

Russia – A “Forgotten Country”

Audio Blog by Gregg Harris, President – FEBC

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Recently, I’ve begun to think of Russia as a “Forgotten Country.” This may sound strange given the fact that Russia and its powerful leader Vladimir Putin are regularly in the news. As a matter of fact, Mr. Putin’s picture just recently appeared prominently on the cover of Time Magazine, having been chosen as their “Person of the Year” with the subtitle: Tsar of the New Russia.

There’s been a lot of talk about the “new Russia”, especially the area of the increased economic strength the country has enjoyed due to their oil reserves.

But for all this attention, I still call Russia a “Forgotten Country.” Why? Because I believe many in the Church have forgotten that Russia remains one of the most populous, yet least reached countries on earth.

With a population of 147 million, Russia is the 8th largest country in the world. It spans 1/6th of the landmass of the entire globe and contains 11 time zones. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, tremendous energy and attention were given to the task of bringing the gospel to those behind “the Iron Curtain” with a particular emphasis on Russia. As Russia experienced more openness in the early 1990s, many Christian ministries poured into the country. But today, almost 20 years after that historic event, less than 1% of the population of the country are evangelical Christians. Societal problems abound. Here are some facts that should concern all Christians:

- More than 50% of Russian marriages end up in divorce.
- Another major area of concern for the family in Russia is violence. One in every four families in Russia experiences some kind of domestic violence.
- Russia’s demographic situation is dire. For several years now the population has been shrinking by 700 thousand every year. Starting this year, the government is actually paying people to have children to encourage higher birth rates. Ironically, though, Russia has one of the highest abortion rates in the world.
- Alcoholism, a problem that has long plagued Russia is a *growing* problem. In some areas of the country, the consumption of alcohol grew 20% during the last year.
- Russia has as many as two million children who are “social orphans,” children who have parents but are choosing (or forced) to live outside of their homes. Russia has more orphans now than after WWII when they lost 27 million people. Alcoholism and drug abuse are the main culprits behind this tragic societal trend.

While this picture may appear discouraging, we must remember that nothing is impossible with God. Many ministries have faithfully ministered to Russia long before and long after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Media has played a major role in bringing the Gospel to Russia and continues to do so. Radio has a particularly important role to play as it can cover massive land areas and touch millions simultaneously. One encouraging statistic came from a research study that showed Far East Broadcasting Company in Russia has 2 million regular listeners.

So, while today, I am calling Russia a forgotten country, it is my prayer that Christians around the world will remember Russia...and will turn their hearts and minds to the largest least reached country in the world.

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