



Merry Christmas

December 2021

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2:14

Dear Pastors and Friends,

Warm Christmas greetings from the Slobodians! Most would not consider December a good time to travel to Russia which is known for very cold winters. Even more so this December due to the fact that Russia is in the midst of one of the highest outbreaks of Covid in the world these days. Furthermore, Russia is amassing a massive force of troops along the Ukrainian border which has many in the West and in Europe concerned that a military invasion is about to happen. Nevertheless, Russia is where we are right now. We have visited our national workers and church planters in both Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Though Moscow especially was extremely cold, our hearts were warmed by the blessings God is bestowing upon the ministry there. The church established in Shahovskaya, which is about two hours from Moscow, has seen folks saved and baptized. That and a recent wedding have encouraged brother Andrei and the folks there as they move closer to being self-supporting. Another blessing was to visit the first drug and alcohol rehabilitation center BIEM had a part in establishing and to hear the testimonies of some of those now free from the bondage of drugs and alcohol. This has been an amazingly fruitful ministry that has led to the establishment of 7 other drug and alcohol rehab centers including two for women. There are now nearly 60 families that are members of churches in the Moscow area where one or both parents were saved through these ministries.

We had a special meal and time of fellowship with several of our very first church planters from way back when we first began planting churches and building church buildings in the Moscow area. In a special service in the Moscow oblast in Nahabino (the site of one of our first building programs), the brethren presented us with a beautiful old Russian wood burning samovar in commemoration of 40 years of BIEM's ministry in Russia. Traditionally, in the old days wood burning samovars were continually fired up in Russia in order to heat water for tea that was always available for guests. These beautiful ornate vessels are considered national treasures and generally not allowed out of the country if they are more than 50 years old or particularly ornate. The brethren were assisted by some experts who found a very ornate 40-year-old samovar they beautifully inscribed with wording commemorating 40 years of BIEM's ministry in Russia. They also provided documents that will make it possible to pass this item through customs. You will soon be able to see pictures of this on BIEM's Facebook page and also in our next issue of the Challenger. This was really special, and we look forward to displaying this samovar in a prominent place at our mission headquarters.

In St. Petersburg, a city of 5.7 million with an ancient and rich history we were glad to see how God is blessing the ministry there. Here brother Oleg had us participate in an English language club that has been a remarkably effective tool for evangelism. They are now attracting between 30 - 40 people regularly and the evangelistic thrust of this effort has resulted in souls be saved and baptized.

Interestingly, it seems as if the media here and folks in both Moscow and St. Petersburg are not at all concerned about an invasion which they do not see as possible. They are much more concerned about the possibility of more drastic anti-Covid measures that may soon take effect including banning anyone from entering stores, public places, or transport, without a QR code indicating that they have been vaccinated. In one city where this has been enacted on an experimental basis, folks have been easily circumventing this by using QR codes off products like refrigerators or packages of chicken to successfully get past screeners!

Thank you for your prayers and may God bless each of you with a wonderful Christmas!

The Slobodians

