

# ACTS OF ADVOCACY



In late January, we spent some time in one of the many shelters for at-risk children in SPB. Here's a few of the girls showing off new winter hats given by one of the US short-term teams we assist.

## Greetings to our brothers and sisters in Christ from Russia!

We understand many of you have seen a good bit of snow this winter, as we have here in St. Petersburg. Snow has fallen almost every day since our return in early January, which has made for lots of shoveling (and sledding)! It has also left the city looking absolutely gorgeous.

Given some of the struggles we experienced in our first year, and the long, 4-month furlough we spent in the U.S., we honestly did not know how we would feel to be back here in Russia this winter. This year we are living in a different flat – just 2 rooms – located about 15 kilometers south of SPB in a little town called Pushkin. Also, I (Miki) am starting a new position teaching English at a school in Pushkin, which allows us to be in the country without restriction for the year, but which also means a new commitment for the family to work into our lives.

Today marks one month since we returned to SPB, and I decided to take the kids to McDonald's (well, and to the grocery store), both to give them a treat and Charlie a couple of quiet hours to catch up on some audio work. It was a particularly cold day today – about 5 degrees Fahrenheit – but the sun was shining and the snow drifts were sparkling. On our way home, as we were driving into the open valley between SPB and Pushkin, I noticed that, because the day was so unusually clear, I was able to see one of the tall smoke stacks rising up from a factory of some sort several miles in front of us.

I remember the very first time I came to St. Petersburg in 2001. When the bus picked us up from the airport and drove us to Pavlovsk, which I now know also took us right by that same smoke stack, I remember thinking how dirty, intimidating and uninviting it seemed.

**So I can only thank God for His work in my life, in that when I saw that smoke stack today, I immediately felt a tremendous sense of comfort and joy and blessing fill my spirit, as this place is now my home.**

Those of you who know of some of our struggles with culture shock and being away from family will also know that this

confirmation for me today could only be because of the Lord's work in our lives, and in His creating for us a home here. It is bittersweet, of course, because it means letting go even more of our lives as we know them back in the U.S. But I can't express how much His faithfulness has meant to me in these days, as well as the countless prayers I know many of you have been sending up on our behalves in these past few years.

Charlie and I have felt in our returning that we've needed to be careful not to just jump back into life as we knew it last year, but that we've needed to walk slowly these first several weeks.

**Honestly, there is so much work here that pulls at our hearts, but we have wanted to step back and give God room to open the specific doors into which He wants us to walk.**

One such door into which I'm feeling His leading is into a ministry of healing prayer. Currently, I know of no official Christian Healing Ministry in the city, but the Lord has led me into many wonderful relationships over the years, and more recently, into many amazing conversations and meetings, that seem to be converging a bit at this time to begin to form a healing ministry in St. Petersburg.

One example is the dinner we had at our home this past week with a couple of Russian friends who are involved in ministry in the area. The entire conversation was laced with stories of individuals they knew who they said were spiritually broken – some they knew who'd been in ministry but had to stop due to overwhelming spiritual circumstances. Then one friend mentioned some office space she owned in the center of the city, and that she was needing some help finding people to use the space for meetings to help her cover the cost of utilities each month.

I told her a little about my desire to begin a healing prayer ministry, and that I wondered if her space might be appropriate for meetings. I expected her, of course, to be very eager for us to begin meeting at her space. Interestingly enough, however, she hesitated with her answer – which leads me to another door the Lord seems to be opening for us in these days. The complication with using her space for our prayer meetings, our friend explained, is the fact that she is a practicing Russian Orthodox believer. The few meetings that are currently held there each month are Bible readings and a youth meeting of Orthodox believers.

"A couple of times different Western, protestant pastors have wanted to rent my space for meetings," she explained. "But when they saw the space, and saw the Russian Orthodox icons that are there, they told me they would not be able to have protestant believers come there." She knew I'd spoken to a Russian, Methodist pastor in the area about this ministry also, and expressed concern that protestant believers may not be comfortable meeting in a space used primarily by Russian Orthodox believers. I think she was surprised by my answer:

"But I do not feel that this ministry is supposed to be just a Western, protestant ministry," I told her. "I feel that the healing ministry the Lord is calling me into should be inter-denominational. I think we're supposed to do this with our Russian Orthodox brothers and sisters." So we're going to meet this next week at the office space, and I pray for wisdom and discernment to know whether it is the place the Lord has

*Continued from page 1...*

for us to begin meeting and learning and training for intensive inner and physical healing in the Lord Jesus. I also ask for your prayers in this, as there are many pieces and persons that the Lord has yet to reveal to us, and as I can sense that this is something the enemy very much does NOT want on many levels. **I ask for prayers of protection and guidance, and that my desires will not inhibit the Lord's leading and truth.**

Another shift we are feeling as the Lord positions us for work this year is in regard to the particular individuals with whom He seems to be calling us into ministry. In a conversation we had recently with a Russian who currently receives foreign support for her ministry, she said, "Miki, if the money stopped coming in from this supporter tomorrow, it would not stop me from doing the work to which the Lord has called me." This statement brought not only conviction to my heart about how much of my time I spend worrying about whether the money will be there each month, but it also gave me a great lesson on trusting the Lord to open the doors to do the work to which He's called us (as opposed to my more common practice of finding a way to make the doors open myself!).

At a meeting with an orphanage director a couple of weeks ago, I asked the director what she thought was the best ways that we could support the staff there. She gave two answers: First, coming with activities for the kids that give the staff breaks was a very good help to them. "And second," she said, "When you say you're going to be here, then be here." **Being there.** It reminds me of God's promise never to leave us or forsake us (Joshua 1:5).

Charlie has a good friend in the city who is an amazing musician, and who is working on producing better and better Russian, Christian albums. Charlie stopped by to pick up some equipment from him a couple of weeks ago, and he asked Charlie to listen to some of the music he's working on for an album they're trying to get out this season. They ended up talking for almost 3 hours about different sounds and engineering techniques to achieve those goals.

We've come to know a couple of Russian pastors in town, who serve in protestant churches, and who sometimes struggle with discerning between what is the Lord's guidance, and what is simply a tradition of the protestant church under which they serve. We know a Russian woman who feels called to minister within the Russian Orthodox Church, and to help Russian Orthodox believers understand the Biblical and spiritual references to the traditions they practice in their church today.

We know several young believers - many of whom grew up in orphanages - who are making big decisions, and who are truly struggling and desiring to do that which will please the Lord in their lives.

I can tell you that each of these individuals is just like you and me, in that they truly desire to do the very best they can with the lives they're each living. And each seems to be called into distinct areas of ministry or service, whether directly with orphaned children on a day to day basis, or into Christian music ministry, or where ever else they may be called. **But one thing they share alone is that they are all Russian individuals - and whether we like to admit it or not, for that reason they are greatly equipped to serve and minister to other Russians in ways that Charlie and I will never be.**

So, with this reality, we are feeling more and more the call to simply come up beside those here who are really doing the work of the Lord, both in order to encourage them, but mostly to learn

from them. We pray that Lord will truly give us hearts of servants toward our dear brothers and sisters here - that we may lay down more and more any pre-judgment we may be carrying with us both about who they are and about what we feel they should be doing, and that we may trust the Lord to do His work as He desires, in His perfect way.

Due to delays in our work visa, we are currently here on a 3-month "homestay" visa, which expires in early April. At that time, assuming our invitations for our work visa are ready, we will drive over to Estonia where we will apply and wait for our approved work visa - hopefully no more than 3 weeks.

If our invitations are not ready at that time, then we will be in Estonia indefinitely - until the work visa invitation is ready. We understand that this process is fairly straight-forward, and that there really is no reason for us to be worried about any major delays or changes in our plans to work and live here in St. Petersburg.

But we do ask for your prayers in this process at this time. With our kids just settling into their new home here, of course we'd love to have as little interruption with time in Estonia as possible. On the other hand, there is a lot of work happening in Estonia with some partner ministries, which we've been invited to visit. If the Lord desires for us to spend some time there working with these ministries, we want to be open to that, and to trust Him that He's carrying our children and will provide a place for them to be comfortable there as He has here.

**We appreciate so much the honor of being called by our Lord and supported by your faithfulness to live and work here in St. Petersburg. Please write us or call us and let us know how things are for you! Love and blessings to you all in Christ Jesus!**

**Miki, Charlie, Isabel and Jasper**



**Ways to donate to this ministry:**

**To make a donation by check:**

- send a check to the following address, noting "Chastain/Russia 322" in the memo:

The Mission Society  
6234 Crooked Creek Road  
Norcross, GA 30092

**To make a donation by credit card or debit:**

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Either contact us via email or phone (678-436-3016) so that we can send you the appropriate documentation, or go to our website: [www.actsofadvocacy.org](http://www.actsofadvocacy.org) and click on "Give" to go to the Mission Society "donations" page.