



Monthly Missions Focus: Russia



Area: 17,075,400 sq.km. The world's largest country extending across 11 time zones between the Baltic and the Pacific – approximately 1.8 times the size of the US

Population: 143,420,309 (July 2005 est.)

Capital Moscow 13,200,000.

Ethnic groups: Russian 79.8%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 2%, Bashkir 1.2%, Chuvash 1.1%, other or unspecified 12.1% (2002 census).

Literacy 99.6%. Official language Russian; local languages in autonomous republics. All languages 96.

Politics: Russia has known little but autocracy or tyranny since it became a country in the 8th Century.

Religion: Freedom of religion written into the constitution. Christian 54.07%, non-Religious 31.08%, Muslim 10.2%, Other 2.5%,

Traditional ethnic 1.1%, Buddhist 0.7%, Jewish 0.32%, Baha'i 0.03%

Answers to Prayer

- 🌐 The spectacular collapse of Communism in 1990-1991 with little bloodshed was a direct answer to prayer.
- 🌐 The Bible is now freely available after years of costly 'smuggling' of God's Word. Between one and two million Bibles are printed and distributed in Russia every year.
- 🌐 Many hitherto totally unreached peoples – Muslim, superficially 'Orthodox' pagans and Buddhist – were given the opportunity to hear the gospel for the first time, and in many the first churches were planted.

Challenges for Prayer

- 🌐 Pray that Christian values of loving, sacrificial service and moral integrity might dispel the corrosive impact and legacy of Communism on both society and the Christian Church.
- 🌐 Godly Christian evangelical leaders are too few – lack of training in the past, lack of funding today and the loss of many through emigration contribute to this lack. Foreigners cannot fill the gap, but can assist in strengthening local churches and their leadership.
- 🌐 Vision for outreach. Pray for:
 - ▶ Church planting. There is probably a gospel preaching church in Russia for every 30,000 people, and such churches are unevenly distributed.
 - ▶ Missions vision.

(Statistics are compiled from *Operation World* and *CIA – The World Factbook*)

Shamanistic Nivkh People of Russia

The Soviet government changed the Nivkh way of life drastically. At one time the Nivkh people showed artistic talent in woodworking, metalworking and making clothes. They loved the sea and fishing. In 1930 the government officially named them the Nivkh and gathered them into settlements. The pantheistic Nivkh people believed hurting the earth was a sin, but they were forced to become lumbermen or agricultural laborers. Since that time, many Nivkh people have returned to fishing, and many have made a meager living by herding reindeer. But some things have not changed since the days of the Soviet Union. The Russian government has invalidated their fishing and land rights, though some still fish illegally. Their homeland is being used for drilling oil. They have no other skills, and change is coming hard to them. Many are turning to alcohol. Since they already feel a need, this would be an excellent time for us to pray them into God's Kingdom. Many would say they are Orthodox Christians, but in practice they continue their traditional shamanistic and pantheistic religions. Their faith is in the spirit world, not in Jesus Christ.

(*Global Prayer Digest – November 29, 2005*)

Buddhist Kalmyks of Russia

This is the only Buddhist people group in Europe! The 100,000 Kalmyks represent a piece of the Tibetan World in a Russian republic that straddles Europe and Asia. They have a turbulent and unique history.

Four hundred years ago the Mongols forcefully swept across Western China. Some of them settled in what is now Kalmykia in Russia. These people adopted their own unique form of Tibetan Buddhism. They formed an alliance with the Russian Czar. During World War II, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin grew suspicious of the Kalmyks and exiled them to Siberia. When the Kalmyks returned home in 1957, their Buddhist temples were gone. Under harsh life in Siberia, their Buddhist culture was gone as well. Now, under the leadership of a very wealthy elected president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, they are experiencing a Buddhist revival complete with the building of many Tibetan Buddhist temples. Tibetan Buddhism is turning the hearts of their youths back to their roots. The Kalmyks are also pondering whether to allow Ilyumzhinov to gain more power, or try to establish a Western style democracy. (*Global Prayer Digest – October 18, 2005*)