

Russia within our Reach

Story by Esther DeWitt and Tom Price

Entering 2000 with a focus on ministry, over 400 Russians and nearly a hundred missionaries from America met for the 6th Annual Pastors' and Leadership Conference in Moscow, hosted by Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission.

Making the Journey

In the dead of winter, Russians from Calvary Chapels across the country exited the metro, their boots crunching new snow underfoot. A pastor from Siberia and members of his congregation had made the two-day journey eastward by train. They wore long coats and fur hats. The woolen scarves that masked their faces could not hide their joy as they neared their destination. Enthusiasm replaced the weariness of the long journey.

Everyone Together

This is their annual pilgrimage to the Moscow Pastors' and Leadership Conference. For these Russian believers, it is a wonderful time of worship, fellowship, and teaching. For some new believers, this is the first time they have ventured any distance from home. This is a treasured opportunity for spiritual refreshment, renewal, and encouragement. Calvary pastors traveled from Austria, England, and the United States to teach.

Many of the Russians had long journeys across this great country, which is 12 time-zones wide. One woman traveled for seven days on the train from Vladivostok, in Russia's Far East. The air is charged with excitement as they enter the large but modest Molodyozhnyi hotel. As the teams from nearly 30 different Calvary fellowships enter the main lobby, there is a joyous reunion of old friends and new acquaintances greeting each other, creating a festive atmosphere.

The staff of Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission (CCCPM), worked unceasingly to ensure check-in would go smoothly.



The fellowship of friends is a highlight of the conference.



George Clerie encourages Sasha, a CCCPM translator.



Worshipping together brings unity to the large group.

Photographs by Tom Price

Greeters from CC Vista and CC Modesto aided with registration and provided care for the children. Soon the conference would begin. Celeste Romero, events coordinator for CCCPM, watched as months of planning for this mammoth event fell into place.

Nearly all of the Russians who attend the conference, as well as many of the missionaries, received financial sponsorships to cover the costs of travel and the conference. Calvary Chapel Church Planting received the support from all over the United States to help cover the expenses of the four-day event.

George Bryson, a Calvary pastor for over thirty years and director of Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission, is considered a father figure to many of the ministers in Russia. Of the many trips he takes to Russia each year, the conference is one of his favorites. He is able to share the experience with his wife, Debbi. Together they greet new attendees and dear friends.

The teachings of the conference center around the theme, "Russia Within Our Reach." Each speaker teaches on a different aspect of life in the ministry. Recognizing the enormity of the task of reaching the entire country of Russia, they encourage the missionaries and church leaders to rely on the strength of the Lord, and to persevere in His work.

"...He'll Make it Possible..."

Brian Brodersen, former senior pastor in London at CC Westminster, shared on "Knowing the Will of God." He has returned to Costa Mesa, where he will assist Pastor Chuck Smith.

Pastor Brian had served on staff at CC Costa Mesa, then pastored CC Vista. The church grew and prospered under his leadership. With a heart for missions, he,

along with Pastor Chuck Smith, encouraged George Bryson to begin planting churches in Russia when the door opened in 1991.

It was a surprise to nearly everyone when he announced he felt the Lord's call to start a Calvary Chapel in London. For over three years, Pastor Brian, with his wife and children, served the fellowship in England. This was where he wanted to stay.

An inner conflict arose when he knew that it was God's will for him to return to California, despite his personal desire.

"I've grown to love my life there," Pastor Brian told the conference. "I can look out on the congregation and see people I led to Jesus and baptized. There is so much potential now for the church to grow and



George Bryson and Brian Brodersen share a heart for missions and close friendship.

really have an impact on London. Britain is a nation desperately in need of the Gospel."

"This is the case all over Europe. Many of the men in Europe look to me as a leader. All those things seem to say I should stay in London. My own personal feelings say I should stay."

Even though there are many people they love in Southern California, it was still a tough decision. Yet he knew God had important work for him in Costa Mesa. He was going back to assist Pastor Chuck Smith.

"In the deepest part of my being I feel like God has grabbed hold of me and told me this is where we are going. That's why I'm going... it's the will of God."

"Many people fail to stay in the general will of God, and then wonder why God doesn't speak to them about the specific will of God in their life."



Pastor Brian Brodersen (left) received an enthusiastic welcome at the conference. Former senior pastor of CC Westminster, England, he has returned to Costa Mesa to assist Pastor Chuck.



Missionaries and Russians alike enjoyed the sense of humor used to illustrate the messages.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Romans 12:1,2 NKJV.

"The general will of God is the same for everyone. Spending time meditating on God's Word, having a consistent prayer life, and fellowship with other believers."

They hunger

"I believe God has a perfect plan and purpose for each of our lives. The Bible tells us that God is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. We conclude that God desires all of us to be saved."

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me,



Worship team from Nihzni Novgrad was one of many praise bands to play at the conference.

that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:40 NKJV

Pastor Brian made it clear that only as we come into conformity with the general will of God, can we begin to discover the specific will of God.

"...Stepping Out in Faith..."

It was a much needed time of learning for those at the conference, and fit well



Pastor Rod Thompson gave an animated message on "Stepping Out in Faith."

with the message of Rod Thompson, the Director of the CC Bible College in Austria and the senior pastor of CC Millstatt. His message on "Stepping Out in Faith" was of great encouragement, especially for those feeling inadequate in the ministry.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." II Timothy 1:7 NKJV

"I know the fear that comes with a new step of faith in ministry," Pastor Rod said. "I know that sometimes it's a temptation to allow that fear to hinder us from stepping out. We can't allow that to happen. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. When we feel the fear, there's nothing wrong with it. As a Christian, the problem is when we allow that fear to control us and make our decisions for us."

"You can't tell me Peter wasn't a little bit frightened standing on the edge of the boat when he was taking that first step, but he stepped out in faith. He didn't let his fear hinder him. You might not feel qualified. And you probably aren't. That is the greatest thing you have going for you, because when you step out, you aren't

and thirst

going trusting yourself. If you were qualified, you wouldn't have to trust God to do it. Now, since you know you're not qualified, you're going to have to say, 'God, you have to do this.'

"I am an unqualified person to oversee a Bible College. I graduated from a high school where all the troublemakers are sent. I came to Austria to work at the Castle when Pastor Chuck made a plea from the pulpit for plumbing help. Later, I became a pastor in Yugoslavia. I have never been to Bible College, but now I direct one. Don't tell me you're not qualified. If God is prompting your heart, He is going to give you the ability. Is God putting it in your heart to do something? Everybody else might say that's impossible, but if God has called you, He'll make it possible."

"...Getting your Head in the Clouds..."



Danny Hodges, the senior pastor of CC St. Petersburg, Florida has been involved with the ministry of CCCPM in Russia for many years. His message "Running to Win" was a great challenge to the crowd.

"Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." Colossians 3:2 NIV

Standing atop an 8-foot ladder, Pastor Danny Hodges began the teaching...

"You get a different perspective up here. I can see things you can't see. I can set my mind on earthly things, or I can set it on things above. This is where it all begins. Paul said, 'I die every day - I mean that, brothers - just as surely as I



Mike Pronio and Ken Ortize in prayer.

glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.' I Corinthians 15:31 NIV. We daily take up our cross and deny self. We must take time to be alone with God, wrestling in prayer, and reading His word."

"It's a daily climbing of the ladder, spiritually speaking, and getting your head in the clouds, in a good way. When you neglect those spiritual exercises for running the race, you actually try and fight the battle in the flesh. You've ignored the Cross. You've ignored the only instrument God has given us for power. This is power through the Cross. There is power through denial, self-sacrifice, and dying, and the Lord fights the battle. When you try to fight the battle or run the race in the flesh, you will never win."

"Maybe you have failed. Maybe you are struggling with any number of sins that could take you out of the race. How are you going to get victory over that sin that keeps pulling you down? Commit to that daily time to get alone with God in prayer and read His Word. Make a decision right now and determine what time daily that you will get alone with God. This is the only way that we can win the race, not just finish."

"...an Investment in Eternity..."

Ken Ortize, the senior pastor of CC Spokane, made his second

trip to Russia in two months to teach at the conference. He has gotten to know most of the senior pastors, as well as many of the missionaries and church leaders in Russia. He had a message to share on the role of ambition in ministry.

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." I Timothy 3:1 NIV

"When Paul introduces the issue of character qualities, the first thing he sets out is the issue of ambition. Every one of us has ambition. Our immediate thought is that ambition is bad, but that



Standing "above it all," Danny Hodges encouraged everyone to keep a higher perspective.

all depends on your heart. Paul speaks about his ambitions. His ambition was to preach Christ where He had never been preached before. He told the Corinthians his goal was to live in a way that pleased God. However, he warned about selfish ambition."

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."
1 Peter 5:2,3 NIV

"Two key things in these verses are: We should be eager to serve and yearn to be an example to others. We are to be examples of a Christ-like character."

"We should always be evaluating the true essence of our hearts. The motive behind what we do in ministry is more important than what we actually do. I need to keep in check all the time why I'm doing what I do."

"If we do what we do for any kind of earthly reward we are being very foolish. We will soon find ourselves bitter and resentful in our service. If we are laboring for an eternal reward, then we count all the losses and sacrifices as an investment in eternity."

"...Prayer Changes Things..."

Pastor Rob Salvato, senior pastor of CC Vista, shared on the subject of personal prayer by looking at Joshua's encounter with Jesus at Jericho, and the example that Jesus gave us through His life.

"In Joshua, chapter five, we see Joshua preparing for the battle of Jericho, looking for a battle strategy. What he needed to do was get his heart in alignment with the Lord. He needed to spend time with Him. One thing we see in Joshua's response to his encounter with the Lord is a heart of submission. That is an important step in getting our hearts in alignment with the Lord. Submitting our will to Him! Be concerned primarily about the Lord's will, the Lord's way, and the Lord's time. The real issue here is to determine if we are with Jesus. Prayer is not getting our will done in heaven. Prayer is getting God's will done on earth."

"Prayer changes things. The first thing it does is change us. We need to get our hearts in alignment with Jesus,

seeking His heart. This is one of the aspects of personal prayer."

"When we look at the life of Jesus, we see that He is a perfect example of this. He desired to be in His Father's will; in His Father's time. In Mark, chapter one, we see Jesus spend an entire day and night ministering to others. Early the next morning before the sun rose, He went to a secret place to spend time with His heavenly Father."

"Jesus was a man of prayer. Now if Jesus needed to be a man of prayer, imagine how much more we need to be men and women of prayer."

Pastor Kostya, from the Ural Mountains, didn't miss any of the teachings during the four-day conference. His thirst for the Word could not be quenched. He watched in appreciation as the dozen members from his church listened intently. Misha 25, and Natasha 22, were among those from his church attending the conference. Both were in leadership within their local fellowship. They had met at church, fallen in love, and decided to marry. They had dreamed of getting

married in a large facility with their fellow believers around them, sharing in God's special moment for them. With the help of some of CCCPM missionaries in Moscow, they made arrangements for their wedding to take place in the meeting hall on the last day of the conference.

Both sets of parents journeyed to Moscow. The women at the conference had

for God's Word



Pastor Rob Salvato prayed one-on-one with many missionaries and pastors.



The wedding of Misha and Natasha was a wonderful ending to the conference.

festively decorated the hall for this special occasion. As the ceremony began, Natasha appeared on her father's arm, radiant in her wedding gown. There was a collective sigh and spontaneous applause for the glowing bride and her husband.

Pastor Kostya performed the ceremony in Russian, and it was interpreted in English. A beaming Misha, his eyes moist, led his new bride out of the hall amidst the congratulations of fellow believers. Their dream had been realized, opening the door for a wonderful beginning of their life together as husband and wife.

The marriage of Natasha and Misha was a wonderful ending for the conference, and left everyone with thoughts of new beginnings.

"Truly, Russia is within our reach."

As the missionaries, pastors, and church leaders departed the conference, they were challenged, encouraged, and refreshed. With grateful hearts they thanked the Americans who had come to serve, and the CCCPM staff who had worked so diligently to pull it all together. Their excitement for the year of ministry ahead of them was evident, and they

are already looking forward to the next conference.

It was with a sense of confidence that they held on to the message Pastor George had shared: "Keeping our focus on the Lord, and remembering our goals, to evangelize the lost and disciple the saved, in the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, Russia is within our reach."



Debbi Bryson, with Sasha translating, spent most of her time at the conference ministering to the women.

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CCCPM 2000 Schedule

Many dates are pending confirmation and/or airfare reservations. Please call (760) 639-4433 or 800-33CCCPM (800-332-2276) or email cccpr@cccpr.org

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| Calvary Chapel of the High Desert, CA | Moscow | May 1 to 11, 2000 |
| Summer Intern Program | Moscow | Jun 12 to Aug 31, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Everett, WA | Novosibirsk | Jun 24 to July 8, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of the South Bay, CA | Moscow | Jun 29 to Jul 10, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Chino Valley, CA | Moscow | Jul 10 to 20, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, CA | Moscow | Jul 19 to 31, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, PA | Moscow | Aug 7 to 18, 2000 |
| High Desert Church | N. Novgorod/Moscow | Sept 15 to 27, 2000 |
| Firefighters for Christ Int'l | | |
| Peace Officers for Christ Int'l | Moscow/N. Novgorod | Sept 15 to 27, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Spokane, WA | Sochi | Sept 19 to 29, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Vista, CA | Moscow | Oct 2 to 12, 2000 |
| Calvary Chapel of Modesto, CA (Prpsd.) | Moscow (Plant) | Oct 23 to Nov 2, 2000 |
| City Calvary Chapel, WA (Prpsd) Proposed (Tntv) Tentative (Plant) Church Plant | Krasnodar (Plant) | Nov 2 to 13, 2000 |