



The Bridge Report

RUSSIA: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF CERKOV MOST – BRIDGE CHURCH



In the middle of March, a joyous celebration took place in St. Petersburg, Russia: The 20th anniversary of the founding of *CERKOV MOST* (“*BRIDGE CHURCH*”).

In prior years, we have featured the Bridge Bible school in St. Pete several times in our reports, but the story on how we began our outreaches into the city, is yet to be told. It is a story whereby a few individuals appeared to cross paths just by chance — but looking in retrospect two decades later, we understand now that they were instruments in God’s hands; partakers of His unfolding plans to reach the peoples across the vast Russian empire with the Good News of His love!

This story begins in 1989. The Soviet Union (USSR) was still closed to outsiders, although cracks in the Iron Curtain had begun to be visible through negotiations between the heads of state of respectively the United States and the USSR, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. During that era, terms like *perestroika* (“rebuilding”) and *glasnost* (“openness”) became part of the debate. The stronghold of atheist communism, however, still had the Russian population firmly in its grip, so the few active Christian believers, the underground church at large, and Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel (“*Refuseniks*”), were still being oppressed and persecuted.

In the early 80’ties I had worked with an East European mission in Germany whose purpose was to serve the suffering church behind the Iron Curtain. Upon my return to the States in 1983, I founded The Bridge International, and in 1987, one of my coworkers in Germany, Bram Oosterwijk, returned to Holland and opened the Dutch Bridge office. Through the vehicle of The Bridge, we continued to work together in serving and equipping the believers in Eastern Europe, but our burden had expanded to also include Russia!



New Wine (Doke and Olga front center)

Doke, Bram’s wife, a talented professional classical singer, felt led with a few of her colleagues to lay aside their classical training and form a worship group they named New Wine. They were drawn toward the plea and suffering of the many Russian *Refuseniks* who had been refused exit from Russia to move to Israel. These young musicians planned to travel to Russia and use their talents to minister God’s love to the Jewish people by singing Old Testament Scripture portions in Russian, set to Jewish music.



Bart Repko and his wife, Joke

Introducing **Bart Repko**, a Christian documentary film-maker from Holland who was friends with the

Oosterwijks. In the mid-80’ties he had traveled undercover into Siberia and lived with a Jewish family for a few months while clandestinely filming their preparation to leave Russia. Then he followed them with his camera along the secret route that brought them to Israel, while keeping this family’s identity and the route secret. His documentary was later aired on Christian TV across Europe, giving public awareness to the oppression of the *Refuseniks*.



Piet (left) with ministry team in Russia

On the above backdrop, we now find ourselves in **St. Petersburg, Russia in June 1989**. Our Bridge East European Director in Holland, **Piet van Walsem** and **Bart** had teamed up on a short term mission trip to Russia to “scout out the land”. In St. Petersburg they “happened” to meet **Olga Sollertinsky**, a young professional Jewish woman who spoke English well. She was fascinated by the foreigners from the West who had come to minister to her people. Olga helped Piet schedule local meetings for New Wine’s who visited Russia the following month.

Here, **Nina Smirnova** comes into the picture. She was a coworker of

CONT.. **RUSSIA: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF
CERKOV MOST (BRIDGE CHURCH)**



Nina (left) interpreting Derek Prince teaching

Olga's, and was also fluent in English. "Olga asked me if I would come with her to a meeting where a music group from Holland would sing and talk about God's love", recalls Nina. She went and ended up attending all three meetings that had been scheduled. "The worship by New Wine and the preaching touched me deeply. I had never before heard a message like the foreigners spoke — that **God is real — He is my Heavenly Father who loves me!** Miraculously, I knew they were speaking the truth! No one had ever prayed for me before. When one of them did, I had my first vision. I knew that these people were very special and sincere, so somehow, I could trust them."

After New Wine and the Bridge team left St. Petersburg, Olga invited the few new believers weekly to her apartment where they would read the Bible, share needs, and pray. "Piet had taught us on the Father's love, so we focused on praying to Him, but we did not yet understand how Jesus fit into it all—that came later."

In the fall, Piet called Nina and asked if she could come to **Lithuania** to interpret for The Bridge team, so in Oc-

tober, she participated in several meetings in **Vilnius**. "For the first time, I saw people being touched by God and healed from physical and emotional sicknesses". At the end of 1989, Olga emigrated to Israel. She gave Nina her apartment, so Nina took over the leadership of the weekly fellowship group which gathered there. New believers were added to the flock, most of them friends and colleagues, and together, they grew in faith and knowledge.

In March, 1990, Nina was again invited by Piet to join a Bridge team who sponsored a Christian conference in **Vilnius**. She brought seven people with her from Russia to assist the team. "I started out interpreting. When I was asked to pray for the people., I would feel the pain of the person I prayed for, and then I watched them be healed! As I cried for them, God healed my broken heart. The presence of God's love and the power of the Holy Spirit was so strong — many gave their lives to the Lord." One young woman who had been unable to conceive, gave birth to a baby a year after Nina had prayed for her. After the conferences, **a new church was planted in Vilnius!** Cont...



1995 Bible school w/ P. van Hoesen (front right) teaching and Nina (red skirt) interpreting.

FROM R.K.'S CORNER

We are deeply grateful to God and all of you who have stood with us and supported us in prayer and encouraging words through Steve's battle with prostate cancer. Ten days ago, we received confirmation that **STEVE IS HEALED!**

Five weeks after his surgery, his blood tested zero PSA! That means that there are no prostate cells left in his body; the cancer was eradicated - no therapy necessary! The doctors warn us, however, not to use the term "*cancer-free*", but rather the more cautionary "*cancer-survivor*". They say there is a small chance the cancer might return in a different form.

Our perspective is a bit different, as our response is the same as after my own bout with breast cancer in 2004: I was healed and now Steve is healed! If cancer is to be found at a later date, we will look at that as a completely new situation, whereby we will again enter the walk of faith and draw on God's grace, mercy, and power for healing and restoration! THANKS AGAIN!

Enjoy the report from Russia on the fruits from 20 years of ministry of the MOST Church!

... **Cont** Eventually Nina's apartment became too small for the expanding group of new believers, so in January 1991, they rented a hall for worship and fellowship where they have remained. **In 1992, Cerkov Most ("Bridge Church") was registered and Nina was ordained Pastor.** It was obvious that she had a proven track-record in serving everybody around her with a pastoral gift.

During the early 90'ties, Nina expanded her travels as interpreter for The Bridge teams into parts of Russia and Kazakhstan. She became the official Bridge contact person in Russia, arranging conferences, organizing and networking the many short-term Bridge ministry teams visiting Russia. Later, as Director of the Bible school in St. Petersburg, she administrated the school and arranged travel schedules and logistics for the visiting teachers. She gained the respect among community and governmental leaders, and was gradually regarded as equal co-worker in God's vineyard by local pastors, bishops and church leaders in Russia.

In 1996, Nina (now **Dal Cin**) met her husband, Rolf, got married and moved to his homeland, Switzerland. **The MOST Church continues to live on!** Always small in numbers, and without flash and flare, **this group of committed believers keeps serving and equipping others, one by one, and releasing them into the harvest. The fruit is seen today in the lives of so many Russian church leaders who serve others as they were served: with the Father's love!**



13762 State Road 84, Suite 423
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33325
USA

Ragnhild K. Ulrich ("R.K.")
Executive Director

Tel 1.954.916.0521
Fax 1.954.916.8740

E-Mail:
TheBridge@BridgeInternational.org
Website:

www.BridgeInternational.org

**LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO
REACH THE UNREACHED**

**Did you know you can
contribute online via our
website? Click and see!**