

Hope for Eurasia





Cover photo: *The Bronze Horseman*, St. Petersburg, Russia. ©2008 D. Shormann

*Testimonies
of
God's Faithfulness
in the
Ministry
of the
Slavic Reformation
Society*



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Hope for Eurasia

Foreword

The Slavic Reformation Society was founded as a 501c3 charity in 2005 by pastors and elders from various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

The mission has its roots in the ministry of Blake and Cathy Purcell who moved to Leningrad, USSR in 1990 with their three children and expecting a fourth. Blake came to Christ in 1974 through friends of his late father, U.S. Congressman Graham Purcell, Jr. (13th Congressional District of Texas). He graduated from Texas A&M University and then served as an officer in the United States Army.

In 1991, Blake opened up the country for the Navigator student ministry after learning, as he says, “cowboy” Russian. The Purcells raised all six of their children in Russia and, now, are blessed with four grandchildren.

In 1998 Blake was ordained in the PCA as a teaching elder/evangelist and returned to Saint Petersburg to form one of the former Soviet Union’s first Presbyterian churches. At the 2000 General Assembly of the PCA, two of these Russian elders were given a standing ovation in recognition of this unique work of the Lord in the 1,000 years of Christianity in the Russian Empire.

Blake is now a TE/evangelist of the PCA’s Pacific Northwest Presbytery.

Since opening the Biblical Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg, Russia in 1999, the seminary has trained men from many denominations. In 2014, 10 SRS-trained pastors formed the Community of Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Eurasia. These churches cover nine time zones in four countries, plus all three major regions of Russia.

We hope you enjoy the testimonies* of these believers who have lived and labored in one of the most difficult, yet, strategic places in the world. Russia again, forcefully, asserting her sphere of influence in the world is a clear sign that a reformation is still desperately needed there. Prayerfully consider how you may be involved with SRS, and pray for peace between Russia and Ukraine!

Yours in Christ,

Yours in Christ,

Doug Roorda

Chairman, SRS

May, 2014

Isaiah 43

Remember not the
former things, nor
consider the things
of old.

Behold, I am doing
a new thing; now
it springs forth, do
you not perceive it?

I will make a way
in the wilderness
and rivers in
the desert.

* In an attempt to have their voices heard, we have left much of the original text in their words.

Pastor Oleg Volkov

The Lord Heard My Voice from a Notorious Russian Prison

“I love the LORD, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live.” (Psalm 116:1-2)

Perestroika was a time when the Soviet Union started to break up and chaos reigned in my home country of Kyrgyzstan. A civil war ensued and the once peaceful life disappeared. Both to get out of the mess in my home country and to find more money I decided to move to St. Petersburg, Russia in 1991. My plan was to meet some people there who would help us commit a crime and steal a lot of money.

After strategizing, we decided to rob a very rich man. We broke into his flat and stole money, gold and valuables. One of my friends was arrested on the spot when the alarm went off. My other friend and I escaped. But at the police station, our friend ratted us out; that night the police came and arrested us.

That is how I ended up in prison. Life in prison was very difficult. The prison was overcrowded, often 12-15 people in a single cell, meant for only one person.

The trial was delayed for 3 whole years. For all of those years before our trial I was stuck in the overcrowded, infamous Kresti Prison in downtown St. Pete. I lived in an 8 by 20 foot room with 10 men; we rotated sleeping on the beds. Tuberculosis was rampant there.

It was here that I began to think about the meaning of my life and if I wanted to spend the rest of it in this hell. Did I really grow up and study to live in this cage? I could not understand how I had got to this point and was very disillusioned in the friends I had chosen and in my decisions. I memorized the “Our Father” prayer and I prayed it every night but my life did not change. Once one of my fellow inmates

gave me a Bible. I tried to read it but could not understand it. But I kept it, believing that it contained a mysterious power.

Finally, after a lengthy trial, I was sentenced to five years in maximum security. I moved to a prison camp in the Leningrad region. There I understood that life there would be entirely different, I met people from Kazakhstan who helped me adapt. I had always believed that once I was formally sentenced my friends and family would help me but with the exception of my parents who lived far away, no one helped me. I realized that survival would be left up to me. During that period, I sincerely began to ask God to help me.

One night I was in bed and could not fall asleep. Thousands of different thoughts cluttered my mind, I thought about what my next move would be and how to keep living. Suddenly I overheard a conversation, a prisoner who was in a position of authority in the camp told another “ordinary” prisoner about Jesus Christ and about faith. I eavesdropped unashamedly. I heard for the first time that if we confess our sins, then God would forgive us, because Jesus Christ came to this earth in order to redeem the sins of people and to save people. That was the first time I had heard about Jesus Christ. I was shocked that this prisoner who had it all was talking about faith and God! All my many sins crowded into my head. I was terrified of the penalty for those sins. I began to pray in earnest for God to forgive me. I told God that without Him, I was hopeless and I repented in tears. When I finished praying a supernatural calm filled my soul and heart. For the first time in many, many years I was at peace. I fell asleep instantly. When I awoke early in the morning an incomprehensible happiness filled me. I was a new person and I immediately stopped devising evil plans, all bitterness left, and I even forgave those who had wronged me. I was free!

Later I met a Christian and learned more about Jesus Christ. He advised me to read the Bible. The first book that I read was the book of Ecclesiastes. As I read I

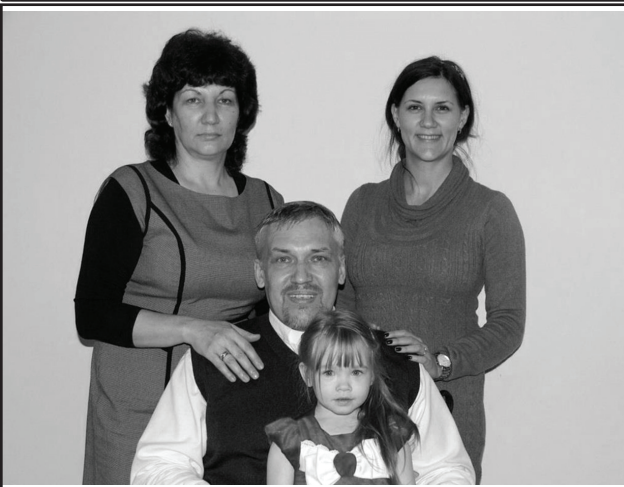
suddenly understood the purpose of my life (to this day it is my favorite book)-to know God and to live according to His will. At the end of Ecclesiastes there are these words: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil”. Finally I grasped what had been hidden from me.

In a short time, I devoured all 66 books of the Bible. I also continued to pray to God. For the first time my prayers to the God were not conceited but came from a pure heart. I also began to tell people about what I read in the Bible and about all Jesus had done.

One day I awoke early on a beautiful morning and decided to take a walk. The air was fresh and cool and the sun was rising in the distance. I walked around the soccer field and thought about my parents. I was filled with guilt and tears for all the grief I, their only son, had brought into their lives. I did not know how to redeem this situation so I began to pray and ask God to forgive me for the trouble I had caused them. Thinking about my parents, I also realized how much sin and wickedness I had done against my Heavenly Father. I began to thank God for Jesus and for His forgiveness. Tears of happiness flowed, and God’s peace again filled my heart. I made a firm decision to learn more about God more and the Bible so that I could share it with others.

I continued to read the Bible, to pray and to meet with others believers in prisoners. With each passing day, I learned more and more about God, the Bible and my sin nature.

One year after my conversion, I began to ask God to release me from prison early so that I could enter a Bible institute. God answered my prayers. At the end of 1996 by an edict of the president of Russia, Vladimir Yeltsin, I was pardoned, ten



Pastor Oleg with his wife Natalia, and
daughters, Victoria and Anna

months before the end of my term. After my release, I immediately entered a Bible college in Pushkin and began to attend the Presbyterian Church in Pushkin. In 1998, I met my wife Natalie.

I met Blake and he invited me to study in the Biblical Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg. I was glad

to accept his invitation. Those three years of study in the Seminary were really a blessing for me. That training molded me as a pastor. I studied covenant theology, liturgy, church history, family relationships and personal discipleship. That knowledge and skills continue to help me to this day.

Pastor Oleg Volkov

One of the Most Difficult Periods in My Christian Life

After graduation in 2004, I was invited to teach New Testament and Church History at BTS. I presently serve as President of the Biblical Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg. It is amazing to look back and see that the Lord never forsakes those who trust in Him!

I began my pastoral ministry in Annunciation Presbyterian Church of Pushkin in 2001. I had only been to a local Bible College at the time and realized that I had much more to learn to be effective as a pastor in my ministry. I began praying and looking for further education. One friend of mine told me that there was a Reformed Seminary in St. Petersburg founded by Blake Purcell, which had just opened its doors to the first students. I contacted Blake and we met. After our conversation Blake offered me opportunity to study in the seminary. I knew that my prayers had been answered so I seized the opportunity!

The education in the seminary was very different from what I heard in Bible College and the academic standard was much more rigorous. The purpose of the seminary was to prepare the ministers for the Reformed and Presbyterian churches of Eurasia. Therefore the main difference of this school from any other was that the seminary did not just equip with theological knowledge but formed the character of the minister. As for me it helped me a lot in my future ministry in the family and in the church.

To tell the truth, my study in the seminary was one of the most difficult periods in my Christian life. You see, in the Soviet system, if you were assigned something to read, or took a test, you could usually just ask someone who read the book and say something about it and if you did not pass a test, you could retake it. But in the SRS

seminary, you had to read all the books and know all the answers for real. If you did not pass the test, you had to retake it and score a 90%. This was a shock. You could not negotiate your way out of really mastering a subject. It was painful! It was a moral shock.

Every day I had to overcome different challenges, solve problems and learn to be patient in my studies. More than once I wanted to quit. I humbled myself, prayed, asked God to help me continue. Later I understood that that is how God was developing my character and making me a better man.

I graduated the seminary in 2004. It was a milestone for me a former prison inmate. Beyond receiving my diploma I learned the important lesson that difficulties in life, work, and studies bring about spiritual maturity. Beyond a much deeper understanding of Scripture and theology, for the first time in my life I understood the importance of family and being a godly husband and father.

For me graduating from seminary was not just a personal vision, so that I could go and become a great minister. As I labored in class, grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, and learned how I could take scripture to practically apply it to my life, simultaneously God was giving me a new and broader vision. As 2nd Timothy says, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” I began to apply this verse to my life, but also had a longing to help establish men that were faithfully equipped across Eurasia.

Today churches across the former Soviet Union need well educated and spiritually mature ministers of the Lord who can be a good example of doing life conformed to the image of Christ. Beyond a pastor who can be articulate and preach, we need men who take faith and character seriously. We need godly husbands and fathers who can lead by example. And that is what the Biblical Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg is all about—giving us deep roots, but also teaching us how to live and walk our theology.

I want to share one story of what I am talking about. In about 2006, after I graduated, 7 local pastors of Presbyterian churches met with leaders of our churches to discuss uniting with them to form a denomination. We knew that some of these pastors' wives did not go to church, and some men had other multiple marriages, and we wanted to simply help them work through whether or not they were biblically qualified to be pastors, and help them become qualified if we could. We started by asking them to share what exceptions they had to the Westminster Confession of Faith, what part of it did they not agree with. This request was met by them with utter shock and anger. They did not want to meet with us or unite with us, they said, if we were going to be bothering one another about such things. Sadly, most churches of the former Soviet Union are lead by men like these, who have never submitted to, or be exposed to those that take I Timothy 3 or Titus 1 seriously.

Our Seminary is unique throughout all of Russia, and probably all of the former Soviet Union, because we try to provide our students with deep academic and theological knowledge but we also pay attention to character development of each minister. There is one more distinction that sets us apart– we pay attention to the minister's family. Therefore we help our married students to lead their families biblically to help their wives grow spiritually and to raise their kids in the fear of the Lord. Our students understand that their family is the first place where they learn to serve your neighbors in accordance with God's will.

In conclusion I don't believe in chance. I believe that everything happens by God's sovereign will and his grace. And my study and ministry are evidence of that. Therefore I am truly grateful for God and all people He has put in my life. Soli Deo Gloria!

Pastor Timur Anickin

Icons of My Great-Grandmother

My name is Timur. I am from Latvia, a country of 2.5 million people. Latvia is a divided country both ethnically and religiously—our currently population is about 60% Latvian and 35% Russian. In religion 20% are Roman Catholic, 20% are Russian Orthodox, 20% are Lutheran, 5% are Evangelical. Of these, there are two Reformed churches among the Latvians and I am a pastor of the Reformed church among Russians.

As I remember I became a believer in the fall of 1991. I grew up in an unbelieving family. My parents did not talk about sin, Christ, faith, salvation or life after death. My whole childhood took place during the Soviet regime, under atheistic propaganda. TV and newspapers never reported good things about faith and particularly about Christianity and the church.

Outwardly I looked like a regular boy but inside my heart was a different story. I did not sleep well. Each night was torturous, the safe world I lived in during the day disappeared and I was constantly haunted at night by a fear of dying. I was also dogged by guilt and shame. I remember the first time I did something that made me really feel bad. My mother and I were in a store and I stole a button. My mother did not know what I did. It was nice golden button with the head of lion. I wanted to put this button back in the shop. But my mother did not come to this shop often, so I could not get rid of my feeling of shame.

Another thing that influenced my life was my great-grandmother who was closer to God than all the other members of our family. She went to the Russian Orthodox Church two or three times a month. During important church celebrations such as Easter, she invited us for a feast at her house. In her flat she kept two very small icons along with the small crosses my brother and I had received on the day our baptisms

as little children in the Orthodox Church. When I visited my great grandmother I would take my small cross and look at it very carefully, and those two icons, trying to understand what they all about. They were a mystery to me that I could not explain. I felt that there was somebody who knew my life and my inner turmoil could give me answers about life. I asked my great-grandmother about prayer. She said that we must repeat to God “Lord be merciful to me,” three times and make the sign of the cross then go to sleep. Although I took her advice I still felt very distant from God.

One day my mother bought a Bible for 25 rubles, which in the Soviet Union was a lot of money. When she brought it home she said that the Bible would tell us about our future. One evening I was at home alone and took the Bible from the shelf and began to read. Eventually I read from Genesis to Revelation. I understood the story of creation, the Ten Commandments, and some of the New Testament, but I still felt very uneasy in about God. I understood that I could not do anything to get closer to God and I was still terrified about death and other horrible things when I was in the dark during the night. This continued for a few years.

Then in 1990 God sent a man to me who was a member of the Baptist Church. At that time I was working as an electrician and already far from thinking about spiritual things because I had lost any hope of finding inner peace. But I saw that he had something in his life that I did not. As we worked together we talked for hours, which stretched, into days and weeks. One day I asked him if I could come to his church service.

When I came to the church I was shocked because people were so kind and happy. I faked like I was as happiness so I could keep going to those services. I liked them. I asked my friend if I could join the church and he said that I first had to repent and turn to Christ personally, then make a public profession of faith.

I remember my first real prayer to God. I asked Him to forgive all my sins for Christ's sake, and though I still did not understand much; I did not want to live any longer as I was. I asked that Jesus come into my life and into my heart. I remember that in that same moment I felt Holy Spirit come into me and all my insides were turned inside out. Tears ran down my cheeks as I sensed that the strong and high wall that had separated me from God was destroyed. That was the turning point of my life.

That night was the first time in many years that I slept well and from that day I sleep every night all night like a baby. I close my eyes and open them in the morning. I know that Jesus died to release me from the fear of death and I am now not afraid of it. I know that Christ died for my sins like my stealing that lovely gold button from that store. Now I know that I am living with God and for God, who created me, and saved me through His only begotten Son. Now my purpose is to glorify God and rejoice in Him forever.

In 1992, I became a student of a Bible college in Latvia. After graduation I was ordained as a teacher and preacher of the Word at a small Reformed church in Riga, the capital of Latvia.

In 2010 I took a leap of faith and entered BTS in St. Petersburg. There were a number of obstacles to my studies: first I did not live in Russia and would have to travel to another country to study and secondly I had already completed two other seminary type degrees. However after twelve years of ministry I was in a crisis, an impasse, where I had no clear vision for the future. I felt an inability to answer the question "what next?" I went online and found BTS and watched a film clip where Blake outlined his vision for how a seminary education should be. I was mainly struck by the fact that Blake wanted to maintain close ties with seminary graduates and help them form associations with other reformed pastors for encouragement and stimulation. I prayed with my family and we decided I should attend the next

session.

After three years of study I believe my seminary courses have showed me a way forward and shaped my vision for the future. Often times I find myself thinking BTS is what I was looking for all those years. Seminary has helped me begin to look at Scriptures not as a system or model, as before, but as the living Word of God, living and active and transforming my life. Through lectures from professors Phil Kayser and Eugene Kruzhkov (seminary dean), I learned critical thinking and practical application of the doctrine of the Word of God. Through lectures and his personal example, professor Blake Purcell has been a spiritual father for me. Rector of the seminary, Oleg Volkov, has shown me how to be sensitive to the needs of church members, and to be honest and open before God and man. Thank God for bringing me to BTS and giving me a spiritual family.



**Pastor Timur with his wife,
Olga, and daughter, Katya**

Pastor Eduard Ivanov

The Difference between Life and Death

I can say the exact day and time when Christ authoritatively entered my sinful life. On the night of the 8 October 1995, I was the captain of a merchant marine ship and my orders resulted in serious damage to the vessel. I was in danger of being accused of criminal negligence.

When everything seems settled, I went to my cabin, lay down on the sofa and began to sob. I gave God my life because I felt I had no other option. The year before my dad died. I remembered it and thought, “Dad, you’re out there,” and the situation forced out of my heart recognition of the existence of God, the Creator of heaven and earth. To church, I certainly did not go, but after the death of her local Russian Orthodox priest, Mother began attending a Presbyterian church and she fervently prayed for me for an entire year.

Thus was my turning to God. I started going to church with my mother and I began to hear the Word of God. I was filled with such a desire to know more and would go anywhere to hear a sermon about Christ. The pastor jokingly labeled me as “this brother Edward who has no brakes”.

The next year I entered the Korean Presbyterian Seminary, where I heard the famous 5 dogmas of Calvinism and I realized that all of this is 100% mine, for me! I was a hyper-Calvinist, or maybe just a fanatic. I was first educated by these Koreans who modeled and taught us to put our family life on the altar of our service to the Lord. We spent our time doing extreme evangelism in the streets of the city, and funeral services or youth ministry of the church, so I was everywhere, but home.

I know understand that I was totally disengaged from my wife and children. All I did was ministry trying to please the God of my mentors. My children had their

own lives and my wife had her job and her friends.

Because of our negligence, we lost our son. A flood of illegal heroin entered our village and eventually that flood drowned my son. The horrible thing was that though I knew he was in trouble with the police repeatedly, I continued my church work and ignored his problems. While he was suffering from drug addiction, I was a rising star in the church. In 2003 a week after his 17th birthday he died of an overdose.

I was disillusioned with God and left the ministry choosing to only practice my Christianity on Sunday. I wandered in the desert of Egypt for about three years, working in maritime logistics, and enjoying the good life with a handsome salary, a car and trips abroad with my wife and daughter. But in my heart there was no joy, I was exhausted from trying to not preach, like the words of the prophet Jeremiah in 20:29. But if I say, “I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. The only positive outcome from my son’s death was that my wife and I drew closer through our grief.

Finally in 2006 the pastor asked me to resume ministering with them and I was sent as a missionary to the village Novolitovsk. It was for me as a sign of green traffic light and I “put the pedal to the metal” fully immersed in the ministry in Novolitovsk, but now always with my wife and daughter. It was 2006. In 2009 I was ordained as a pastor. But in my preaching and ministering I sensed a superficiality, my sermons were dry full of my own biases and desires.

We are planting the Seeds of a Great Harvest

Because of criticism from Orthodox churches and friends, I wanted to change worship patterns and set up a type of worship that was orderly and conformed to

Scripture. I became interested in liturgical worship. I started to use the liturgical calendar of the Lutheran Church and the Lectionary. This helped me tremendously because I was no longer allowed to preach only from my favorite places in Scripture.

In 2010 my good friend, Pastor Yuri Levchenko introduced me to the Biblical Theological Seminary in St. Petersburg. Now, after 3 years in the seminary I can say that the Biblical Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg is a source of constant challenges for me. Each intensive course at BPS is fireworks events and paradoxes. For example, one night we have a party, and in the morning the students scrape ice off the sidewalk so that women can get to the seminary apartment without falling down, and in the evening we go to a concert to listen to classical music, exercise, sports, and the next day visit to the Hermitage museum, to enjoy world-class art.

But the most important thing is the teaching in the seminary. Usually it's a shock. For example, a lecture by John Mahon was an axe blow on my head. Lectures on the covenant relationship in marriage, male leadership in the home, in church and society are like this for me. This is a very difficult challenge for me. I know how far my family strayed from the norms which the Scriptures dictate to us. How it all started, the children grew up, one of those whom we have lost.

I brought a book published by our seminary on biblical marriage to my church in March that the seminary published. It is on godly dating and courtship. A parishioner was in shock, "it's not realistic for Russia, it is not feasible... it is a utopia and is not suitable for Russia. "

Yes, the Soviet Union and Eurasia have been deprived of very much, and rejected very much, so much that it is hard to imagine what to do about how broken down we are. We are like the old Naomi with her daughter-in-law Ruth returned to Bethlehem from Moab no sons, but a bitter widow returned at the time specified by the Lord ... to the top of the peak harvest (Ruth 1: 22).

No one wants to be in a “transitional period,” the first fruits of a harvest, knowing that the seeds of a greater harvest we are sowing but will never see on earth. But John the Baptist was just such a “transition period.” Moses looked from a distance to land, which he did not enter. But I believe in God who not only loves to throw us a call, he is “The Father of mercies and God of all comfort,” 2 Cor. 1: 3, I believe in God, who always likes to surprise us.

Pastor Kirilll Treschetka

You Are of No Use to Me Dead



Kirilll Treschetka

My name is Kirilll Treschetka and I was born into a family of seven children in 1950. I went to school and married in Kyrgyzstan, in the capital of Frunze. By the time I graduated from university I had a wife and two children. However, we did not have a place to live and we wandered from place to place living with relatives or friends. When my father passed away the house was divided between myself and two other siblings, but the

arguments and infighting became so fierce that I decided to leave my native land and go far, far away. At that time the USSR enacted the resettlement program to the Far East in an attempt to build the population there. We agreed to be a part of the program and were sent to a small village in the Far East. They gave us work and a house but the fragile system of the Soviet Union was about to collapse.

It was during this time that visiting pastors from the Ukraine traveled to our area and brought New Testaments and the Gospel to our area. I asked one of the missionaries to come to the carpentry school where I was employed and show a cartoon story on Christianity. I would charge money for these film nights and make money for my family but also for trips with my students to who I was deeply devoted. In the evenings I would show films for money. Local Christians began to actively pray for me. After a while because of my interest in Christian things there began to be complaints from people in the region about my school. I even had a national standards agency come out and check on my school.

But I proved to everyone that these were necessary projects (the showing of Christian films) because I used the money to buy tents, backpacks, and sponsor field trips with

the students. Children learned to play the guitar, to drive and to care for horses. We even participated in the regional competitions on tourism and won coveted prizes that never went to small poor village schools. Parents of schoolboys and girls in this area only knew how to do two things, work in the woods and drink themselves into oblivion every night.



Pastor Kirill with his wife, Ludmilla

I held many meetings with parents and tried to encourage teachers to engage with the children and help them develop skills that could be used in their free time. But I pushed too hard and the parents and teachers turned against me. I gave up all hope and was in such despair that I saw no

reason to live today or tomorrow. I decided to take my life. I climbed up on a chair and prepared to throw the noose around my neck, but then I heard a voice: “You are of no use to me DEAD!” I ran to the missionary and asked: “Who is this Jesus if all anyone ever talks about is God?” He gave me a pile of books and the New Testament, but even after reading the New Testament I did not understand anything. But one afternoon I watched the Jesus film and I realized that I needed Christ. I called out to Him and confessed my sins. I read the Sermon on the Mount and I understood that we were deceived by the Communists who said “Religion is the opium of the people!”. The Communists were the ones who fed us with the opium of a false religion that kept us from Jesus Christ! I broke down and cried, realizing I was so close to death and the voice of Christ has rescued me!

I began studying the Bible independently and searching for a church to join. I first looked to Orthodoxy but from reading Isaiah I knew that idol worship was wrong, I was afraid to go to the Baptists because they were labeled as a sect. At the Church of Calvary there was a missionary from Ukraine and I started to be on friendly terms with them and found out that they had been praying for me for a long time!

Reading Joshua's words: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord!" This enticed me to begin to go deep do discover God. Through communicating with the Lord, I knew I had once been dead and now am alive. Continuing my communication with the Baptists, I started to attend their church regularly. Since meeting with Blake



At Bible Study with church members

Purcell I have been inspired to run, and hearing many reformed Christian lectures I have begun to fly!

Pastor Ruslan Moroz

The Only One Allowed to Leave Alive

My name is Ruslan Moroz. I was born on September 23, 1967 in an ordinary Soviet family, my father was a builder and my mother worked in a store. My parents loved me and wanted to give me a happy life but my father traveled and was rarely home. All character development and discipline came mainly from my mom. When I was five, my mother and my father's grandmother had me baptized in a small Orthodox church. It was kind of a step of faith for them; they wanted God to protect me. The second thing my mother desired was for me to join the Communist Party because that was the only way to climb the ladder of success and become somebody.

But my mother's dreams did not materialize. I was a poor student and spent most of my time outdoors. Later I served in the Army and married, very quickly we had a daughter and a son. The nineties were difficult for our country, the familiar Soviet way of life was crumbling and there was rampant unemployment. People began to lose all hope as the Communist dream of living on eternally in prosperity. Despite it being a poor time for honest labor, there was real money to be made for dishonest thugs. My friends and I started selling stolen cars from Japan in the Russian market. I squandered all the money on personal pleasures.

This life brought much suffering and grief to my parents and my family finally, my wife filed for divorce. Suddenly I was caught in a nightmare losing everything that really mattered. Because I valued friends and money more than my family everything had fallen apart. This continued for nine months until I was on the brink of taking my own life. Unexpectedly I met Eduard, a childhood friend, who was pastoring a local church.

I do not know why, but I believed Eduard and what he said about God and the Word. The next morning I attended Eduard's church, the Korean Presbyterian Church. During the

service I heard the voice of God speaking to me and I believed and the Spirit filled my life.

The biggest miracle occurred when I able to leave the criminal gang alive. The usual method of leaving was death. I went into to the mafia boss and simply said, “I need to leave this business.” And he said “OK.” This was only by God’s great mercy. All of my friends from that time have since been killed in one-way or another. I was the only one allowed to leave alive.



Pastor Ruslan with his family

My wife and I reconciled and were married again, this time in the church. My family regained a husband and father. Soon my entire family including my parents trusted the Lord. I entered seminary in Vladivostok, and devoted all my time to

the church. But new problems arose, I was at church continually and my wife worked full-time, there were communication problems and our family suffered.

In 2006, the sixth year after my conversion I was sent as a missionary 100 km away in a neighboring city. Though I only saw my wife every 6 weeks, I was content because I felt like I was serving the Lord. In 2009, I met Blake Purcell and began studying at the seminary in St. Petersburg. I became acquainted with the works of Mahon, Calvin, and Chesterton, and learning discipleship from Blake. My eyes were opened and I was convicted that the ministry was coming at the expense of my family, which was not pleasing to God. I could not continue to labor like this without serious consequences to my family. It was my second birth as a minister. Praise the Lord for his continued mercy.

As pastor of the Light to the World Presbyterian Church of Romanovka, I began to realize that I was not adequately leading my flock. Enrolling in BTS helped me develop a clearer

vision for the role of the church and family. My studies in the seminary and time spent in sharpening fellowship with teachers and fellow students are making me a better pastor. Thankfully our studies are conducted in a practical way that I can take home and apply in my ministry. I began integrating fully liturgical covenant renewal services; we began to practice weekly communion, baptism and communion children, and teaching about the role of men as the head of the covenant family and leaders in the church.

Seminary is unimaginable without its founder and mastermind Blake Purcell, who has become a real spiritual mentor. His rigorous drive and patriarchal attitude has helped me to not be lazy during the learning process, but on the other hand he is also a tremendous encourager like a brother.

Additionally two of the first graduates from BTS, Oleg Volkov and Eugene Kruzhkov, who now serve at the seminary, have been a huge blessing to know while building the Reformed Church of Russia. I am also forever indebted to many churches in America that have faithfully supported and sponsored my church. I am grateful for Pastors Greg Lawrence, Eric Green, and Brian Nolder and for ministry support from Doug Roorda and Mike Forster.

Studying in the seminary is not limited to the formal intensive courses, but because of the relationships formed there we now have a fraternal community of churches that co-labor across Eurasia. We share one vision and one goal, and are striving to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ through the distinctives of the historical Reformed Church to all parts of the Russian-speaking world.

Pastor Ravil Kunakaev

In the Russian Army, You Cannot be a Bystander for Christ

I was born in the USSR, in the city Ufa, where a majority of the people are Muslims. Now it is more nominal, but it is still a very Islamic area of Siberia. My father is a practicing Muslim.

I am the second of three children. My life is the life of typical Russian young man. It all began with nursery, then kindergarten, and school, after school I joined the Army. It was in the Army that my life changed.

The first time I heard anything from God's Word was 1994. I was still quite young when the Iron Curtain fell and there was an influx of missionaries carrying the gospel. There was a large evangelical project and the first missionaries to Ural came in about that same year.

My mother and sister were always attracted to mystical and unusual things and they visited this mission event. When they came back from the program they were really strange, very emotional which was actually kind of a normal state for my mother.

From that time on the situation in our family became strained. My father kept practicing Islamism but my mother had converted to Christianity and their relationship broke down. My mother and sister were always talking about an unknown God and secretly sneaking to church.

Of course they shared the gospel with me. They gave me these instructions: I need to repent of my sins; repeat this special prayer and God will forgive me and will live with Him forever. I didn't understand anything of what they were saying but wanted them to leave me alone so I just did it. I went through the motions to please them. But my life didn't change, I was the same and my life was the same.

When my mother and sister prayed before eating or going to bed it was boring for me. But I knew that the prayer would come to an end after word "Amen". So through the

all prayer I continued to repeat “Amen, Amen, Amen...” so that the prayers would just end, but on and on they went.

However over time God began to work on me. I visited the Christian church. I was really surprised that there were so many youth and nobody was drinking and smoking. There everyone prayed as if it is normal, they all shared of their relationships with the Lord. I started to go there from time to time. Something, beyond myself, compelled me go there. I felt unusually calm after worship.



Pastor Ravil with his wife Yulia and sons, Nathan and Arslan

Then I visited a Christian conference. Before it I started to read the Bible. The Bible was interesting for me and I enjoyed it enough to keep reading. At the conference, we had a special class and then test to see how much of the Bible we knew. And I was really sad that I didn't have the answers and had not read that much of the Bible.

After this moment I started to read the Bible harder, nearly every day. My life continued to change. No more could I say that I did not believe in God, but my life and my values didn't really display. I already tried to share the Gospel with my friends, but I still had not given up any of my old ways or really pursued God in a tangible way.

But then in the year 1999 I was drafted to the Army. My cold, self-reliant attitude began to melt away. The challenge with being in the Russian Army is that you can't just be a bystander in their activities; they expect you to be all in with whatever they are doing! And my once simple life was now morphed into this new thing the Army wanted

me to be. I knew I would either move further away from Christ, and maybe fall away completely, or, I had to have an unconditional commitment to follow Christ, even if it meant the men in the Army hated me for it, or worse. I had to make choice; finally, in the second year of my military service I was baptized in Vladikavkaz in the mountains, one of the most beautiful places on earth.

From that moment of baptism until now I believed in the God who created the Earth and gave His Son Jesus for the salvation of the world, who works in our hearts by Holy Spirit is my Lord! After my coming home, it was the start of something new. Encouraged by my sister and brother-in-law I decided to head to St. Petersburg and study in seminary. There I met many of God's beautiful people. These people became my good teachers and friends.

At the church in St. Petersburg I met my wife, Yulia, and we got married in 2005. That was the same year we began our ministry in the Tyumen. In 2007 God gave us our first baby girl Margaret but she passed away from kidney failure when she was 1 year old. It was a hard time for us, but now we have 2 wonderful boys Nathan and Arslan. My family and ministry are a great blessing in my life and I am so thankful to God for His abundant mercy.

Pastor Ravil Kunakaev

All I Wanted to Do Was Quit

My studying in seminary holds a very special place in my life because for me it was an emotional and intense journey.

Before I was called to the Russian Army I had deep desire to serve in the church. I thought that being the minister in the church was fascinating. I romanticized the job; I couldn't imagine what it means to be a pastor. Later, after actually being in ministry, I agreed with the proverb: "The heart of the pastor is the rug near the entrance that everyone tramples with their dirty shoes."

After coming back from the army my brother-in-law one recommended that I study in the St. Petersburg at Reformed seminary. He knew Blake Purcell and spoke highly of him.

Before I had even gotten my bearings in St. Petersburg it was announced that all students must memorize the whole book of 2 Timothy and read Augustine's City of God which is 15 cm (5 inches) thick. This was a huge trial for me because I had never had to use my brain like this and all I wanted to do was quit.

The next three years of the seminary changed my very existence. Meeting with such great people as Blake Purcell, John Mahon, Phillip Palmertree and others had a tremendous influence on me and helped me grow as a minister. Beyond academics, the professors took a personal interest in me that helped me bear spiritual fruit.

I would attribute the bulk of my success in Seminary to Blake Purcell and his desire to serve the Lord for so many years in Russia. I can say that even before I met Blake, he did everything he could for me. And the role he played in my life during seminary was more like the relationships of a father and the son. And when I thought that I haven't enough

power to study his encouragement always helped me to continue. About the 3rd week of my first year in the seminary, I felt that I could not pass all 6 classes I was taking, so I ran in the rain to Blake's house and told him that I could not continue in seminary. He appeared unworried, and said, "Ravil, just cut out 2 courses, and see how you do." I finished 4 courses that semester with grades of between 80% and 90%, and from then on I had no problem with grades. Blake was very understanding and flexible with us if we felt we were trying our hardest. (If not, he was not flexible at all!)

I also have received much support from John Mahon who made me realize that I needed to be a better husband and focus great attention on being a father. I think that the influence of our professor of the Old Testament helped us to understand the Bible from a deeper side. He showed me how I should study the Bible with intensity and love its words.

The fruit of my ministry as a pastor in Siberia I can attribute to the hard work, love, and perseverance of so many blessed men and teachers in my life from my time in seminary.

Pastor Evgeniy Kruzhkov

I Always Laughed at Those that Went to Church

I was born in Karaganda, in Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, in the Soviet Union. My father was an electrician. My mother was an engineer.

Although in state schools I was taught the theory of evolution and that the primary ideal for society was atheistic communism, my parents still baptized me when I was a few months old in the Russian Orthodox Church in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Still my parents and all my relatives were unbelievers and they raised me as an atheist. I did not learn to pray, to read the Bible and was never taken to church.

Instead we were taught that God doesn't exist, when Yuri Gagarin, the first astronaut to orbit earth flew into space on April 12 1961, he famously quipped, "I don't see God anywhere." And we believed it. On that very day I was initiated into Young Pioneers. All Pioneers learn that the communism is the only true ideology, that religion is evil, and that all people must accept the communistic regime. We were taught in school that we must believe and serve the ideas of Lenin and that humans evolved from monkeys.

I was a good student and graduated from a technical university, where I received a high-quality education. I always laughed at those who went to church. A few times I met believers, and they preached to me about Christ, but I was only amused by their ramblings. I thought that my life was only in my hands, and God should not interfere. I wanted to live as I pleased and besides that I truly believed that materialism was all there was to life.

When I met my future wife she suggested we go to the church. For a long time I resisted but I finally agreed because I was curious about how she spent her Sundays. In August 2000 I went to a Presbyterian church for the first time, it had been started by a missionary

from Korea. I listened to everything but decided that I would not return. But the next Saturday my wife invited me to go to a rehearsal of the choir and the worship band. I liked music and so I tagged along. There were many young people there and they welcomed me very warmly. Their behavior really surprised and pleased me. So the next Sunday I visited the worship service again. After a few weeks they invited me to play the keyboard for the worship time. I consented, but I was still not a believer.

The more time I spent with those Christians, and listening to the Sunday sermons, the more I learned about God. By this time I was married and my wife prayed for me a lot, of course. Through fellowship with others believers I understood who Christ was and what He did for me. I began to understand how I could have salvation from my sins and from God's wrath. The pastor and his family paid a lot of attention to us, and I liked visiting with them. In a few months I turned to Christ and truly repented of my sins. After this I became serious about God, about ministry in the church through music, and my prayer life.

The pastor invited me to go to a group Bible study. I began to understand God's Word and to read and study it for myself. I fellowshiped with other believers and read any Christian book I could find. Week by week I felt my faith became stronger and grow up. In April before the church I confirmed my infant baptism and became a member of Joy Presbyterian Church.

I served first as a music leader then I worked with the youth. Finally after five years I realized that God wanted me to serve Him full-time. I quit my job as a military teacher and I became a preacher at Joy Presbyterian Church. In March 2011 I graduated from the Biblical Theological Seminary of Saint-Petersburg and received a degree of the Masters of Biblical Studies.

Pastor Evgeniy Kruzhkov

My Wife and Children Were in Shock

By the time I entered seminary I had already been in full-time ministry and was preparing for ordination. According to 1 Timothy 3, an elder must be “one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity”. In September 2010, I had finished half of my studying already and completed my fourth



Pastor Evgeni with his wife, Saule, daughters, Adele, Vera, and Margaret, and son, Slava, (they now have a new daughter, Lydia)

intensive course, which included Reverend John Mahon’s lectures on the covenant of marriage and how to raise your children. Hearing the lectures I clearly realized that I was not managing my household well or keeping my kids in obedience. Pastor John’s lectures were like an illumination, like a thunder from a clear sky. I was grateful to God that by John He opened me the Biblical view how I need to love my wife and to raise my children including disciplining them with love so that they might fear the Lord.

After the two-week intensive course I immediately began to apply what I had learned. It was real shock for both the children and my wife. They had not been

expecting such a change in their husband and daddy. I started to discipline my children. This was a struggle, primarily because I had to force myself to be diligent and to convince my wife that discipline is very necessary for their holiness and piety. But God was faithful! In spite of all difficulties, the result was not long in coming. In just a month we saw serious fruit from this obedience. Since then we have two more daughters and we were able to welcome them wholeheartedly because we didn't have any panic or uncertainty, because we knew if we did things God's way He would be faithful. We firmly see the guidance of Scripture how it is necessary to train children to holiness and encourage them love their parents and God in obedience.

Also the pastoral instructions and the personal example of Blake and his family motivated us to expand our family. My spiritual background had convinced me that the wife of a pastor should devote the greater part of life to the church and ministry and that children were only an obstacle. We were encouraged not to have more than two children. But because of our seminary and personal relationship with professors who taught the whole Word about the blessings of children we received a different perspective. Now, I am grateful to God that for the time of my studying and how through the seminary God has blessed our family. Our next big step will be faithfully homeschooling our children. Please pray for us in this endeavor!

Evangelist Rodin

Central Asia

My name is Ridon and I am from Central Asia. In my country all Christian activities are banned, and especially the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But despite the fear of punishment and even death, the gospel is preached and people are turning to Christ.

I was converted to Christ when I was 16 years old. My sister was the first believer in my family and she told me about Jesus Christ. But I strongly resisted and even threatened her, calling her a traitor to the Islamic faith of our fathers. Through her words the Lord touched my heart and I also believed. I was baptized and joined the church. I immediately began to witness about Christ to others, especially my peers. At church, I was asked to lead a Sunday school for children. Then for more than three years I worked as translator and a preacher. Eventually, I realized that I needed to study formally so I went to Vladivostok, Russia and entered a seminary run by Korean missionaries. In Vladivostok, I met Pastor Yuri Levchenko, who was a student at Biblical Theological Seminary in St. Petersburg. He counseled me to enroll at the seminary saying it would be useful for my ministry and help me go deeper in the Word. At that point I decided BTS was for me.

When I first arrived at the crash course in St. Petersburg, I immediately realized that this seminary was very different from my previous studies. The approach to teaching at BTS was serious and I realized that I would actually have to study. However this also made me realize how little I knew so I stuck with it. I asked God to help me be a good student. Helpfully during my studies if I could not understand something or had personal struggles the teachers and professors were very open. I realized that the seminary provided not only knowledge, but were also deeply involved with character formation of the students. The courses

challenged me in such a way that I had to remain humble and patient. Now I am a second year student, and I am glad God led me to BTS.

My seminary education helps me in my ministry in the church in my home country. I always try to apply the knowledge and skills in practical way. Another strength of BTS is their focus on the family, particularly on the role of husbands and wife and on how to raise godly children. I now can use this knowledge to teach our joint conference we hold twice a year in my home country. During the intensive course last spring I was fortunate to hear John Mahon teach on “Covenant Family”. It was through this course that I had a clear biblical vision for starting a family. I began to ask God to give me a godly wife to join with her in covenant relationship in which we are able to bear and raise godly children.

We have recently opened a school to train leaders and evangelists among Muslims. I will be able to use the knowledge and skills I am learning in seminary to start something like it in my own country. Our task is to prepare serious and devoted disciples of Jesus Christ who will faithfully serve the Lord there, where He will send them. I want to continue to work hand in hand with SRS and BTS to help formulate new programs to reach Muslims.

I am grateful to the Lord providing mentors in seminary: Blake Purcell, Oleg Volkov, Evgeniy Kruzhkov and for all the professors and teachers. Their sacrificial service to the Lord and His saints is an example for me personally and for all students. I am also grateful to the Lord for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of St. Petersburg, which has been in prayer for me and has financially supported me during very tough conditions in my Muslim country. I am glad that I can be accountable to the brothers and the ministers of the church who are helping me to remain true to the Lord!

Pastor Yuri Levchenko

Coal or A Diamond

My name is Yuri Levchenko. I am 45. My father abandoned my mother when I was 4 years old, and with no family guidance I grew up to be a hooligan. God miraculously saved me 16 years ago when I was about to die from drug abuse.

I accepted Jesus Christ at the age of 28, in 1997, in a Pentecostal church, in the far east of Russia. Eight months later I met a Korean missionary and he invited me to study at the seminary of the Presbyterian church where I spent the next two years.

I am very proud of the fact that I am a Presbyterian minister. But after full-time study at the Presbyterian seminary I knew the five dogmas of Calvinism and I believed in the absolute authority of God - but I did not know much more. I was so convinced of the purity of my beliefs that I used them to quarrel with other believers and lost many friends. For instance I read a book by John Murray on the baptism of children and I was convinced that whoever did not agree with me and John Murray was either a heretic or sadly misled.

During this time when I had cut off relationships with so many, God opened the door for me to continue my education at Biblical Theological Seminary. When I began I did not expect that the seminary would influence me so strongly and help me to really begin to build my life and all my relationships on the Word of God. God used the seminary to break me and remake me in His image. After the first semester, I came home from Vladivostok, and baptized the children in our church. I realized the value of weekly communion and began to allow children to Supper. Since the children were not involved in our common worship - they went to a separate children's ministry, I returned the children to the common worship with the adults. We began to worship on the basis of the five steps in worship, as described in the book by Jeffrey

Meyers.

Education in the seminary gave me confidence in my ministry. Pastor Blake taught me to use the original Scripture texts to prepare my sermons. In addition to all the knowledge and skills in ministry, which especially pastor Blake worked very hard with me to become more accountable and better at communicating with people. Blake loved me with tough love and put so much pressure on me I was either going to become coal or a diamond. I hope I am a diamond for the Lord.



Pastor Yuri with his wife, Svetlana, and their sons

The seminary has helped me become a team player and has helped me gain healthy, stable and brotherly relations with other ministers. This has benefited both my family and my church.

At the moment, besides our movement, I do not know other pastors who cherish theology and try to practice it in truth. I am very very grateful to God for what he has helped me to meet with Blake, Oleg and all serious brothers of America. Thank God that we have in Russia is such a doctrine - I am very happy and appreciate it. Later in life, I wish to dedicate the preaching of the Gospel and the promotion and dissemination at us in Russia the doctrine that changed my faith, my life and my ministry.

Chaplain Igor Krutogolov

Go Home and Tell Them How Much the Lord Has Done for You

Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. (Mark 5:19)

I personally know there is nothing impossible for God. My testimony is a story about a convict who became a prison chaplain. First of all, I would like to say that when I was young I didn't have any sympathy for people who were in prison; among the people I went around with in my youth those who had been in prison were considered to be foolish and wicked. We were sure that you couldn't expect anything good from them. But my own life turned out such that before the age of 28, I had three convictions. This meant that if caught and convicted a fourth time, I would be given a harsh sentence.

In order to avoid arrest, I went into hiding for 2 years. By that time, I was married for 5 years and had two kids, and I still hoped to rejoin my family and live with them. But I needed much more money for that to happen. The only way I could get money was through criminal activity.

In March 1993, just before my 30th birthday, I was arrested and imprisoned in St. Petersburg. It was clear that I faced a serious sentence. After several days of thinking I became fully convinced that I had made the right decision and committed to myself that I would continue my criminal activity till the end of my life. I was sure that the prison would raise the level of my skill in the business of crime.

I had never considered myself to be a cruel person, but to get status among prisoners, to get the best room in the barracks and other privileges; I had to put on the mask of cruelty. Little by little it became part of me, and my reputation as a tough guy and prison boss grew. It wasn't too difficult for me to get alcohol or even drugs. I quickly

became a guy to be avoided in prison.

One evening, a few months later, I met a person who called himself a believer; he was trying to tell a friend of mine about Jesus. My friend wasn't interested, but I asked him to tell me about this Jesus. In the cell he explained the whole story of Jesus Christ. He told me that there was nothing impossible for God, and God could even change the life of a prisoner.

Outwardly I viewed my life as one of no problems, in spite of the fact that I was in prison I had one of the best rooms, good food, good clothes and anything that can be bought on the territory of a prison colony. But after meeting this believer and praying with him, I realized I had serious problems and no way out. By this time my wife had officially registered our divorce, but my main concern was my 7 year-old son. My parents had divorced when I was young, and I didn't want my son to call some other man "daddy," as had happened in my own life. That moment I thought: if this person is telling the truth about this God who can do everything, do I really want to change my life? Do I want my family and children back, do I want to be free from this prison? In my heart, I knew this was what I wanted, but how could I be sure that I was being told the truth that such a change was possible with God's help?

All I knew to do was to appeal to God in prayer and ask His forgiveness of my sins. I thought, "Well, what can I lose?" Easter was coming, and I made plans to celebrate that day in a special way, like a true believer. Also, the time was coming when I might be eligible for a release from my sentence, and I was praying daily for God to allow this to happen. But the day before Easter began with problems. The person who usually woke me up in the morning had overslept, and I missed my appointment at the duty office. The captain would not listen to my excuses, and sentenced me to a special punishment cell called "the glass" because of its size: 1.5 m x 1.5 m for fifteen days. I wanted badly to resist in my old way, but I remembered the words from the Bible that any authority was from God. All my hopes for early release were dashed.

Why did God allow this to happen and all right before Easter when I was planning a special time? From my little cell, I could see only a bit of blue sky, but I knelt down and looking at the sky, appealed to God: “If You are up there and You know everything and hear me, help me to get to the appeals committee anyway.

Two more weeks passed, and finally it was time for my review with the prison committee. I remember that I was very calm and tried to act as the Bible taught me. And, glory to God, the resolution of the committee was positive for my case. I had tried to solve this problem by myself for several years, but it resulted in nothing or even made the situation worse. But nothing is impossible for God even when all the rules created by man are against you.

I became to fellowship with a community of believers and to study the Bible. Eventually I began to publish a newspaper called “The Shepherd” and talk to other prisoners who came to me with questions about God.

Soon God gave us a chance to make repairs to our little meeting room. It became light and beautiful, and we were very proud of it. Every day we held different meetings, Bible Studies, even musical groups.

We visited a medical department in the colony twice to talk to those who were sick. During this time God helped me to understand that it was possible to be free even when you were in prison. In the evenings, we gathered in the barrack where I lived, and we sang songs and prayed. Once the other prisoners who were in the same room heard our singing and applauded. Even now I remember those days with joy in my heart.

God tested and tried me many times. I remember that after my repentance one brother who was on the lowest hierarchy among prisoners came up to me and before everyone stretched out his hand. Before coming to Christ, I would not even stand near such a person. This was like a revolution in my heart as I took his hand in mine.

After my release, I was invited to take part in the prison ministry. I traveled with missionaries, and we visited prisons and colonies where I told my testimony of what God has done in my life.

But I had a permanent prayer request – it was about my family that I had lost. From the first day of my new life, I started to ask God about my wife, son and daughter. I had no idea how to find them, so I asked God that if my wife had re-married then I wanted her husband to be a good father for my children and love them. And, of course, I prayed about their salvation because I considered myself responsible for everything that had happened in my family. Because there was no God in my previous life, I had doomed my family to a hard life.

And then God made one more miracle in my life, I found my family. On February 6th, my son's birthday, I went home. God kept His eye on everything because I was able to bring gifts. But best of all, my wife had not remarried yet. I had been gone for seven years.

I cannot tell you about all the feelings I had on the way to them. What would I say? How could I explain why I did not care for them? Would my son accept me? My family met me, and I was able to tell them about our Heavenly Father for whom nothing was impossible. Valentina could not believe that this man was her husband. She was expecting a rough and tough man after seven years in prison, and she was astounded by the changes both inside and outside. My family did not fear me anymore and listened to my words about Christ. In the beginning, my son was not used to me, but after a while God gave me wisdom to overcome the barrier between us. I apologized for not taking care of him and for my bad life. On the eighth day of my visit, my wife received Christ. We prayed together and thanked God for His mercy and grace. I left a few days later to find a job and a place for my family.

In 2001, God brought me to the Biblical Theological seminary in St. Petersburg. I was

able to rent a flat in the city, and my wife became a volunteer in a ministry against abortions.

Two years later, I met my grown daughter. Now she has been saved and lives near our family.

Several years ago my wife and I made a decision to devote our lives to prison ministry. We have active and ongoing ministries in several of the larger prisons in the Leningrad region but our major effort

is to develop a halfway house to help ex-prisoners integrate into society. Without a halfway house, it is easy for them to fall back into their old ways and old friends and end up back in prison.

Currently, I serve as an elder in Kingdom of God Presbyterian Church, St. Petersburg and a chaplain of the prison ministry for St. Petersburg and Leningrad region.



Igor and Valentina Krutogolov at
a recent prison ministry meeting at the foundation
of their future halfway house

Chaplain Igor Krutagolov

A Small Bombing Raid

From 2001 to 2004, I studied in the Biblical Theological Seminary, St. Petersburg, founded by Reverend Blake Purcell. I want to express my gratitude to him for the time I spent studying at the seminary.

In 2000, I was the editor at a radio studio “Galileo.” The studio produced radio programs for prisoners, which broadcast in the world’s largest prison “Crosses.” The prison is located in the center of St. Petersburg, and holds up to 15,000 prisoners, though it was designed to hold 2,000. I realized that I was accountable for the quality of information provided about God, Scripture and the Church and this was a heavy load. I began to feel the need for further training in the Bible. Through my friend, Pastor Oleg Volkov, the Lord led me to the BTS.

I lived in the country next to Oleg Volkov and every day we had to make a 100 km. round trip on rough Russian roads. Each time returning from the seminary after school, I would say I will not go back, I don’t have the strength, Blake demands too much and I am too old to be a schoolboy sitting at a desk. To get our monthly stipend, we had to fill out a questionnaire in which the last question was: During the last month, has your husband loved you as Christ loved the Church? My wife had to sign her name under my answer! She remembers these days with gratitude to the Lord! I persevered despite my fatigue, the cold weather and the terrible roads and returned each day to the seminary to study with great teachers, and of course suffered Reverend Blake, who, if I do not understand something or something had to be done, and He forgot to tell us about it, always said: “You should have been able to guess, young man.” If I told him that he gave too much homework, and I do not have time to do it, he replied: “This is a small bombing raid, in the future they will

be worse ...” It was a good school to learn patience and humility required of every minister in God’s harvest.

As I see it now, for me, the seminary was not only a source of knowledge, but, first and foremost, a place where in love we learned how to live out the practical, everyday life of Christians. Blake organized all kinds of theater visits, recreation, work projects and theatrical performances by the students for Christian holidays. He was actively involved in the needs of my family and helped me learn how to lead my family in devotions at home, and the support of prison ministry. His house was always open to everyone, so you could get advice in all matters of life and faith. Seminary has helped me gain a deep belief in matters of faith as well as practical skills to apply these beliefs in everyday life. I thank God for what He has brought me to the BTS and blessed familiarity with the working people for His Glory. I would also like to thank Blake’s wife, Cathy Purcell, for her assistance in the prison ministry. May the Lord save us all for His Kingdom!

Reverend Blake Purcell

From Foe to Friend: How a US Combat Officer Became One of the First Evangelists to the USSR Since 1917

February 1991- I was ushered into an ornate marble room in a rundown palace. My friend introduced me to the fifty people at the meeting. I had, specifically, been invited to find out why an American with a wife and three children would move to their country where thousands were trying to immigrate and there was no food in the stores. They had been told we were willing to come because of our religion so they wanted to hear about that.

This was not just any meeting. It was one of history's last meetings of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. I shared with them Revelation 3:20 and how in 1974 Christ had come into my life, forgiven my sins and given me a purpose for living. American believers had helped me come share this good news with them, I said, and we wanted them to have the abundant life that only Christ gave.

I understood that I might have been the first person in the history of Communism to be asked to preach the Gospel at a Party meeting and was, surely, the first "evil imperialist American" many of them had ever seen. To give me some credentials my host explained that my father was a United States Congressman and that I was raised as friends of the President's family. She did not say that my father as a Congressman had gone to Vietnam six times to support our troops, and that I had been reading Voice of the Martyrs newsletters since I was sixteen and clearly understood the havoc that communism had wreaked on believers in the Soviet Union. We also did not mention that I was still a reserve officer in the United States Infantry, and had spent five years of my life training as a combat leader to do nothing but fight the Soviet Army.

Humanly speaking, I should have been one of the last persons that ended up behind the Iron Curtain representing the Prince of Peace. This is my account of how God brought this about. Colossians 1:20 says, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things in heaven or things on earth, making peace by the blood of His cross.



Blake (left) at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1982,
training to fight “the Commies”

An “Up and Outer”

Many that come to Christ as adults or young adults, as in my case, are “down and outers”. They have made a mess of their lives and sunk so low they have nowhere else to turn but to Christ. This is why most of our first seminary students here in St. Petersburg were former convicts. They had ruined their lives and were open to any suggestions.

I was an “up and outer”. I was successful in my small world and when I got to the top, I found there was nothing more. The effect spiritually is the same, but the circumstances in life are different. I was born in 1958 in Wichita Falls, Texas, and even though I was baptized in Fain Presbyterian Church, my family was nominal believers.

In 1962, when I was four years old, my father was elected to the US Congress for the 13th District of Texas. You can see me shaking hands with Vice President Johnson,



who, about a year later, would become president of the United States. (I warned him to avoid Vietnam, but you can see how much attention he paid to my advice, obviously disregarding my words.)

My family attended church, perhaps, once a month. I feared God and revered the Bible, but had no idea what Christ had done for me personally. But my true gods were the USA, the Democratic Party, my family and myself. I humbly planned on being the President of the United States by 1980.

Vietnam decimated my idealization of the USA, and my father's defeat in 1972 destroyed my idealization of the Democratic Party. A third blow came with my parents' divorce in 1968 and dealt a death knell to my trust in my family. By this time I had been elected to president of my freshman class at Groveton High School, a supposed high point for any high schooler. But there I realized that I had made empty campaign promises that I was too lazy and apathetic to keep. I also recognized that there was something mean and petty in my relationships with others even while I pretended to be everyone's friend. I knew something else was controlling me, I could will what was right, but I could not do it, and that scared me.

At fifteen years of age, I had already seen the results of looking to man for answers. I had been let down by America, my family but, most importantly, by myself.

In March of 1974 my father invited two young men from the Presidential Prayer Breakfast movement to start a youth group at our church, Washington Farm United Methodist. Their first weekend in town I sat next to one, Glen Mars, and began weeping. He shared the Four Spiritual Laws with me, reading right through them, and God showed me that while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me.

As C.S. Lewis writes, I never "made a decision" for Christ and I can say the same thing. God just invaded my life. For eight years he had destroyed my idols and, finally, He had showed me the one true God. From that moment on serving and glorifying Christ was my purpose in life.

Move to the Soviet Union? “I could never do that!”

I met the Navigators in 1979 at Texas A&M where I was a cadet in the Cadet Corps. They recruited me to a Summer Training Program where for the first time I heard, “Matthew 28:19, 20, Make disciples of all nations, means that every Christian must surrender his life to Christ being willing to go anywhere in the world for Him.” I went out into a dark open field and got serious with God.

By 1989 I had been serving with the Navigators at the Air Force Academy and Texas A&M for five years, when I was invited to take some cadets to do evangelism in Moscow and Leningrad, USSR. As the plane departed Moscow I told the cadets, “You won’t believe this, but there are some Navigators that actually want to move to the Soviet Union as missionaries. I could never do that!” And I meant it.

On Christmas day, 1989, as I was watching the last “counter revolution” of Eastern Europe take place in Romania, I felt a very clear leading from God to “move East”. By this time God had washed away all my fears of the USSR, and I felt that even though it would be difficult God would sustain me. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The next five years turned out to be far harder than we ever imagined, and far more rewarding than we ever deserved.

Christ did, in fact, come to reconcile all things to Himself, so much so that he made former foes into great friends. Now Cathy and I can say that we have hundreds of friends, through the blood of Christ, across nine time zones and in 4 countries of the former Soviet Union. Christ does make peace by the blood of His cross at all times and in all places and with all peoples.

The Churches and Ministries of SRS Seminary Graduates

Thank you for taking time to learn more about these men and their ministries! We hope that you, your church, or business will partner with SRS in 2014. In September, 1999, the Biblical Theological Seminary (BTS) of St. Petersburg opened for classes. All ten pastors and ministry leaders on the following pages are BTS graduates.



BTS teachers, students, and former students, Fall 2013. SRS Field Director Blake Purcell (center), sits between Pastor Rob Rayburn (right) and RE Jim Price (left) who traveled from Faith Presbyterian, Tacoma, Washington, to teach.

While we are grateful to God for these men and their passion for being Christ's ambassadors, we also understand the difficulties involved in shining the light of the Gospel in difficult places. After reading this, please take time to pray for the Slavic Reformation Society, its seminary, and the graduates shown on these pages. Share this booklet with others via email, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Please also consider becoming a sponsor, providing monthly financial support. If you currently sponsor one of these men, consider asking others to do the same.

Thank you and God bless,
Douglas Roorda,
Chairman, Slavic Reformation Society

Pastor Timur Anickin

Riga Reformed Church of Jurmala, Latvia

Riga Reformed Church of Jesus Christ our Savior was founded in February, 1998. Currently in Latvia, almost 1 in 3 persons is unemployed. Only 1 in 5 are considered evangelical Christians, and the majority of these are not active in their churches. Pastor Timur is determined to shine the light of the gospel in Latvia.

Financial needs

- For rental of place to worship (they currently meet in a member's apartment).
- Pastoral support and general church operation/ministry expenses.
- One time needs include
 - A van
 - A computer

Prayer needs

- That God would bring new members.
- Discipleship training of current members.



Timur in front of a facility
he hopes to rent for worship



Celebrating Advent with
Church family



Pastor Eduard Ivanov

Coram Deo Presbyterian Church, Novolitevsk, Russia, (Far East)



Pastor Eduard and
wife, Svetlana.



Pastor Eduard's church
in worship, in the
building he built by
hand.



Coram Deo
Presbyterian Church as
it looks in March!

Coram Deo Presbyterian Church was founded in 2009. It is located in Russia's Far East region of Primorsky Krai. Each Sunday, Pastor Ivanov rings his church's bell, inviting the community to worship. Pastor Ivanov is determined to bring the light of the gospel to his community, who like Noah, Abraham, and many others, walked by faith in spite of opposition.

Financial needs

- For covering building maintenance, church operation/ministry expenses, and pastoral support.
- One time needs include
 - Firewood and coal for Winter.
 - Electronic bell (call to worship).

Prayer needs

- Build relationships with people in community.
- Male leadership in church.
- Faithfulness in evangelism.

Pastor Kirill Treschetka

Freedom in Christ Presbyterian Church, Kavaleroovo, Russia



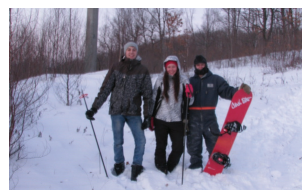
Pastor Kirill began his ministry when he was ordained in 2003. He is currently pastor of Freedom in Christ Presbyterian Church, which has 15 adult members. Kavaleroovo is currently a difficult place to live, with high unemployment. This results in families separating for long periods while one parent works in Vladivostok, the largest city in Far East Russia. Pastor Kirill also has an online church founded by his relatives in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Financial needs

- Pastoral support and general church operation/ministry expenses.
- One time needs include
 - Water and septic at church.
 - Ski and snowboard equipment.
 - 4WD car/truck for traveling to remote villages.
 - Supplies for Christian school.

Prayer needs

- That they could reach their region, called Primorsky Krai, with gospel. Many lost souls in this region.
- Formation of a Christian high school.



Pastor Kirill has a sports ministry for youth. They have also started a small Christian school, directed by his wife, Ludmilla.



Freedom in Christ Family



Pastor Oleg Volkov

Reformed Presbyterian Church of St.
Petersburg, Russia

Pastor Volkov began his ministry in 2000. He is also rector of the Biblical Theological Seminary, where all ministers in this catalog have received a degree.

Financial needs

- Support to cover rental of worship facility.

Prayer needs

- Faithfulness of current members.
- Wisdom for church leaders.
- New ideas to reach lost souls in St. Petersburg.



Church work day,
October, 2013



Easter Service, 2012

Pastor Ruslan Moroz

Light to the World
Presbyterian Church,
Romanovka, Russia



Pastor Moroz started the church in 2009. His education in SRS' Biblical Theological Seminary helped him better understand the truth of God's word, and revealed to him many unbiblical positions his denomination was adopting. Upon leaving the denomination, he lost his church, even though the members had funded most of its construction. They have purchased property and are moving forward on a new church.



Ruslan's Family



Site for New Church.



Vision for new church, members plan to build themselves.



Congregation

Financial needs

- Pastoral support and general church operation/ministry expenses.

One-time needs include:

- Finances to complete church construction.

Prayer needs

- For Arkadi, Aleksander, and Yevgeni, in their preparation to serve as elders.
- The establishment of a diaconal ministry in the congregation.

Pastor Ravil Kunakaev

Reformed Presbyterian Church, Tyumen, Russia (Siberia)

Pastor Kunakaev planted Reformed Presbyterian Church in 2005. It currently has 26 members, including 6 new members. He has many hopes and dreams to grow his church and become self-sustaining, and spread the Gospel in Siberia.

Financial needs

- Pastoral support and general church operation/ministry expenses.
- One time needs include
 - Support to start a family business.
 - Bibles, hymnals, and other literature for church.

Prayer needs

- Spiritual growth of church members.
- Strengthening of families in church.
- Spreading of Gospel in Siberia.



Fellowship after
Sunday worship



Summer Family Camp

Pastor Evgeniy Kruzhkov

Reformed Presbyterian Church, Karaganda Kazakhstan

Pastor Kruzhkov started the church in June, 2012. The Session of Reformed Presbyterian Church of St. Petersburg assists Pastor Kruzhkov until they have their own session of elders. Because of high divorce rates in Kazakhstan, Pastor Kruzhkov is especially interested in discipling families to grow in Christ together. He also serves as Dean of Students for the Biblical Theological Seminary.

Financial needs

- Pastoral support and general church operation/ministry expenses.
- Support to rent formal place for worship.
- One-time needs include:
 - English lessons for children in church.
 - Car for family and ministry.

Prayer Needs

- For another church to allow them to rent a place of worship. Small churches cannot get government permission to start a church so must meet in a home of rent from a church that has permission.
- New men to join church with their families.



The Kruzhkov Family



Church family.

Evangelist Ridon

Pastor of Truth and Freedom Church,
closed Muslim Country

Pastor Ridon serves in a country hostile to Christianity. He founded Truth and Freedom Church in August, 2011. They have 15 members, and plan to baptize new members this December.

Financial needs

- Monthly support for evangelism materials
- One time needs include
 - Car.
 - Roof repair of poor family in church.
 - Small business loan to open mini market and poultry farm.

Prayer Needs

- For God to soften hearts of government officials to the gospel.
- That God protect their church from those hostile to Christianity.
- Continued faithfulness of the church.
- Wisdom to reach young people for Christ.



Bible study. In the former Soviet Union, most people consider a church a cult if they meet in a home. However, because Christianity is prohibited here, Rodin's church has no other option.

Pastor Yuri Levchenko

Church planter in Dmitrov, Russia (North of Moscow)

Pastor Levchenko and his family moved to Dmitrov, Russia in Fall, 2013. Shortly thereafter, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. They also have three other living children, all boys. For health and family reasons, they recently left Vladivostok, where Yuri was pastor of a church. His plan in Dmitrov is to get a job, purchase land , and build and plant a church.

Financial needs

- Pastoral support and church building rental.
- One time needs include
 - Money for purchase of church property.

Prayer needs

- Opportunities to preach the Gospel and for God to soften hearts.



Svetlana, the latest
addition to the
Levchenko family!



Pastor Levchenko praying for chil-
dren of former church in Vladivo-
stok, Far East Russia.



Chaplain Igor Krutogolov

Director of Chaplain Prison Ministry,
Leningrad Region, Russia



Igor (front, center), visiting with prisoners



Planning meeting with ministry partners, Summer 2013



Construction of halfway house continues as funds become available (October 2013 photo).

Chaplain Krutogolov graduated in 2006 from the Biblical Theological Seminary. As a former prisoner himself, he understands prisoners needs and knows how to bring the Gospel to them. He has big plans to build a halfway house to help former prisoners make a successful transition to civilian life. The halfway house is in what is known as the Leningrad Region, on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, Russia.

Financial needs

- For family and general ministry operations
- One time needs include
 - Support to complete construction of halfway house.
 - Support for Project Angel Tree: a Christmas ministry for children of prisoners.

Prayer needs

- Completion of halfway house.
- Permission to visit all 16 prisons in Leningrad Region.

Proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

Isaiah 61:1

The Berlin Wall falling in 1989 was the beginning of the largest liberation in modern history when 270 million Russian speakers gained religious freedom for the first time in 1000 years. The Gospel was quick to follow.

Hope for Eurasia is a collection of testimonies of Presbyterian ministers born as Soviets who are former...

convicts

drug addicts

alcoholics

mafia

Russian soldiers and officers

thieves

enforcers

Communists

.....set free by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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