitation of sex and violence appear on Russian television.

*There is still a great spiritual hunger within the Russian soul; a hunger that Satan will try to dull through the counterfeit. There is much work for the people of the Russian churches to undertake to change Russia through the love and compassion of Jesus.*

## **THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

The Russian Orthodox Church (Русская Православная церковь), also known as the *Orthodox Catholic Church of Russia*, is the largest of the Eastern Orthodox churches in the world. The Church has over 23,000 parishes, 154 bishops, 635 monasteries, and 102 clerical schools in the territory of the former Soviet Union and has a well-established presence in many other countries. It has historically been the dominant church of Russia representing the state religion. During the Communist years it experienced a demise of power; it underwent great persecution in 1922 then later it was infiltrated by Communist appointments. It is united under the Patriarch of Moscow, Alexius II, who in turn is in communion with the other patriarchs and primates of the Eastern Orthodox Church. (7)

Celebrating its millennial anniversary in 1988, the Orthodox church is now perceived as a major symbol of Russian identity. It has some 60 million professing adherents today, yet the reality is that only about 3% actually participate in church life. However, due to its deep cultural roots, various members of the Russian government are keen to display their respect for the Church; it is common for the President of Russia to publicly meet with the Patriarch on religious festivals and many previously confiscated church buildings have been officially returned to the Church in recent years.

Generally the Orthodox Church is still reluctant to co-operate with any other denomination, while reclaiming what it considers to be its "heritage". Powerful elements within are using every possible means to regain its exclusive spiritual dominance. In 1997 the church was involved in the instigation of the complex and ambiguous 1997 "Federal Law on Freedom of Religion", the preamble of which emphasizes the special role of Russian Orthodox church and mentions Christianity, Islam, Jewish religion and Buddhism as traditional religions of Russia. The Orthodox church in Russia uses this to make every effort to present the Protestant churches as pseudo-Christian sects and not real Christians. However, there is nevertheless evidence that a number of open-minded priests within the Orthodox Church are willing to enter into a dialogue with other Christian denominations, and even be critical of the existing Orthodox hierarchy.

The Orthodox church has vigorously resisted reformation throughout its history. There have, however, been a number of historic break-away groups, such as the Molokans 1659, who queried the Orthodox liturgy and accuracy of many of the Russian Holy books and manuscripts.

## **THE RUSSIAN PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

### **Historical Background**

In an impressive eleven-article manifesto dated July 22, 1763 in the second year of her reign, Catherine the Great, aware of the vast untapped potential of the vast Russian lands, invited a number of foreign groups from Germany, into Russia to develop the agriculture and industries. Article 1 of this Manifesto:

*... granted such foreigners coming into Our Empire the free and unrestricted practice of their religion according to the precepts and usage of their Church. To those, however, who intend to settle not in cities but in colonies and villages on uninhabited lands we grant the freedom to build churches and belltowers, and to maintain the necessary number of priests and church servants, but not the construction of*

*monasteries. On the other hand, everyone is hereby warned not to persuade or induce any of the Christian co-religionists living in Russia to accept or even assent to his faith or join his religious community, under pain of incurring the severest punishment of Our law. This prohibition does not apply to the various nationalities on the borders of Our Empire who are attached to the Mahometan faith. We permit and allow everyone to win them over and make them subject to the Christian religion in a decent way. (17)*

These immigrants, mainly Mennonites, with their pacifist beliefs, and Lutherans, were guaranteed freedom of religion, lower taxes, exemption from armed service, and were given large grants of land. Lutheran congregations in Russia however began earlier in the 16th century through indigenous Lutheran Christians who came under tsarist rule when Peter the Great conquered the areas around the Baltic Sea. In the years leading up to World War II, many Lutherans were deported to Soviet Republics in Central Asia and the Far East because they, as ethnic minorities, were seen as a threat to Soviet state security. The church survived, however, as underground faith communities led by lay leaders. It was only in 1988 that Lutheran churches of ethnic German heritage were able to begin officially to function again in Russia.

By the early nineteenth century Orthodox clergy were perceived to be very distant from the common people and that important pastoral needs were being ignored. Following the freedom of the serfs in 1861, the failure of formal orthodoxy to give practical Biblical teaching led to break-away movements as hungry minds sought God's Word, like that of the peasant Stundism of Osnova. Although producing outwardly clean lives they faced harsh persecutions, like the severe birchings of 1867.

However many of the educated classes were intensely religious but also unsatisfied with the detached formalism of the Orthodox Church. For example, by 1873 a strong evangelical movement had developed through the witness of an English visitor, Lord Radstock, who was happy to work with sincere Christians whatever their denomination. The movement drew in a number of the senior aristocrats of St Petersburg, including Count Brobrinsky, Minister of the Interior and Colonel Vasili Alexandrovich Pashkov of the Russian Imperial Guard.

Alarmed by any hint of change, the Russian aristocracy petitioned Tsar Alexander II to act firmly; furthermore the wrath of the Orthodox church had been aroused and its leaders also joined the appeal to the Tsar. When in 1884 the United Evangelical Conference in St Petersburg met in Princess Lieven's palace to organize a united fellowship of New Testament believers, police arrested converts, exiling some and jailing others. What may have become a reformation within the church was forced to be a sect outside it. Harried, persecuted, imprisoned, exiled to Siberia these Christians were treated as common criminals, suffering more than Lenin and the other later revolutionists did prior to coming to power. Yet they generated churches wherever they went. By 1891 over half the 41 Orthodox dioceses complained of being effected with evangelical growth.

In 1909, the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians was formed as a fellowship of autonomous congregations. Although persecuted as an heretical sect during the final decades of Tsarist Russia, the evangelicals received a relative freedom immediately following the Communist Revolution, but after the introduction of Stalin's law on religion in 1929 they underwent a similar fate of severe repression as did the Orthodox Christians.

In 1944, the northern "Evangelical Christian" and the southern Baptist group were united. They had held joint beliefs and worked with each other for a long time. The name "Baptist" is commonly used today, but the full name for this unified group is "Evangelical Christian / Baptist." At the close of *the Patriotic War* (World War II) the Communist government reorganized all evangelical groups under this one denominational label. All congregations were immediately required to register with the state; a step which granted believers a

measure of religious tolerance providing they agreed to restrict their activities to passive worship. During Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign the pressures were stepped up and led to a split in 1961. The registered churches decided to try to work within the system, while the unregistered ones, in good conscience, could not, attracting increased state opposition.

Pentecostalism was introduced to Russia and other Slavic nations by Ivan Voropaev, a Russian - born American who initiated a ministry in Odessa in 1920, the origin of the movement in the Slavic nations. He founded many congregations in Russia before being arrested by the Soviet police in 1929. He died in prison.

### **THE RECENT PAST**

Despite many problems, evangelicals continued to grow in the Republics of the Former Soviet Union. Lifestyle contrasts between Christians and non-believers became an arena for witness to neighbours and fellow workers. Even with limited access to Bibles and discipleship materials they demonstrated a strong commitment to the Word of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ, an example to the West of a purer church whose members were prepared to take risks to honour and obey their Saviour. This led to the support movement in the 1960s by some concerned Western churches in the form of sustained prayer and "Bible smuggling".

### **THE RUSSIAN BIBLE**

The Russian Bible Society was established in 1813 at the command of Tsar Alexander 1, who gave generously towards the work. Prince Golitsin became its first President. The aim of this society was to "*enable the people of Russia to receive the Holy Scriptures in ethnic languages at a low price range.*" The work was very effective, in the following years the Society was able to print 876,106 copies of the Bible and its separate books in 26 languages and dialects. The Old Slavonic Russian version, vaguely understandable by anyone but clergy, was superseded by the Synodal version, its translation being completed by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1876. This translation blessed by the Holy Synod remains the first and the only Russian translation of the Bible recognized universally by all Christian denominations. As the standard translation used throughout Russia, it is a good translation though some of the words are rather archaic and thus unfamiliar to those new to Christianity. (18)

### **POST GLASNOST PROTESTANT LEADERSHIP TRAINING**

The 70 years of Communist rule held back formal Protestant scholarship; a high proportion of Russian Protestant leaders were, compared to their Orthodox counterparts, men of limited theological education. During the 1980s the Russo-German missionary organization, LOGOS International, developed a program of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in some of the cities of the Former Soviet Union, spearheaded by the Kazakhstan-born Dr Peter Penner. A residential Bible School was established in 1990 with 45 students in the Krasnodar region of Southern Russia; being the first Russian Protestant Bible College to be opened for 70 years. The following year it moved north to become the St Petersburg Christian University (SPCU) with Dr Penner serving as the University's first Rector.

Dr Penner together with his wife, Katharina, perceived two important needs for the Russian churches:

- 1 That of establishing sound evangelical scholarship, drawing in the selfless servant-hearted services of international scholars such as Dwight Acomb (USA), Hannes & Annamarie Further (South Africa), Johannes Lange (Germany) and many others.
- 2 The need to establish effective distant learning levels for leadership training and effective discipleship to meet the needs of the majority distant and poor

churches; seeking to adapt the South American SEAN TEE programme for the latter.

The Penners hoped that SPCU could serve as a centre for both educational thrusts and that TEE understanding skills could become part of the curriculum for the resident students. However, the difficult financial demands of maintaining a residential University within a Russian economy needed Western support linked to the requirements for international accreditation, so SPCU had to pass the SEAN TEE development work to their associates in Oxen Ministries.

During the 1990s serious investment has been made to train their leaders, teachers and workers through the foundation of further “Western style” Bible colleges. Many valuable workers and leaders have already been trained through such institutions.

As well as the risk of producing young inexperienced and spiritually immature leaders, elite residential training systems cannot meet the enormous leadership and training needs of the wider and majority poorer communities of Russia. The diploma level BEE distant learning programme has sought to address this problem by enabling many leaders to study and train on the job. BEE perceived that the established churches are 80% women which makes it difficult to raise up men leaders and that the main hindrance to the Gospel in Russia is that people have little or no Christian influence or background. They saw how small, home based Bible studies provide solid education and positive exposure to the love and teachings of Christ. (19)

Other effective distant learning initiatives developed, like Peter Dyneka’s Russian Ministries (founded in 1991) dedicated to church-planting and church growth through providing the resources and training to equip the next generation of church leaders.

### CONCERNS

The percentage of evangelical Christians is still below 3% of the Russian population. The most recent edition of *Operation World* records that the hopes of spiritual revival of the early 1990s were dashed by failures of both political and church leadership. Russian church growth failed to reach 1990’s expectations through inappropriate evangelism and lack of effective discipleship. (1)

- I. *The majority of the people who claim to be Christian remain untaught.*
- II. *Their poverty and their hopelessness has stimulated crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, emigration, family breakdown, and suicide to alarming heights.*
- III. *Many people lived for months in the late 1990s without receiving their due wages.*
- IV. *Young people have been often neglected by the churches.*
- V. *There has been a growing incidence of teenage pregnancies, whilst the main method of contraception has been that of abortion. Crime is on the increase and powerful networks like the Mafia make mockery of justice.*

Many national evangelical Christians still isolate themselves from society because of the previous decades of persecution. It is very hard for them to accept new Christians because of the vast difference between the Christian sub-culture and overall society. However, there is also a concern that Western church example is far too compromising, and furthermore, that a number of Western attitudes are now being paralleled in these Russian churches, especially Biblically incorrect expectations of the role of pastor.

There is the problem of emigration, mentioned earlier. Very many theologically trained pastors with access to the West have left Russia these last ten years, or not returned to their home towns or villages - an ecclesiastical echo of the words of the American 1918 song: “*How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree?*”

There is a great need for manly mentors in the churches. So much of the church work seems to be held together, as with families, by the women. Too often men either fail to

see a male role within the body of the church or become confused as to their role and responsibility, including that of seeking leadership for the wrong reasons and the wrong perception of the leadership role, drifting towards an autocratic or "Tsar" type, with associated problems of petty legalism, unquestioned authority and theological fads.

There is traditionally much superstition across Russia. Sadly the Russian Orthodox church has given very little Biblical teaching to the masses, relying instead on formal liturgy. An Itar - Tass News Wire of June 2, 2001 estimated 5 Million of Russian nationals to be involved in sects, claiming that most of the sects to be protestant, pseudo-Buddhist or neo-pagan with more than 5,000 sects functioning in Moscow alone. The agency spokesman warned that almost all these sects act under the disguise of public organizations and stealthily mesmerize people. (20) However, although Protestant are treated as sects, there has nonetheless been a steady infiltration into Russia of groups such as the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Hare Krishna, Unification Church (Moonies), Scientology and White Brotherhood. Sergei Torop, known to his followers as Vissarion claims to be the Christ returned to earth to complete his work. Already he has a growing following of several thousand in Siberia.

### **POPULAR LEVEL TEE LEADING TO THE BIRTH OF ORTA**

With the encouragement of SPCU, Oxen Ministries continued the work of formatting a *popular level* TEE programme. They recognised that the purposes of God go beyond evangelism, and that it is important that the churches have access discipleship training materials that would help all believers understand the central truths of the Bible, so that they could grow into strong disciples of Christ and avoid false teaching and error.

An additional valuable tool to this TEE programme was the availability Focus Radio's 125 radio broadcasts in Russian of the SEAN courses *Abundant Life* (for new believers), *The Light of the Bible*, (an overview of the Bible), *Spirit World* (recognising and dealing with the occult and superstition) and *Work for All* (the Biblical teaching on work). These were produced at an extremely high professional standard by Tatiana Satsuk, a graduate of SPCU, who was recommended by Dr Penner for the task and enabled by the generous support of Focus Radio through its Director, David Couchman.

The vision of Oxen Ministries centres on the compassion and command of Matthew 9:35-38 and the vision of commitment within 1 Chronicles 13:23-38. Oxen were concerned that the emerging Russian churches should avoid creating elitist structures within the churches that disqualify the very type of people that Jesus chose to be His disciples from doing the very ministry that Jesus taught his people to do.

Today's social-economic problems in Russia demonstrate that changing political systems does not change men's hearts.(21) There is urgent work for the churches and every member is needed. Why cannot at least an equal investment in thought, research, planning, prayer and finance that goes into training and equipping leadership, be put into training and mobilising the masses - God's tent makers, God's ants, God's partisans, God's labourers rather than God's loiterers, all envisioned and equipped to change society for Jesus? Christians are represented by school teachers, taxi drivers, policeman, shop assistants, soldiers, university lecturers, students, scientists, street cleaners, media personalities, doctors, bus drivers, artists, musicians, writers, politicians, busy working folk with *dacha*\* responsibilities, people understandably allergic to print at the close of a long working day, yet people who daily rub shoulders with all sorts and conditions of men and women.

*\*Up to 70% of the families living in cities and towns in the far eastern cities of Russia have plots of land known as dachas, often several kilometres out of the town, where they grow a high percentage of their family's requirements of vegetables and fruit.*

Oxen firmly believe that Church leadership requires clear accountable goals for each stage of a believer's growth and service. In Chile, for example, Alfredo Cooper had already demonstrated in his *PROGROMIN* programme that when popular level TEE is properly incorporated as a disciplined and integral part of church life, the spiritual gifting of each member become apparent, so that the potential leaders, evangelists, administrators, children's ministries, youth workers, teachers, helpers, worship leaders, TEE tutors, those with pastoral hearts can be recognised and their gifting encouraged, developed and proven within the church, leading, in the process to the formation of church planting teams.

### **Oxen Ministries' Strategy**

1. to translate the SEAN core curriculum and associated courses
2. to make strategic contacts to field-test the material in Russian churches,
3. to seek out or form some national organisation to take responsibility for the work,
4. to seek "bridgehead" cities across Russia that could develop "strawberry runners" into the surrounding towns and villages.

Much of this was undertaken for Oxen through the tireless work of Vadim Poddubsky, a generous-hearted and mature graduate of SPCU. Hard pressed donor agencies like Timothy Ministries, Feed the Minds, Hilfe fuer Bruder did much to encourage this work through grants, especially for printing, but it proved very difficult to interest western churches, which themselves rarely have discipleship programmes beyond *Alpha*, and have little or no understanding of TEE, to give on-going support to such a concept. Although the work slowly progressed funds were never sufficient to employ full-time translators. Eventually the long journeys proved damaging to Vadim's health, and he had to step down, but not before he made a major breakthrough by introducing Oxen to important contacts in key cities in the Russian far east, Magadan and Vladivostok.

The far east of Russia proved to be a major step forward; firstly through Olga Rybakova, the founder/director of the St James Bible College in Magadan. Magadan region is a huge territory with many scattered little towns and villages. Olga immediately perceived how such TEE could serve the vast areas around Magadan region and beyond into Chukota, Kamchatka and the NE regions of Siberia for long-term discipleship tools especially in the newly-planted churches; secondly through the immense generosity and trust of Manfred Brockmann, Dean of the Lutheran churches of Eastern Siberia and the Far East of Russia. Manfred opened up the Lutheran churches in Vladivostok, Chita, Khabarovsk, Ussurijsk, Arsenijv and Komsomolsk-on-Amur for field testing the various courses. The cooperation, hospitality and generous friendship of these Lutheran Christians has been profound, and, as well as opening up the need for further editing of the material, has led also to important contacts in other churches. From these experiences Oxen Ministries invested all their reserves in January 2004 into a bold UK-based training project.

"What winter!?" was the unforgettable Russian response when during the minibus drive though the countryside to Devon from London an apology was made for bringing them over to England during the middle of the English winter. Nine committed Russians had travelled some 6000 miles from Magadan and Vladivostok to Moscow without any guarantee of receiving a visa there to proceed to England. Then, from Moscow travelled a further 1500 miles to London - all in the depths of their Russian winter where temperatures can drop to below -40C, hence their dry comment "What winter!?". Nearly all of those who came had never been outside the former Soviet Union.

The delegates were carefully selected from those recommended by the two team leaders, Dr. Annetta Vyssotskaia, from Vladivostok and Olga Rybakova from Magadan. The two teams were as follows:

From Vladivostok: Dr. Annetta Vyssotskaia, a church leader, immensely respected across the Christian denominations within the Primor'ye Krai region and beyond, especially for her initiative and ability to get different churches to work together, Vladimir Vysotskiy, a graduate of the Faith Bible College in New Zealand and Vera Sapojnikova, the Chief

Education Officer of the North Union of Evangelical Christian Churches Department of Christian Education that covers the Russian far East regions of Yakutia, Amur, Khabarovsk and Primor'ye regions.

From Magadan: Olga Rybakova, Founder/Director of the St James' Bible College, Magadan, and pastor of the Revival Church of Magadan; Lyubov Fedorova, an experienced accountant and administrator, who also serves as a professional advisor on labour laws and accounting to a number of related Christian organizations in Magadan; Irina Krizhanovskaya, a University teacher of English, and founder/ editor of the interdenominational Christian women's magazine, "Woman's World"; Galina Gerkina, the social worker in the St James Centre and already an experienced TEE tutor; Igor Nichkasov, a senior Pentecostal pastor, and Alla Vysokova, an extension student of the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary in St.-Petersburg and leader of St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church, Magadan.

### **THE REASONS FOR THESE SEMINARS**

1. The conviction that "Grass Root" TEE, especially that represented by the South American-born SEAN material, has a vital important role to play in equipping the people of God for effective discipleship ministry and service within the vast needs of Russia and the Former Soviet Union.
2. Realization that, although much effort had been put into translating and introducing the SEAN TEE curriculum into Russian, it is not being used to anything like its true potential within the churches. The reasons were twofold:
  - Lack of proper introduction to the educational methodology leading to confusion and misunderstanding regarding its goals and use.
  - Absence of a proper TEE tutor training programme for the Russian churches.
3. The need for a regional and/or national umbrella TEE organisation that is Russian owned, Russian financed and Russian led, to take responsibility for this work.

### **THE GOALS OF THE SEMINARS**

Oxen set and followed seminar goals; that having undertaken these two weeks in England,

1. *the delegates, as a team, would be competent to set up the necessary TEE organisation required to facilitate the running of TEE programmes on a local, regional and even national basis.*
2. *The delegates, as a team, will also be competent to train other people in the specific skills needed in the fields of education methodology, editing, administration and financial policies that are associated with a well run TEE programme.*

### **SUMMARY OF THE SEMINAR & WORKSHOP CONTENTS**

- Educational principles – curriculum development
- Administrative structure and goals – national organization
- Administrative structure and goals – regional organizations
- Administration structures – local TEE centers
- Administration – financial policies
- Administration – production and distribution of courses.
- Administration – accountability
- Administration - accounting principles and systems
- Accreditation
- Tutor training – principles, content and practicalities
- Course development
- TEE and help ministries
- International examples of "Grass root" TEE

## THE SEMINAR LEADERS

1. Jacqui Brown, Field Director, SEAN UK *with ten years of TEE experience in the Axminster Christian Fellowship, which she and her husband, Rob, founded and disciplined into ministry and effective community service in a country where too many churches are shrinking, weighed down too often by historic baggage.*
2. Zafar Ismail, former Director of the Open Theological Seminary, Lahore, Pakistan and currently serving as Director of Al K'hair Ministries.
3. Peter Bisset, Founder/Director of ITEEN, Nepal
4. Tanka Subedi, National Coordinator, ITEEN, Nepal.
5. Rita Subedi, Programme Coordinator and Translator, ITEEN, Nepal  
*Both Zafar and the Nepalese team represented the experience of strong and effective TEE programmes in countries where Christians represent a religious minority often facing persecution. (3000 registered students in Pakistan and then 1800 in Nepal- rising to 3000 by 2006 ). The Nepalese team represented also a country which has a very low level subsistence economy.*
6. Richard Collins FCA. Partner of Collins Davies Chartered Accountants.  
*Richard brought with him extensive hands-on experience working with the African churches, plus a growing international responsibility in training NGOs and Christian organisations in responsible accounting and stewardship*
7. Bernard Cocker, Founder/Director of the International Aid Trust
8. Michael Huggins, Field Director, Oxen Ministries.

## THE TEE SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

### 1 Seminars led by Jacqui Brown,

Jacqui took the delegates step by step through the vision and goals of *Grass-root* TEE, with its educational principles; covering in thorough and practical detail the principles behind programmed learning, group tutoring and the value of practical ministry assignments. Jacqui also covered a number of important practicalities, attitudes and commitments that needed to be understood for effective use of TEE within the local church. Her Power Point presentation was skillfully adapted into Russian prior to each seminar through the dedication of Vladimir Vysotskiy, who often worked into the small hours of the morning to accomplish this service. Jacqui's seminars were clearly presented, sincere, focused, practical and helpful and have been adapted effectively since by ORTA staff in the far east of Russia.

### 2 Seminars led by Zafar Ismail,

Zafar provided the delegates with both a scholarly and Biblical background to grass-root level TEE within the context of the church as the local witnessing community; how Christianity starts with the local church – person to family to community -and that, like the cells of a body, individual identity within the church is functional within family and community.

Zafar showed how the maturing of men and women of God is an area that needs to be pursued and carefully guarded; arguing that the natural seedbed, *seminarium*, for growth in Christian character is the local church. The equipping of God's people, therefore, should happen where they are – in the local church, for, although God gives both gifts and calling to each member, the church nevertheless has the responsibility before God to equip all its people for service. The group examined together how this local focus for theological education and mission can be served effectively through a relevant TEE programme, and how and why, therefore, the training of local church-based TEE tutors is essential for this.

Using the Pakistani OTS TEE programme as a springboard, Zafar explored the historical development of mission strategy within the Indian sub-continent. He showed how traditionally Western money has dictated mission strategy. He gave the example of Pakistan, where the challenge to the witnessing community of the church, representing 2% of the population, needs to be envisioned and equipped to reach the other 98%. The

delegates then had an opportunity to examine the challenges that lay ahead in their own local, regional and national situation.

Zafar introduced the seminars to the problems and opportunities facing Christians within an Islamic culture, and the principles under which the administration and curriculum development of OTS was formulated within this environment. The importance of cultural adaptations was explored when translating in order to reach the lesson objectives most effectively.

Zafar explained the principles behind the OTS TEE administrative structure and its approach to tutor training and cross cultural training. The need for curriculum development to be relevant to the cultural requirements within the churches. The seal, the accreditation, of these inter-denominational TEE programmes being the value the churches are placing on the ministry, outreach and even leadership of students trained through these programmes.

### **3 Seminars led by Tanka Subedi, Rita Subedi and Peter Bisset**

The Nepalese team explained why and how ITEEN was established, working all the time with and through the churches. They worked through the practicalities of ITEEN's legal and administrative structure in detail, laying out some important principles that the Russian delegates were able to discuss and formulate in the light of Russia's religious and taxation laws.

The ITEEN management programme was presented and discussed in terms of establishing short, medium and long-term goals, goals that must be realistic and obtainable. They emphasized in detail the importance of teamwork and the ultra-careful selection of staff, including those at trustee and management level.

Using actual examples of ITEEN's annual budget proposals and monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and yearly budget-actual reports, ITEEN's policy towards financial priorities, budgetary controls and transparent reporting was also discussed. Although the Nepalese team represents a country which has a low level subsistence economy, even from such a background, the team nonetheless emphasized the practical steps that ITEEN is taking with the churches towards a level of financial sustainability that will take them away from having to constantly rely on Western grant money to function.

The importance of establishing clear and acceptable educational discipline within the programme was emphasized. A sound tutor-training programme linked to this should be the priority of any serious TEE system. These points were addressed through practical and entertaining workshops during which the team drew in aspects of ITEEN's own Tutor Training programme which the delegates were able to experience for themselves. Their TEE tutor-training workshops are a very serious foundation to the ITEEN programme. No one can tutor a group until they have undergone this training. Applicants have been known to travel for up to 5 days on foot before a three day bus journey to attend a three day seminar; all this with the continual hazard of being attacked or even killed in the some of the remote areas.

### **4 Seminars led by Richard Collins, FCA,**

Richard's contribution to these workshops was through the seminars he conducted on accountability procedures needed for a successful TEE programme. He introduced a series of workshop sessions in order to build the capacity of the delegates to manage financial resources more efficiently and effectively and to develop the confidence and financial skills of individuals to operate finance systems which enable accountability, transparency & integrity.

## **5 Seminar led by Bernard Cocker on the Practical Responsibilities of the local church to the needs of the poor.**

Before introducing the ministry of the International Aid Trust, Bernard focused on the Biblical teaching regarding the church's sacred responsibility before God to demonstrate the love of Christ through the gospel going hand-in-hand with a determination to care for and meet the needs of the poor, the homeless and dispossessed, the fatherless, the widows. His presentation was both challenging and dramatic. He used modern examples of the contrast between the wealth of some churches and their expensive building projects with the poverty in the surrounding neighbourhood. The resulting seminar discussions included the relevance of TEE within such an area of responsibility for the churches. It was noted that this is very much part of the three part educational ethos of TEE, "knowing", "being", "doing", and able to teach others also. Students doing the SEAN "Life of Christ", "Mission, Mercy and Me?" and "Work for All" courses were expected to undertake assignments linked to the teaching, then, establish with the advice and support of the church pastor, a project. Many such projects would be connected to community concern and needs.

**6 Michael Huggins**, as well as assisting the seminar leaders, introduced examples of TEE usage around the world, national, regional and within the local church.

### **Delegates Assignment**

As an on-going practical extension to this tutor-training, throughout the two weeks all the delegates worked their way through a SEAN TEE course, "Abundant Light" (the Light of the Bible). The delegates were divided into two tutorial groups. Each group member would do the home studies daily in his or her "spare" time, then attend the group tutorial from 9.00 to 10.30 a.m.. The purpose of the exercise was to provide the delegates with a daily opportunity to improve their group leadership skills. Everyone had to have a turn at tutoring the group, though no-one would know before each group meeting who the tutor was to be for that day, so all had to be prepared. Tanka, Rita, Peter and Michael each took turns to observe and comment.

### **THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE SEMINARS**

1. *ORTA*. The decision of the delegates to form the Open Russian Theological Academy, with two Regional Committees, Magadan and Vladivostok plus a National Committee, co-opting Michael Huggins of Oxen Ministries as a member.
2. *Matheteuo*. This Russian seminar experience had convinced those concerned of the advantage of drawing together TEE training teams from within a network representing many years of valuable TEE experience in a wide range of countries, economies and cultures to be able to serve in the same way in other venues around the world. Worldwide experience had demonstrated that the aspirations of TEE can be significantly advanced through:
  - ❖ An increased understanding of TEE including the vision and potential, the methodology and the practical application involved.
  - ❖ Adequate foundational training for those wishing to establish TEE programmes.
  - ❖ A clearer recognition of realistic levels of pump-priming funding needed to establish national programmes.
  - ❖ The need to work towards indigenous ownership and funding of the programmes.

*Matheteuo* under the patronage of Dr John Stott was therefore established as a training and resource vehicle for such TEE.

### **ORTA STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT**

Since its inception in early 2004, ORTA has had to concentrate on four key areas:

1. Tutor-training seminars
2. Translation

3. Financial Support
4. International responsibilities

### **The Vladivostok and Primor'ye Division of ORTA**

The official population of Vladivostok is 650,000, but in reality it is about a million. It is a city of many nationalities. In the past it was a closed city and a military port.

Following the 2004 seminars the Vladivostok team was immediately strengthened by addition of three key people; Maria Boyko (now Vdovina), a gifted Bible teacher from the Union of Evangelical Christian church and two colleagues from the Lutheran church, Irina Barsegova, a skilled translator and administrator and Eduard Mishenko, a book-keeper/accountant. In June 2006 Irina became the National Coordinator of ORTA.

The Vladivostok team led by Vera Sapozhnikova aimed to achieve 8 tutor-training seminars a year – centering on Vladivostok and moving then to other towns like Ussurijsk, Blagovestchensk and then to distant villages like Chernigovka and Rettikhovka. At the same time they planned to make contacts so that this work could spread beyond the region into areas like Sakhalin and Amurskaya Oblast. These seminars are brilliantly conducted, drawing in the UK and Nepalese examples and adding a great deal of Russian sparkle and spice. In June 2006 Maria replaced Vera as Regional Controller as Vera had resigned to undertake overseas missionary work,

ORTA do not release their TEE material to churches unless the church's potential tutors have first participated in a tutor training seminar and possess the appropriate ORTA certificate. This means that as the ministry of ORTA spreads across Russia so does the need for additional trainers to meet the demands of growth and interest. During these last two years Vera and Maria have sought out able tutors to join the training team as volunteers. The UK Ulting Trust have kindly helped with the costs of travel for these trainees (for example, two female delegates had to undertake a 16 hour bus journey to participate in the three day seminars in Vladivostok in June 2006), and the J.W Laing Trust have enabled ORTA to use effective PowerPoint equipment for the training.

There have been many wonderful testimonies sent in from ORTA tutors and students. An ORTA tutor and volunteer member on the tutor training team, commenting recently on *Abundant Life*, SEAN's TEE course for new believers, pointed out that:

*“Abundant Life” may seem simple at first but its impact on the inner man is huge! Everyone who went through it in our church loved it. This is the sort of knowledge that transforms you but also forms a new man and changes your relationships to God. All those in original group are in ministry now. Oleg is tutoring and taking responsibility in children's ministry, Ljudmilla is leading a group, Natalia helps serve people, and is now pregnant so ORTA makes you fruitful in other ways!, She has since started home group using ORTA principles. All the students are very excited, for they now feel equipped to share their faith. ORTA provide a systematic educational tool for the church that develops a taste for continuous education”*

### **Vladivostok-Primor'ye region Prison Ministries TEE Project**

There are 25 prisons in the Primorskii region with a prison population of over 20,000 people. Already a number of Primorskii churches are collaborating in different aspects of prison ministries, from evangelism to the care for the needs of the families of prisoners, especially the mothers, wives and children; and also the follow-up of prisoners after their release. The work is voluntary and the churches involved tend to be poor, yet give sacrificially. As well as these important ministries there is a recognised need for Christian education and discipleship within the prisons. Some of the prisoners are serving long sentences and are eager to study.

There are many restrictions facing prison discipleship. From very limited prison amenities that do not permit the group dynamics of TEE to increasing official opposition, ORTA's printed SEAN courses have nonetheless been successfully used as correspondence courses in these circumstances; the Russian Prison ministries have a very good opinion of the material. Currently there are about 80 students in prisons doing these courses.

Sergei Smirnov, former Director of the Russian Bible Society in the Far East is pioneering a tape/CD ministry into many of these prisons and is keen to work with ORTA on a project using the Focus Radio broadcasting/cassette/CD adaptations of some of the SEAN courses as the backbone of this work. He believes it is ideal for prison work providing access to the teaching to far more prisoners. The printed ORTA material will also continue to be used where possible.

### **The Magadan Division of ORTA**

Founded in 1933, Magadan is a port on the Sea of Okhotsk. It is the administrative centre of the Magadan region and has a population of about 120,000. Magadan is very isolated. There is only one road in and out, and the nearest city is Yakutz 2200km away.

As well as their own tutor-training programme, the Magadan team forged close links with the New Life Radio station who undertook twice-weekly broadcasts of the Focus Radio's brilliant radio/CD adaptations of four of the SEAN courses over a three-year period, linking these broadcasts to the work of ORTA. However the station has been experiencing growing technical problems associated with old equipment; furthermore they are currently having problems over their license renewal from the Ministry in Moscow.

As projects, ORTA Magadan are seeking ways to serve some 24 Christian fellowships along the Trassa. The Trassa is the infamous 1600 km "Road of Bones" of the former Gulag. Under this highway lie the bodies of many of the Russians who died in the gulag work camps. Also ORTA hopes that TEE will be used to serve in a remarkable Pentecostal mission to the Koryak people that uses an old Russian army heavy-duty snow vehicle to take the Gospel to them; a work that can only be undertaken in winter as the terrain is impassable once the snow and ice have melted.

TEE materials are used not only by evangelical churches. The Catholic priest Father Michael in Magadan reports that 28 people from his church studied *Abundant Light* (Bible introduction) and he now wants to study another TEE book, "the Bible Encounter Manual" with them. Incidentally this church has a special ministry to the elderly survivors of the gulag – "*their dignity was taken from them, we want to restore it in old age.*"

### **Translation, editing and publishing**

ORTA has made the editing of the existing Russian translations of SEAN TEE courses (22) a priority. Some they are having to re-translate from more updated versions of the English. By 2006 *Abundant Life*, *The Light of the Bible* and Book 1 of the *Life of Christ* had been re-edited and re-published, and Anneta Vyssotskaya completed the draft translation of *the Bible Encounter Manual* and undertook the work on *Feed My Lambs* to serve children's ministries within the Russian church.

Although some much appreciated publishing grants have been received, ORTA still found it difficult to raise realistic financial support for this key translation work. Because of this each member of the team, Irina Barsegova, Anneta Vyssotskaia, and Maria Vdovina undertook the work at very low rates and have had to support themselves through outside work. This has meant that the difficult and exacting work of translation and editing has had to be fitted into spare moments, usually at the close of a long and demanding working day.

Meanwhile the demand for the courses has out-stripped the speed of translation and ability of ORTA to make the next courses available when needed. This demand not only comes from the Russian churches, but also from Russian-speaking countries in Central Asia such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan where Russian is both used as a bridging language and a source language for further translation.

At the National Committee in June 2006 it was agreed that the translation programme urgently needed to be advanced. A fourth member, Natalia Goncharova, was added to the translation and editing team. Like the others, Natalia has a very good university degree in English plus valuable experience in translating Christian material into Russian. By providing funds to advance the translations this project would allow two of the team to move more towards full-time translation work and also allow the other two to set aside more professional time to concentrate on the editing. The result would be that the whole of the core SEAN TEE curriculum would be available by the close of 2007 with further courses added the following year. ORTA have budgeted their total needs for this translation project to be US\$ 13,000 a year for three years - \$39,000 in total. This funding project includes all translation and editing costs but not printing.

### **The International Ministry of ORTA**

As well as their commitment to Russia, ORTA is also being challenged by a growing international ministry. Anneta Vyssotskaia and her family moved to New Zealand in the summer of 2004 as her husband, Dr Mikhail Vyssotsky, had been seconded there to head up marine scientific research. However I.T. communication technology has enabled her ORTA work to continue and expand, both as an active member of the translation team but also as ORTA's International Director.

Not only is Russian spoken in FSU republics of Europe and Central Asia, but requests for access to the Russian SEAN translations are being made to ORTA for Russian speaking communities and immigrant workers in countries like the USA, Israel, Mongolia, Bahrain. Furthermore the South Korea churches have a massive missionary presence across the Russian-speaking world, and the TEE Korea programme use Korean versions of some SEAN material as ORTA. All this requires special printing and publishing license agreements in association with the author body, SEAN. To avoid the incorrect use of their material and a multiplicity and confusion of Russian translations, ORTA are firstly insisting that groups outside Russia who want access to their material abide by the same rules applied within Russia, being that of providing evidence of prior TEE tutor training; and secondly that all the editing of the Russian SEAN material to be undertaken by ORTA, and any cultural changes within the Russian text be made with both the agreement of ORTA and SEAN.

In 2005, in collaboration with TEE Korea (23), Anneta Vyssotskaia led ORTA seminars in Seoul Korea for Russian speaking immigrant and in November 2006 journeyed to Kyrgyzstan to undertake similar seminars at the invitation of Bishkek United Bible Seminary. As International Director of ORTA Anneta serves on the International Council of Reference of Matheteuo and on the Educational Practice task group of INCREASE, a new USA-based initiative whose mission statement includes service to international distant learning as a catalyst for joint mission training projects.

### **ORTA's Administration and Financial Policies**

ORTA have two administrative bases, its main office in Vladivostok and an office in Magadan within the St James Bible College. Annual budgets are carefully worked out within the regions and agreed with the National Committee. All funds are carefully accounted and if necessary, ring-fenced. Although the long term aim of ORTA is to be financially independent, the work is still at that early stage of dependence on outside financial help. The budgets cover capital items and working expenditure both for the general administration of ORTA as well as the important associated projects such as tutor training, translation and prison ministries.

Most of the capital needs of ORTA have been obtained through the very generous help of the J.W. Laing Trust. Greatly appreciated printing and publishing grants have been received during these last two years from agencies such as Hilfe fur Bruder, the Alfred Haines Trust and SEAN International. The Ulting Overseas Trust has kindly helped with the Tutor training and funds do come in from unexpected sources, such as a donation from from "La Trinidad" de Las Condes church, Santiago Chile whilst in 2006 a private UK donor has guaranteed the equivalent of US\$9000 a year for three years towards the work of ORTA.

The annual ORTA salary budget should be at least US\$40,000 if all salaries and associated taxes could realistically be covered, which they are not. US\$20,000 are needed for administrative costs and tutor training and US\$24,500 is needed initially for the prison ministries work. These calculations do not include the annual travel costs into Russia by Anneta Vyssotskaia and Michael Huggins, who seek such travel funds outside the National ORTA budget, and have been helped by groups such as Timothy Ministries USA and the Swiss-based Matanav Foundation.

### **GROWING OPPOSITION**

One disturbing trend is the strong evidence of the growing official opposition in the cities of Vladivostok, Magadan, and Khabarovsk to the increasing amount of social work initiatives being carried out by the protestant churches – prison work, work among drug addicts, alcoholics, invalids and the destitute, especially street children. There are also the un-reached people groups. Sadly much of this opposition has been instigated by the Russian Orthodox church in its mounting resentment of the growth of Protestant churches, yet it does not seem to have alternative help ministries in place. This years we received news that the government plan to investigate all drug rehabilitation centres In the Vladivostok region believing that Protestants were using them to spread the faith.

Olga Rybakova reporting on the social work activities by protestant churches in Magadan; already the *Sceptre of Truth* church's canteen to the poor has been stopped by officials. Olga stresses the importance now of drug and alcohol rehabilitation, yet there are still no rehabilitation centres in Magadan. Furthermore, many women and children are in misery because men abuse alcohol – whole families are suffering.

The application for the renewal of their broadcasting license by Magadan's New Life Radio Station has been refused, but the staff, André, Olga, Lilia and Lyuba, are waiting for their appeal to be heard. This is the same broadcasting station which has been so effectively broadcasting Focus' Radio's adaptation of some SEAN courses in collaboration with ORTA.

Anneta Vyssotskaia who also serves on the WEA Religious Liberty Commission, and on was the guest writer of this RLC release dated September 6<sup>th</sup> 2006:

#### ***NEW LAW IN RUSSIA WOULD IMPACT CHURCHES' OUTREACH***

*Religious bodies in Russia seem likely to be more restricted soon in their normal activities, especially missionary work and evangelism. In August the Ministry of Justice informed registered religious bodies of a draft law 'On the amendments to some federal laws aimed against illegal missionary activities'. The proposed law contravenes the Russian Constitution as well as international treaties guaranteeing people the right to share their religious views and act in accordance with them. Even humanitarian work in the name of Christ would be outlawed. The draft legislation is due to go to the Russian parliament before the end of this year. If enacted the law would especially threaten churches for whom outreach and evangelism is basic in their activities. Please pray that the advocacy of believers, lawyers and others will succeed in getting the oppressive nature of the proposed law changed. (24)*

### **ORTA's Future Developments**

ORTA's vision goes beyond the far east of Russia into Siberia and the West of Russia. As more and more tutors are trained for the various churches and registered student numbers grow (some 500 within these last two years) ORTA is seeking how the city of Khabarovsk, capital of the Khabarovsk region, could become the next regional bridgehead.

ORTA value greatly the SEAN core curriculum, but do not plan to restrict their programme to SEAN, but are looking at additional material from other TEE programmes, including material on relationships, marriage and family life. There is a possibility also of writing material of their own.. As the basic level TEE curriculum becomes securely established there is the prospect of adding diploma level material from other international programmes.

As Chairman of ORTA, I am immensely moved by the tenacity, imagination and sacrificial dedication of my Russian colleagues, including the many voluntary tutors, especially the way they see taking risks for Jesus part of their service, accepting that Christian service has its cost. It is an immense privilege to work a people with such a capacity to understand, accept and forgive.

Much prayer is needed about these threatened religious laws, but even if they are implemented I do not believe they will succeed in stopping the ministry of ORTA. The greater threat is that of financial starvation. My colleague, Anneta Vyssotskaia, best summed up this in her 2005 ORTA report:

*"All the people who are now involved in this (ORTA) work both in Vladivostok and Magadan are committed Christians and have been serving for a long time in Russian churches of different denominations (Evangelical, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Baptist, etc) in a leadership role.*

*"There are pastors, pastor assistants, Bible teachers, missionary workers, church administrators, Christian writers and editors etc in our team. In addition to this the people who are involved are also professional university lecturers, school teachers, translators, social workers, accountants, etc. It is a highly professional and at the same time very spiritual group of people. They also have good reputation in the churches. A better team cannot be even imagined or desired.*

*"However, as an International Director of ORTA work I express my deep personal concern about the continuation of this work. After our recent visit with brother Michael Huggins to Russia I saw again the hard work of ORTA teams in Vladivostok and Magadan, which however is not financially supported in the way it should be. The people actually have to work on the edge of their strength because they also have to work very hard to provide for their families.*

*"At present most of ORTA workers are women, two of them are single women, two have unemployed husbands, some of them still have small children to care for. They have shown their sacrificial commitment already for this work for a long period of time. They are all financially very unprotected. This is the actual situation that must be taken into account when we speak about long-term work. In my opinion, the financial support of the workers is number one priority in this particular situation."*

Michael Huggins, ORTA Director General, October 2006

**OBSHEDOSTUPNAYA ROSSIYSKAYA TEOLOGICHESKAYA AKADEMIYA**

For contacts outside the Russian Federation: [mvvysot@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mvvysot@xtra.co.nz)

For contacts within the Russian Federation: [irinabarsegova@mail.primorye.ru](mailto:irinabarsegova@mail.primorye.ru)

## REFERENCES

- 1 Patrick Johnstone, Jason Mandryk, Robyn Johnstone, Operation World, 2005
- 2 Nazavisimaya Gazeta, quoted by Pravda 29.05.2006
- 3 *Russia's shrinking population* The Week 10<sup>th</sup> June 2006
- 4 Damian Grammaticas, BBC Moscow correspondent, *Life Ebbs Away from Russian Villages* Friday, 5 November, 2004,
- 5 Anatoly Ovsannikov, the Russian Academy Socio-Economic Research of the Population Unit, Moscow.
- 6 *TB Sufferers in Moscow Prison*, Reuters, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2000
- 7 Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
- 8 '*On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations*' Russian Federation Federal Law, Keston Institute translation 1997
- 9 Timothy Heleniak, research fellow at the Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars and adjunct professor, Georgetown University, *Russian Demographic Declines Continues*, Population Reference Bureau.
- 10 *History of Russian Immigration*, www.russiantoronto.com 2006
- 11 Colin and Bron Cleaver "*Extreme Solution Siberia*," Operation Mobilisation 2006.
- 12 Roy Walmsley, A paper presented at a Council of Europe seminar for judges and prosecutors in the Russian Federation Moscow 11 October 2000
- 13 *Child Protection in Russia*, UNICEF www.unicef.org/Russia/Protection.html
- 14 Pravda 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2004
- 15 *Alcoholism and drug Addiction among the Russian Population*.  
www.eldis.org/static/DOC9364.htm
- 16 Paul Webster, *Suicide rate in Russia on the Increase*, The Lancet, vol. 362, no. 9379, July 2003
- 17 *Manifesto of the Empress Catherine II*. issued. July 22, 1763
- 18 *Bible Society in Russia* Russian Bible Society, Vladivostok Branch,  
<http://vrbs.vladivostok.ru/eng/history/index.htm> ,
- 19 *BEE into Russia* Copyright © 2002-2006 Evangelical Friends Church - Eastern Region 1992
- 20 *About 5 Million of Russian Nationals Involved in Sects*, Itar Tass News Wire June 2, 2001
- 21 Anneta Vyssotskaia, *A Vision for Russian Church Training*, Matheteuo, 2004
- 22 www.seaninternational.com
- 23 www.teekorea.org
- 24 Anneta Vyssotskaia, *New Law in Russia Would Impact Churches' Outreach*, World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission no. 360, Wed. 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2006