

ACTS OF ADVOCACY

Charlie and a friend in Ryazan



And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Colossians 1:17)

Miki and I realize that our first year "on the field" is somewhat unique in comparison to many, if not most, first-term missionaries. Where most may travel to their intended field one or two times before moving, we had almost 8 years of short-term experience working in Russia before we paid our first rent check in St. Petersburg. This was mostly in the form of bi-yearly visits for 2+ weeks in efforts toward helping at-risk kids. While the exposure was limited compared to actually living here full-time, it gave us enough of a "taste" to consider working towards moving to Russia.

Among the many things that have made this first year so very challenging (having a child abroad, a new language, culture shock, etc.), laying that body of previous work down has been, for me personally, among the most trying. Miki and I made the decision, with guidance from many, to set the majority of our work aside for the first year in order to better assimilate into Russian society, focus on our family's transition and prepare for the arrival of our son. We felt like this would only help our longevity and effectiveness for the future.

While the fruits of our decision have been abundant for the most part, it's the bad days in which we've felt as though the whole decision to move to Russia was a gigantic mistake. We could easily start asking ourselves, "What are we doing here if we're not helping these kids we know and love?" When a rough language class would throw us off the hinges, we would ask, "Why are we doing this if we can't get the language?" The worst, however, has been when we would start questioning the impact of our move on our marriage and kids. Stress is natural in a transition like this, but boy, has it felt like a constant barrage! It's hard not to wonder, for example, if our kids will pay for this later in life. It's hard to watch our normally outgoing child shy away on the playground because she's not sure if she can communicate. It can be heartbreaking.

During those rough times, the temptation was to feel like there needed to be a justification for our presence here- and we'd start thinking about ministry work again. It would have been so much easier to have "hit the ground running" upon arrival and

expand our work from day one. But at what price? Would we feel as comfortable as we do now if we had been working in the orphanages and shelters full-time, relying on interpreters and trying to take our short-term processes and put them in a day-to-day perspective? I doubt it.

I mention all this to say that it feels like we've turned a corner. God was faithful and kept us "sane" enough to press on, and now our ministry work is starting to pick up steam. We're finishing up our language classes for this year, and our work with Love Russia USA is becoming more concrete day by day.

I've just returned from Moscow, where I spent a week visiting some of Love Russia UK's nearby projects. The goal was to find programs that we could possibly mirror in St. Petersburg, and to connect with the regional government officials with the hope that they would be advocates for us in St. Petersburg as we begin to build our programs there.

My time in the Moscow area revealed a lot to me. I saw the fruits of collaboration with local government and the impact that it can make in the lives of orphans- from purchasing shoes for 30 kids to renovating facilities that fell into disrepair during Russia's economic turbulence over the last 2 decades. I witnessed the impact of international collaboration between doctors and physical therapists: Children who would be sedated and bed-bound in the St. Petersburg facilities in which we work are moving freely (and happily) throughout the halls of an disabled orphanage in Yerlatma. British health care providers have worked with this orphanage for years to implement programs to help these kids get out of their beds, increase their movement and developmental capacity- so much that Love Russia is considering adding on to the orphanage so the kids have somewhere to move about! Reflecting on Love Russia UK's work: I've seen physical needs met, conditions improved, lives changed, hearts opened and more possibilities to come. This is why Miki and I felt God was telling us to say "yes" when Love Russia asked us to join their US team.

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But upon arrival back in St. Petersburg after my week in Moscow, I was surprised by my low spirit. Looking back on almost 10 years of work here, I remember thinking at various times, "if we only had the resources" or "I know how to fix this issue". You would think, now that we're working with a group that *does* have the resources and a *track record* of improving the situation for orphans, that I'd be joyful. I thought that's the way I'd be as well.

But all I could see that entire week was the faces of God's children. Children built to be loved and adored by parents. Children created to reveal the majesty of God in public- not behind closed doors in rural facilities in Russia. Though their lives have experienced a vast improvement in many ways- they're still lacking some of the most vital things that make us *whole*. Things that Love Russia (or any other charity) can't provide. The kids are still looking at me with longing- wondering if I'm the one who'll take them home. I haven't felt such a desire to run away and try to forget what I've seen since my first visit long ago. But this time it was not because I was unprepared, but for a different reason- all the things that I thought were needed to "fix" the tragedy of orphanhood are in front of me and at my disposal and I now know *its only the beginning of what needs to be done*.

Quite a gut-check moment for me. Forgive me Lord for once again trying to do things on my own. You are the only answer.

This is not to say that Love Russia's projects aren't done with the love of Jesus intertwined throughout- because they are and for that I'm truly excited. It's just that we don't have the ability to pull these children out of facilities and deliver them to loving families. We haven't figured out how to engage our Russian brothers and sisters into opening their hearts and homes to children longing for their affection. We haven't figured out how to encourage young mothers to keep their children in the first place. We haven't figured out how to convince some of you out there to trade in your monthly giving for a plane ticket here to let your heart be broken so that you can advocate for them as well. We haven't figured out how to ***truly be Jesus*** for these kids. The resources are the easy part! ***It's the prayer and time and sacrifice and heartache and engagement and awareness that must increase.***

As our first year in Russia is coming to a close, these are just a few of the things that I feel like God is pressing on me at the moment.

I wish I could say to all of you that our presence here makes all the difference to at-risk children in Russia, but I can't. I understand that we are just one small drop in a bucket of unanswered questions. We've chosen to continue to follow Jesus as He commands to help these kids here, but now with a better understanding of our place in the whole picture. In the next few newsletters and blogs we'll be introducing you to some new projects we've started in the last 2 months. I hope you'll see these projects as opportunities to consider where God may be leading you in regards to *your* drop in the bucket of Russia.

Every Blessing!
Charlie, Miki, Isabel & Jasper



We're coming to the States!!!

IN MID-AUGUST 2010, WE HAVE TO COME TO THE U.S.A. TO RENEW OUR RUSSIAN VISAS. WE WILL RETURN TO RUSSIA JANUARY 2011 ON MIKI'S WORK VISA!
DURING OUR 4 MONTHS HOME, WE WANT TO SEE AS MANY OF YOU AS POSSIBLE. PLEASE CONTACT US SOON TO SET UP DATES FOR THE CHASTAINS TO VISIT YOUR CHURCH. WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN!



We finally have the van! God is faithful!
Thank you all for your prayers and donations to help make this possible!

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 electronic debit:

- go to our website: www.actsofadvocacy.org and click on "Give" to go to the Mission Society "donations" page.

To make a monthly pledge:

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 and click on "Give" to go to the Mission Society "donations" page.

TO MAKE A SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION FOR THE VAN PURCHASE, PLEASE SPECIFY "CHASTAIN VEHICLE" ON YOUR CHECK NOTE OR ONLINE DONATION.