

Eurasian Missionary College

Preparing national church planters and missionaries for Tatarstan, Russia and Central Asia

December 2003

Teamwork Builds Buinsk Church

Teamwork between our students and resident missionary workers in the town of Buinsk has resulted in the beginnings of a new church. At the beginning of the year we asked you to pray for the town of Buinsk, and this is how God has answered your prayers.

Earlier this year, during a practicum, students and their mentors decided to befriend people sitting in the local public library. One of the people they sat next to was a young Tatar who was studying marketing. Follow-up of this conversation by the local missionary worker resulted in the young man's baptism about 2 months ago, it being the Buinsk church's first baptism. Instead of marketing goods, this young man is now marketing pamphlets about Jesus! His enthusiasm is infectious, and his local knowledge and the distribution of literature he has already been involved in, has meant that knowledge of the church's existence has gone far and wide.

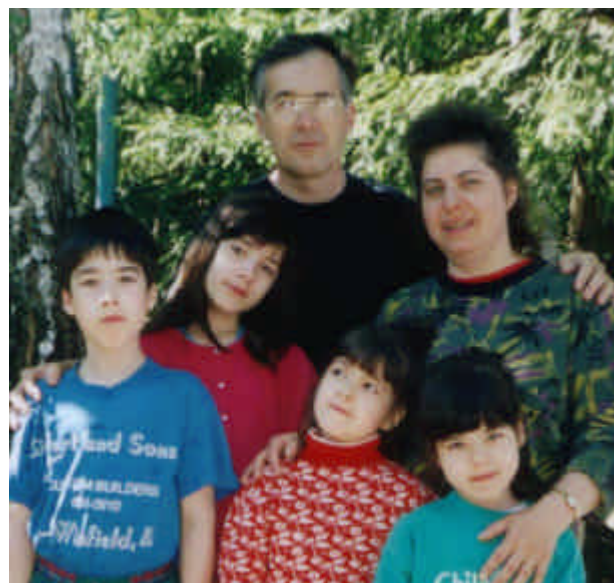
An example of this came up in the most recent practicum in Buinsk. One Saturday the team ran a youth meeting. To it turned up, not only some young people the students had been talking to in the local boxing club, but also an older woman, who had been suffering from a significant loss. A few years ago her husband had died, and this tragedy had left a deep wound in her soul, that was as yet unhealed. She started going to the Orthodox Church, but found no peace there. At about the same time, her brother had heard that there was a non-Orthodox church, where they read the Bible and prayed in a simple form. From friends he then discovered there was such a church even in Buinsk, and so he brought his sister to the meeting. The team talked and prayed with her, and urged her to turn to the Jesus we know from the Bible, so she could find peace for her soul.

In another amazing 'God-incidence', during the recent practicum, another young man was put into contact with the local church here. Students were speaking to people on the streets when the youth overheard their conversation. He approached and asked if they knew where he could find a meeting of the evangelical church. This really took them by surprise, as the vast majority of the town are Tatars (nominally Muslim), and not at all interested in church, let alone the evangelical one. It turned out he had earlier attended an evangelical church in another town, but had since moved to Buinsk to study there. Until that chance meeting on the street he had no idea an evangelical church even existed in that town.

During their time there, the students had the opportunity to witness to a number of others who came to the church. Unfortunately they have not yet returned.

- Pray for the safety of the young man recently baptized in Buinsk. He already has had some difficult encounters for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Pray too for others with whom the church has contact, in particular the women seeking healing, and those who came to church recently, but who haven't yet returned.

A Return to the Stalinist era?



Tahir Talipov and his family

Last edition we reported that one of our lecturers and mentors, Tahir Talipov, had been denied a visa. Our college administrator recently wrote a report, highlighting some of his concerns about the whole incident. The following is an edited version:

"To me, it looks like we are back in the Stalinist era again. This alarming thought comes to mind more and more as it seems judgments concerning religious freedom in this country are being delivered more and more by the FSB (former KGB), and not by the due process of law. I have at my disposal a document that is a glaring example of that. Here's its story.

Pastor Tahir Talipov, citizen of Latvia, Tatar by nationality, and evangelical Christian by religious conviction, has resided in Russia for the last 11 years. Last year he applied for a residence permit to the Visa Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tatarstan. There being no reply for six months, he approached them again. He was then invited by an FSB officer to discuss certain issues unofficially. At their third meeting he proposed that Tahir sign a cooperation contract with the FSB. The latter refused to cooperate, knowing that this simply implies becoming an informer.

In the meantime the Visa Department still gave no answer concerning the residence permit. Since by law they are obliged to answer in six months, and it was already ten months, Tahir appealed to the court. It's a curious fact that exactly at the time of the court session the Visa Department made a decision to deny the residence permit. In court a Visa Department official referred to a judgment by the FSB administration.

After that he appealed against the sentence of the district court to the Supreme Court. On November 10th, 2003, his appeal was considered. That's when the Court filed the document I've mentioned above. It is a document for internal use (sent by FSB to the Ministry of Internal

Affairs). As Tahir's representative in court, I was acquainted with it and I have a photocopy. This is the document that sealed Tahir's fate.

The letter states that the FSB considers it necessary to deny the residence permit to Tahir Talipov and his family because his activity is no less than (a quote) "extremist in its nature, it creates a threat of destabilization of the interdenominational and international situation in Tatarstan". As a basis for denial they cite items 1, 4, 8 of article 9 of the Federal Law "Concerning the legal position of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation". So for example Item 1 states that a foreign citizen is denied a residential permit if he "supports forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional system of Russia or by any other actions creates a threat to the security of the Russian Federation or its citizens".

What exactly was Tahir's "extremist activity"? The letter cites, for instance, the fact that he "in the early nineties was involved in propagating the Baptist religion in Nizhnekamsk as a missionary". He also "established in Kazan a religious group 'Faith of Life' which up to this moment doesn't have official registration and is acting illegally". Further, as an accusation, the FSB maintains that "the evangelists of 'Faith of Life' make it their priority to work towards the conversion of Muslims of the Republic to their religion".

The letter is striking for its lack of professionalism. Firstly, the mysterious "religious group 'Faith of Life'", which supposedly isn't officially registered, is, in fact, the evangelical church "Faith and Life", officially registered almost two years ago (registration certificate dated by March 6, 2002, No 1210/r (50)). Moreover, even before this church was officially registered it acted legally. According to Item 1 of article 7 of the Federal Law "Concerning religious freedom and religious groups", a religious group's activity is legal even without official registration.

Furthermore, since when is "spreading of Christianity in the Republic's regions from the position of baptism", even among Muslims, been considered as extremism? It is the constitutional right of every citizen "to confess, individually or with others, any religion.. to freely choose, have and spread religious and other convictions" (Art. 28, Constitution of the Russian Federation). Others here take up that right. Recently, in the largest concert hall in Kazan, 2 Russians, former Orthodox Christians and now Muslim converts, gave public lectures. Although in their speeches they openly urged their audiences to turn to Islam, nobody accused them of "destabilization of the interdenominational situation". It seems "the Baptist religion" is once again becoming illegal in Russia, and once again it is the activity of evangelical preachers that is "extremist in its nature".

I have known Tahir Talipov really well since 1994. He is a sincere believer and a kind and sacrificial person. He has helped a large number of people in Russia come to faith and find meaning in their lives. He has helped restore broken families, fight against alcoholism and immorality, and encouraged people to change their lives, becoming good and law-abiding citizens. If someone like that is considered dangerous to society, then what kind of society do we have?" Fedor Dzuba.



This year's current student intake gathered around Tahir

- Pray for the retention of religious freedom in Tatarstan.
- If you have any questions concerning this article please contact us at the email addresses below.

College Curriculum Expands

Last month, the college launched its new 'Bachelor of Missiology'. Designed as a course for people who have already done some theological study, participants will undertake up to six 2-week sessions a year to cover in 3 years a variety of subjects relevant to practical mission. The first intensive will be held next February.

Adventures in Aksubayevo /Derbishki

In our recent practicum in the town of Aksubayevo we were warmly encouraged and supported in the work we were doing by the Director of one of the Institutes there. Deeply believing in God she worried about the fate of her students.

The response by some of the students was also very warm. When we left some accompanied us out into the street to say good-byes, and there were tears and requests to come back.

Not all were so inclined. We also encountered some very skeptical students, 2 of whom just couldn't understand how it is possible to live without obvious sin. "How can a healthy 'guy' live without women, drinking and other 'delights' of life?" one asked. Our student replied that it is altogether possible and even a wonderful life, the life of a happy person!

Students in Derbishki, a satellite of Kazan, helped wallpaper a children's home and put on a puppet show, to demonstrate God's love in practical ways.



- Pray that the Lord will continue to open doors for the Good News in Aksubayevo and Derbishki, and that he will develop skills for service in our students

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