

Article for Fellowship News
On My Russia Trip
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Imagine: It's Saturday, October 24, 1992, and you're in the Olympic indoor stadium in Moscow, Russia. The 42,000 seats are full and a couple of thousand people are standing behind rope barriers on the stadium floor. The Russian Army Chorus begins to sing C first, one of those Russian folk songs made famous by their record albums. Then they break into a rendition of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic": "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord... Glory, glory, hallelujah, His truth is marching on!" What's happening? Is this a wild fantasy from a dream? No, it's the truth, which sometimes *is* stranger than fiction. This is how the second of the three Billy Graham rallies in Moscow started, and I was there to see it. Dr. Graham preached on the prodigal son, the best sermon I've ever heard him preach. At the end, people literally ran to accept his invitation, and more than 10,000 made professions of faith that one night alone.

This was just one of the highlights of my two-week trip to Russia with a team of a dozen teachers, pastors and laypeople from the Philadelphia area. We visited St. Petersburg, Novgorod, Moscow, and Vologda to share the Gospel with the Russian people. Our time in St. Petersburg and Moscow was basically for sightseeing, but we spent five days each in the other two cities C both about 300,000 in population C speaking in schools and giving a series of evening talks on the Bible to the general public.

There is a marvelous openness in Russia today. We spoke in some 50-75 high school classrooms on such topics as "How to increase your grades without any additional effort," "Introduction to computers," "God and evil," "Is Christianity reasonable?" "Angels and demons," "Solid values in a changing society," and "Is the universe an accident or designed?" We gave out Russian versions of Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws to each student, and sometimes had time to go through the booklets with them. We don't get opportunities like that in public schools here! And the students and teachers were respectful, interested, often excited, and asked numerous questions. Perhaps 1500-2000 students and teachers heard a credible presentation of Christianity from our team.

Our evening lectures were less well attended, but they provided good contact with a number of seekers and Christians. Pastor Ed Miller spoke on the Bible's solutions to family problems. Dr. David Dunbar and Pastor David Hine gave a series for new Christians C the life of Christ, and the Christian walk. My talks were aimed at seekers: "Does God exist? What kind of God exists? Why do we believe the Bible? What's wrong with mankind? Who is Jesus? Did he really rise from the dead? Is there life after death? How can I know God?"

In Novgorod, our evening lectures were held at the "Dialogue Center," formerly the Communist Party Headquarters for the city. One of the Communist youth organizations is called the "Young Pioneers." In Vologda, a former Young Pioneer building is now the Children's Creative Center, where we were invited to give the lectures we gave in public schools. One of the highlights of

my time in Russia was giving "Solid values in a changing society" to a group of children aged 6-16 in this center and leading them through the four spiritual laws. Some were visibly moved by the story of the prodigal son as a picture of how God is waiting to receive us. Many came up afterwards with gifts of postcards and requests that I autograph their Gospel booklets. What a time that was!

Christian Cultural Centers have recently sprung up in both Novgorod and Vologda, where children are taught the Bible along with music, literature, ballet and folk dancing. We gave our evening lectures in Vologda at the Christian Cultural Center there. The leaders at these centers held receptions for us and showed us what they are doing. It was very moving to see the Russian teacher's enthusiasm for the Bible and the children's excited participation as she taught a lesson on the creation story in Genesis; to hear the children sing our familiar Scripture choruses in Russian; and to see the smiles on their faces. What a rewarding experience!

The Lord is doing great things in Russia, but there are many adversaries. Some blame the current economic difficulties on the abandonment of Communism and would like to see it restored. Some are hardened atheists, but others are rethinking their atheism. Many are open not only to the Gospel, but to occultism, the New Age movement, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism. As you have prayed for Russia in the past, so continue, that God may bring many into His kingdom.