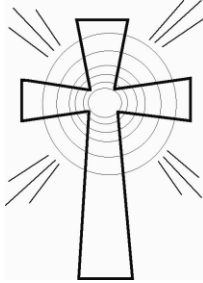


# **Three Swedes on a Mission: The Beginnings of Christian Radio *in* Russia**



By Christian Radio for Russia  
[www.CRFR.org](http://www.CRFR.org)



edit: 10/30/16



**TABLE OF CONTENTS: Three Swedes on a Mission:  
The Beginnings of Christian radio in Russia**

Introduction .....	i
Chapter I. Fact Sheet of Mission: Challenge, Hardship, Reward.....	1
Chapter II. The Beginnings of a new Movement in the Church.....	11
Chapter III. Getting in through the Backdoor.....	23
Chapter IV. Another Swede's Journey Begins.....	30
Chapter V. Missionary Radio Potential in the New Russia.....	42
Chapter VI. The Battle for Christian Radio commences.....	48
Chapter VII. God's Victory in Magadan: A Diary account of NLR.....	61
Chapter VIII. Time to Reach the Nation with the Gospel.....	70
Chapter IX. New Life Radio on the Air from Moscow.....	83
Chapter X. Continuing the Mission: the Future of Christian Radio in Russia.....	100
endnotes .....	111

## INTRODUCTION

Stories. Most of us are drawn to stories. The incredible diversity of life and history throughout time gives ample material to create the tales that regale us, challenge us, and hopefully to change us in some way.

This story is about the greatest story we have, and the impact of that story on the lives of a few individuals who were committed beyond all measure, to share that story with those they were called to witness to.

The story concerns Jesus. Its about what he did for mankind, what he went through to help us understand what our lives were truly about, and how he guided those called to share his life with the world. John makes it all very clear: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have eternal life.* Once believing, it is our privilege and duty to act on what he said.

Featured are a handful of characters, called to carry out what Jesus described in Matthew 28 as the *Great Commission*, to proclaim his story to the ends of the world. And the ends we will look at are in Alaska and Russia.

They say Swedes are stubborn, or maybe, persistent. In this case, that characteristic is a foundational one for the people described in this story. What could drive three young men, armed with a passion and calling to do something incredible, maybe impossible, and how could they continue to take on a quest that most would readily dismiss as unthinkable?

It is in the challenge of the impossible that the endeavor of the spirit becomes possible. For the main notables in this story, the call of God to take on their assigned task at the greatest of odds, is the miracle of living the Christian life day by day, event by event, until the time when the task is completed.

Our story spans the ages, but we will look at a slice of time, of cultures, of nations, technology, and possibilities experienced by a few men and ultimately thousands more. How could three Swedes take on the biggest nation on the planet, in the effort to share the Gospel with the entire world? And how would they accomplish it? Without any sure understanding of their future, it was clear they were part of God's larger mission, moved and controlled in the manner of His own choosing and direction.

As the Russians say... Все возможно, если это угодно Богу  
(All is possible, if it is from the Lord)

This is the story of the development of Christian radio inside of Russia, from the perspective of a few men named Axel, Adolph, and Daniel.



## Chapter 1

### **A Fact sheet of Mission: CHALLENGE, HARDSHIP and REWARD**

When Jesus explained in Mark 4 the story of the sower, he gave a sobering account of what the average missionary would face in carrying out the task to share the Gospel. With absolute clarity, he told us what to expect when it comes to sharing one's faith and the many ways people would react to it and the message that frames it. The parable was played out on the path, on the rocks, in the weeds, and from our vantage point, in the world, on the boat, over the water, behind the bars, stuck in ice, bound in wilderness, facing indifference, troubled by politics, befuddled by culture, lost in translation.

And yet this did not stop the Apostles or his eventual disciples across the ages from taking up the call to go out and do as he asked, because we knew the harvest was there and that souls would be reaped in abundance to eternal life. When Jesus said the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, he knew what he was talking about. How many lonely missionaries have felt that sentiment as they ventured out to realize their calling, often in places never before evangelized, or among peoples devoid of God's Word in their life experience. But they went out, first of all, because they had been changed, their lives transformed, and the only possible course to follow was to share what they experienced.

Luke reminds the flock that Jesus warned about "sending us out like lambs among wolves" and with his dictate to not take a purse or bag or sandals, one could wonder what kind of adventure would he be sending us on. For the actors in our story, all this would mean is that God has impressed on them the need to be totally reliant on his provision, on his protection, on his direction. If the Roman soldiers killed Jesus, what less could we expect? In the unbelieving world we encounter, we take a little pity on the Apostles who sought an Israel that seemingly rejected their messiah and his message. Even Thomas had doubts, despite seeing the very power of God in Jesus' actions.

Nevertheless, we each have our duty as Christians to go out and reach all the nations, in whatever capacity God directs us. And we do it, knowing the potential hardship that comes with carrying out discipleship and running the race to its proper conclusion. What propels us is our remembering that this is all about victory, a victory that was won at the cross, and a plan of salvation that was perfectly executed. With God's power, one individual could change the world! With that assurance in hand, comes the promise of reward, that he who stands firm to the end will be saved. If ever a missionary needed to dwell on something, it is surely that.

For a Swedish youth, outside of his comfort zone of the homeland and working on hostile territory, assurance and reward had to be pillars of security where nothing else was. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let's go back to and take a particular look at sowing in a land that long remained unsown.



## **The Harvest Field: Russia**

Nearly 30 years after Jesus' resurrection, Paul was writing in his Roman prison cell the words of encouragement and teaching that would equip subsequent missionaries far from the environs of his detention, or for that matter, the birthplace of the faith—the holy city of Jerusalem. The mission field was dramatically expanding, spreading west and north to various parts of the Roman Empire. The New Testament was being formed as the Church grew in conjunction with the mission Christ had set forth at Bethany. God's word, available, living, breathing, and yet cutting, overthrowing, empowering—this was the seed of life, the tool of the missionary, and the implement for reaping the harvest. Yet it would take a very long time before the land of Russia began receiving this seed.

Legend has it that Andrew, one of Jesus' disciples, made missionary journeys in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century along the Black Sea to convert the Greeks. Eusebius quotes the early church father Origen claiming Andrew travelled as far up as the Dnieper River near the area that would eventually be known as Ukraine. History is murky and we are uncertain as to the state of the Church in these environs—though later claims during the middle ages for Andrew are the basis for his canonization as the patron saint of Ukraine and Russia.

Ever seeking new lands and people to share the Gospel, missionaries from Byzantium—centuries later—began their labors among the Eastern Slavic peoples. In the effort to present God's word in a language they could understand, two brothers worked out an alphabet (Cyrillic—named for the missionary St. Cyril who created it) that would allow them to translate the Greek text of the Bible into the local tongue of people living in the region known as the Ukraine—circa 860 AD. This version of Scripture came to be known as "Church Slavonic" and soon the people were given literature for the first time that included Eastern Orthodox Church chronicles and portrayals of the lives of the saints.

During this period, the Kievan Russ—dominated by tribes of Scandinavian descent—established a hegemony over the Slavic peoples who experienced hardship of climate and topography, yet established a way of life that had little connection with the centers of civilization to the south and west. Christianity entered an official phase in the life of the people in 988 AD when Prince Vladimir of the Russ, after shopping around for a religion (between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) and hearing reports of the great cathedrals and worship in Byzantium declared, according to legend:

“Ah, this is exactly what we need. This religion will be a good tool to build a great nation and to civilize the people. Byzantine Christianity it will be! I and all Kiev will be baptized in the Dnieper!”

So in that year, the Kievan Russian state became officially Christian. The Gospel was now proclaimed across the land, the Church developed as souls were saved, and the impact of the faith upon the people was a transformative force in the life of the nation.

The seeds of a nominally Christian Russ had been sown and both positive and negative outcomes of this were apparent when addressing the vitality and weakness of the Church. History would repeat itself: the Slavic church witnessed similarities in conformity and co-opting of the faithful believing community with official state endorsement (from the days of Roman domination of Christianity since Constantine). Forced repentance and spiritual conformity have never been hallmarks of the early Church, but such would be the case for many in the Ukrainian/Russian experience, as Orthodoxy would take the form of an autocephalous church merging national/cultural identity with the faith.

It would take centuries more for the nation to develop into the modern Russia and with its Christian heritage that we know today. The influence of the Russ eventually waned with the entry of other powers for domination in the region. This included the emergence of independent Russian principalities (1243-1556), the invasion by forces of the Eurasian Golden Horde, and the eventual victory of the Grand Principality of Moscovy (Moscow) over the Horde to secure suzerainty.

A tragedy for Byzantium (Constantinople) became a watershed moment for the Russian Church as the Turks conquered Byzantium in 1453, marking the end of the eastern Roman Empire, and the subsequent claim by the Russian Orthodox for Moscow as the THIRD ROME, the successor of Peter, and consequently, the new center of the Christian faith.

As the state was seen to be headed by God's representative, the Russian Church claimed the structure as a theocracy. It was a view that suited both Prince and Patriarch. The Russian Tsar (Caesar or king) could depend on the Church to back his claim to the divine right of kings, while the Church looked to the state to keep her members in order. Such an arrangement persists to some degree even to the present.



By the time of Tsar Ivan III (the Great) in 1462, the Church had acquired about 25% of all cultivated land in Russia. Its churches and monasteries had become incredibly wealthy, and they worked in close cooperation with the state most of the time. Not all sections of the church, however, approved of this situation. Serving a monarchy controlled by the King of the Universe and his Christ, many disciples of the faith were troubled with the influence of the Church in political affairs, the Tsar's interference in spiritual matters, the inordinate wealth of the Church, and the harsh treatment of those who disagreed with the rulers. These less than Christian practices aroused protest and debate by monks in the more contemplative orders. The protests, however, never succeeded. All who deviated from official views in any way were labeled heretics. This internal dissent was often dealt with cruelty by the combined power of Church and State.

Under these conditions, Jesus' parable of the sower continued to play out in the life of the nation and its people, with seeds scattered along the path of Russia's villages and cities. As with the seed sown on the rocks, many of the people did not respond. Among the weeds, many heard the Word and responded to it with joy, but without solid teaching or Biblical instruction—or even lack of discipleship—they quickly fell away during times of

trouble or persecution. This was a hallmark of a Russian society beset with despotic rule. Many had no interest for the Christianity that was displayed by the Tsar and Orthodox structure that ruled them.

A majority of the population could not read the Bible in its Church Slavonic language: in its place, the faithful relied on the priests to relay the elemental understanding of the creed, alongside worship based on impressive liturgy, ceremony, and the aid of religious art to tell the Biblical story. Hundreds of years passed from the time of Ivan the Great with this status quo of Russia maintaining its particular cultural and spiritual life. With every society, spiritual versus secular movements would cause changes in the nation's development and outlook, with the Church continually vying for influence in not only the spiritual, but also the moral and ethical realms of Russia's identity.

More worldly concerns became paramount in the minds of the aristocracy, with the focus on material wealth enriched by an enforced serfdom of the poor, the expansion of Russia as a great imperial empire stretching across the largest landmass in the world, and even new sources of knowledge and culture as the Russian elite came in eventual contact with the intellectual developments of Western Europe.



A good portion of the Russian peasantry would continue their adherence to the faith of the Apostles, led by their priests, comforted by a growing tradition of protective saints and hopeful in the promises of God to obtain eternal life. So interwoven in its national identity was the Orthodox creed, that any challenge to its teachings or close affiliation to the ruling forces was unimaginable, and often met with disciplined opposition by those in leadership. Like the Scandinavian nations to the west that had adopted the Augsburg Confession as a state creed, the melding of Church and state became a formidable adversary to any who questioned prevailing conditions and practices of the Church.

For those sensing the need for reformation, and to any who felt the call to go deeper into their understanding of the Christ who died for them—the answer lay in looking closer into that Word of God that held the key to their faith and ultimate destiny. It is in this process of men seeking to draw closer to Jesus, through his Word, that we now enter the focus of our unfolding story.

“But then there was the seed sown on good Russian soil, and that seed took root--some as it was watered by the movement of God coming from other places in his creation.”

---



## Chapter 2

### The Beginnings of a New Movement in the Church

Almost 70 years after Moscow's first claim to Peter's apostolic succession, the stirrings of protest and calls for reform of the established Christian (Catholic) world order were taking definitive shape, led by a monk and university professor from Wittenberg, Germany. He and his agents of change were not revolutionaries, nor overthrowers of a historical, 1500 year tradition of Christianity, but simply men and women, transformed by the living Christ, who were deeply committed to him, and passionately engaged in Jesus' mission in the world.



Martin Luther

Above all else, they believed the authority of the Bible was supreme in all matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct, and was to be trusted, over and above the traditions, history, pontifical control, and protection of the saints they had been taught, as was the case for the Russian church. As Luther's revolt answered a growing need for taking Christianity back to its historic moorings tied to Scripture and the early Church, both Catholic and Orthodox lands saw the potential for dividing asunder the established arrangement of Church and state, with a new era of independence and freedom for the individual who ultimately was answerable to God alone for his fate.

"Where is it written" became a watchword for those debating the terms of faith and practice, and Luther himself was convinced that unless it could be shown to him by Scripture, he would not change his positions on doctrine and conduct. One man against the collective Christian world seemed an unlikely calling, but clearly the power to succeed and overcome for truth was possible through his reliance on Scripture. Such boldness from resting in the assurance of God's word would become a hallmark for the many adventurers of faith that would later seek to infiltrate the Russian homeland to proclaim Christian freedom and liberty.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of the Protestant Reformation and Pietism--a renewal movement in Europe that originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century emphasizing the need for a life that is personally connected to Jesus Christ, a reliance on the Holy Spirit, personal study of the Scriptures, and a call to service—was setting the stage for a growing evangelical spirit in Europe that would be that catalyst for mission movements into the Orthodox world. Among those called to bring God's Word were missionaries from the Scandinavian nations--returning not to claim their rights under the Kievan Russ, but to promote Christ's kingdom by bringing with them a new emphasis on getting closer to God through understanding his Word. It was a venture fraught with risk, but the called came, as simple purveyors of a story that could bring *new life* and peace to all willing to hear. They were to sow seed, and through watering it with a new emphasis on the Scriptures, using personal and collective Bible studies, new fruit would develop.

In 1813, the British Bible Society was officially established in St. Petersburg, and from there, *colporteurs* (Bible distributors) travelled throughout Russia selling Bibles and

reading the Gospels in public places. A Russian Bible Society was formed the same year, and work on a new version called “Synodal” began, though it would take over 60 years to complete the Old and New Testament into final form, due to the activities of the Society being interrupted several times by reactionary policies of the Russian Government.<sup>1</sup>

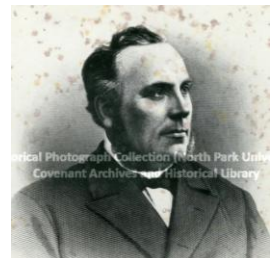
They brought the Word of God to people in a commonly understood Russian language for the first time. This effort was a beachhead for the later evangelical movement in Russia. Small pockets of Christian communities in the nation developed, taking their faith seriously, holding their Bibles close, while often facing scrutiny or oppression from local Orthodox leaders and priests. Yet armed with God’s Word in a dialect they could understand and grow in, the seeds they sowed were reaping results in a new, and for the authorities, troubling way. It is in this background that our Swedish subjects come into the forefront of this story.

Sweden had a troubled history with Russia, with wars back and forth in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, ending with Peter the Great’s securing Swedish lands along the Gulf of Finland, and access to the sea via his new settlement at St. Petersburg. While there was no love lost between the countries, Russia’s elite had a grudging respect for a culturally and technologically advanced Sweden, though they despised their Lutheran orientation and the growing evangelical fervor that was developing strong into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Like their British counterparts, Evangelicals in Sweden were developing similar strategies for new mission endeavors that included greater availability of the Scriptures and societies to promote the study of them. These believers maintained their Lutheran identities and connections with the state church while at the same time, promoting reforms and a greater emphasis on holiness and Godly living. They wanted their congregations to be alive, reliant on the Word, and ready to serve in promoting God’s mission to the world, even to regions thousands of miles away (ie., Africa) or to their next door neighbors over in Russia.

Within this Swedish movement came a group of Lutheran believers who began meeting in homes for Bible study and communion. They stood firm with the Protestant Reformation, clinging to the central tenets of being saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone. Noting their own troubles with the state church that opposed the unauthorized sharing of communion outside of official state parishes, a number of these Swedish evangelicals eventually formed into groups known as “Mission Friends.” They were characterized by a strong insistence on biblical authority, the absolute necessity of new birth, Christ’s mandate to evangelize the world, the continuing need for education and formation in a Christian context, and a responsibility for benevolence and the advancement of social justice.

Out of this movement came the development of a new denomination, formed from a collective of these small groups dedicated to Christ’s mission, called *Svenska Missionsförbundet* (Swedish Mission Covenant Church). Formed in 1878, its first president, E.J Ekman, emphasized the priority of evangelism. A new mission society was authorized to receive funds for foreign and home



missions, and a strategy for missions was developed to engage three possible target locations: north into the Lapp country; east to Swedish sailors in Russian ports, and south, to the African Congo.

The Swedish Mission had contacts with British and American colleagues that were interested in a new push to get into Russia. In 1880, an attempt was made to establish a mission station on the island of Kronshtadt, just off the seaport of St. Petersburg, but it was quickly shut down. Reports of interference by both Russian Orthodox and Swedish Lutheran elements were noted as possible reasons for this.

### **ENTER THE TWO SWEDES: Axel and Adolph**



**Nobel**

Not deterred from the troubles encountered in St. Petersburg, President Ekman made a contact that proved fortuitous to making another mission attempt in Russia. In 1881, Ekman found himself in that city once more, where he chanced upon a fellow Swede, Alfred Nobel. Nobel, the inventor of dynamite and one of the world's wealthiest men, owned a number of oil refineries in Baku, on the Caspian Sea. Nobel suggested to Ekman that religious work might be carried on among Swedish workers manning his refineries there. He took serious note of the dramatic and positive changes that the evangelical church had brought to the working people of Sweden, and was disturbed by the bad behavior of the Russian and Swedish oilmen working his refineries.<sup>ii</sup>

Nobel worked to arrange sending Covenant missionaries to the refineries, so Ekman found and commissioned two willing servants: Adolph Lydell and N.F. Hojer. At the same time, two more missionaries stepped forward to attempt setting up a mission station among the nomadic Saami peoples living in the far north of Russia near Archangelsk. A young Axel Karlson and Frans Hammerstedt made their way in 1882 with great expectations.

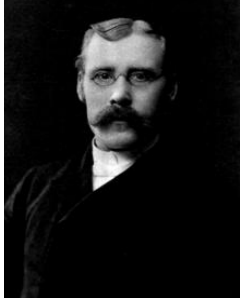
Adolph and Axel were typical of a new generation of Swedes who came to Christ and sensed the greater purpose of sharing the Gospel, regardless of the linguistic, cultural, or geographic considerations they faced. Each was eager to go out into the unknown in order to fulfill their calling. Fortunately for both, their first targets were the minority among the people who spoke their native tongue.

Axel's target was the Saami, and when he arrived at his destination, he plowed into learning the language of the nomads. At the same time, however, he began regular visits to the port of Archangelsk and began witnessing to the Swedish sailors who worked alongside Russian crews. Ministering to both the Swedes and Russians while preparing to engage the Saamis kept Axel busy, but unfortunately for him, his efforts soon gained the attention of the local Orthodox priests.



**Axel**

Far down to the south, Adolph, now accompanied by his wife, was busy working the Baku refineries and making progress in his ministry. A new land, a new life, and gladly



Adolph

doing the task of sharing his faith made Adolph extremely excited for this newest of Covenant ventures. Three years into the mission, however, Adolph's wife developed an illness, and the couple was forced to make their way back to Sweden to get medical treatment. They made it as far as St. Petersburg (Petrograd) where Mrs. Lydell died. Shocked and struggling at this misfortune, Adolph made it back to Sweden, heartbroken and most likely questioning how God could allow such a catastrophe to happen.

1700 miles to the North, Axel and Frans were making good progress in their ministry and looked for new opportunities to expand the work. Unfortunately, the intense hostility of the Orthodox church toward evangelicals came to fore even in Archangelsk, and the missionaries found themselves the target of not only the priests, but the government officials who were only too willing to carry out the policies of the Russian Czar against unauthorized activities by foreigners. Both men were soon arrested and later transported south to the Central prison in Moscow.

Languishing for a time in this prison—known for being a point of embarkation to Siberia for the most desperate of Russia's political prisoners—Axel and Frans needed saving, and though they credited God for their eventual release, it was pointed out later that only by the resolute efforts of the Swedish state department, were the two released and deported from the country.



In any event, both Axel and Adolph found themselves in 1885 back in Sweden, their plans to carry out the Great Commission seemingly a failure. But at least, they were alive.

The noted Covenant historian Karl Olson wrote:

“In our rather relaxed age, it is difficult to understand the zeal which drove poorly trained and often moderately talented missionaries into political and physical hardships which would have taxed the courage and resourcefulness of the most intrepid adventurer.

The record of missionary martyrs of the 1860s-90s fill us with wonder. They were murdered, imprisoned, harassed, and tortured: they died of cholera, malaria, plague, dysenteries, and of obscure and undiagnosed ailments of the liver and spleen; by the hundreds they succumbed to the ravages of tuberculosis. What drove them on?”<sup>iii</sup>



Perhaps Axel and Adolph remembered how the Lord forewarned them in the Sermon on the Mount, as he exclaimed, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Without dwelling on the failure of their past attempts, Karlson—unmoved from his experience in that Moscow prison cell—and Lydell, with the wound of a dead love still unhealed, immediately petitioned the Covenant leadership to send them back out on the mission field. Fortunately, they did not have to wait for long.

## New Opportunities



On the other side of the world, Finnish-Swedish explorer Adolph Eric Nordenskjöld undertook the dangerous and unpredictable Vega expedition by ship to make the first complete crossing of the Arctic Northeast Passage. Himself a political exile from Finland from following anti-czarist and liberal circles working against Russian occupation of his homeland, Nordenskjöld was nevertheless allowed to take up this incredible seafaring adventure. On his way through the Bering Strait, his ship was trapped in the ice of a bitterly cold Alaskan winter. As he and the crew waited for the spring thaw and the release of his vessel, Nordenskjöld was able to spend time observing the area, and was deeply concerned for the state of the Eskimo's spiritual and physical condition.

No doubt he was aware of the sad state of affairs surrounding contact and relations between white men and natives-- beginning with the Russian's time of control and quest for resources, resulting in the oppression and often killing of natives—to the whaling ships in the region and their crews introducing alcohol and vice that many would never recover from. Far from home, the Swedish explorer, with his insight and compassion, would become a link in a bigger chain that would eventually introduce the Gospel to these native peoples, bringing a new breath of hope for their salvation.

Upon his return to Sweden, Nordenskjöld made a visit to his old friend, E. K. Ekman, and was determined to challenge Ekman and the Mission Covenant to reconfigure its mission strategy from a frontal assault on Russia, to going in through the back door. From his time observing the Eskimos, he knew that not only could missionaries enter Russian territory from Alaska, but there were both natives and Russians who could be the beneficiaries of a new mission effort there. Ekman took the advice and went with it. The Mission Covenant would now focus their efforts on the Russian Far East and the Eskimos along the Bering Sea region.

Ekman knew the decision wasn't without potential pitfalls. The Russian Orthodox Church had a long history of mission penetration into Alaska and Chukotka (the eastern most part of the Russian landmass), but the mission stations were far to the south in Southeast Alaska and the Aleutians, and with the American purchase of the territory in 1865, there would be no threat of Czarist government intervention in the Alaska region. But this didn't hold true for Chukotka. The thought of travelling around the world to seek out the most remote and wild regions of the earth for a mission endeavor, was asking the impossible. But it didn't deter Ekman, nor Axel and Adolph.



In 1886, armed with a new commission into a seemingly impossible set of conditions that would challenge anyone's sanity or faith, Axel and Adolph left Sweden for a long

journey across the Atlantic to the shores of America on their way to Alaska and Chukotka. During the voyage, they had time to reflect on their experience with the Russians: the people they encouraged and brought to faith; the possibilities they missed out on; the dreadful treatment they received from their Orthodox brethren and the Czar's police; and their forced deportation by government order, or in Adolph's case, his wife's death. But these things would not deter them in their task, and in their faith, they assumed a new level of zeal that would be absolutely essential if they were to successfully take on all the barriers potentially lying in their path.

With every passing mile of ocean, Axel and Adolph had a plan: somehow, they were going to make Alaska a base of operation for a larger evangelical assault on Russia.

### **Human Intentions and God Redirections**

After a successful voyage, the two men made their way across the heartland of America, to meet up with fellow Swedish immigrant brethren who had recently formed an American version of the Swedish Mission Covenant. Attending the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant's second annual denominational meeting in Rockford, Illinois, Axel and Adolph shared their passion with the assembled delegates for developing the Russian and Alaskan mission.

Excited by what they heard from the men and challenged to support an incredible dream for mission, the delegates voted to equip Axel and Adolph and sent them on their way to the west coast with money and supplies for the final leg of the journey up to the Bering Strait.



Crossing the continent to San Francisco, the men eventually boarded the aptly-named vessel "S.S. St. Paul," and took another ocean journey going north. As they traveled up the beautiful northern coastal passages of Canada and Alaska, their imaginations must have run wild when considering how they would pull off the venture. What would be the

conditions they faced? Was Alaska simply a wilderness of ice and snow populated by hostile natives living in primitive conditions and controlled by forces that would violently oppose their mission? How would they get into Russia, where would they live, who would join them, how would the Eskimos respond, could they make converts, would they survive?

They also remembered some of the discussion in Rockford when they discussed the feasibility of their plan. Skeptics in the room might have said they were poorly advised. First of all, the local Russians and Chukotkan Eskimos across the Bering Sea did not present any optimistic missionary opportunity. Some thought there was no reason to believe that missionary progress from Chukotka to Western Russia would be easier than from Finland across to Russia, because the same police system and Orthodox opposition

was operative in Siberia and the far East as it was in European Russia. Here again, human argument would have to cede to God's control, opportunity, and provision.

Historian Olson wrote about the dilemma facing the men as they considered the consequences:

“Nothing less than a transcendent love which is a true child of grace, would have compelled these brave and good people to fling themselves with reckless gusto against the bastions of centuries old apathy and hostility.”

Little could our Swedish missionaries know that God had been preparing a way for them, and the people they would end up witnessing to. The Lord employed his favored means of communicating to men his plans and purposes through the voices of his prophets: only this time, it would be from a group of Eskimo shamans employed *in the enemy camp*.



Ever since the Eskimo of Alaska could remember, life was extremely difficult in the far north, with survival the primary task, and society revolving around a constant cycle of hunting, gathering, breeding, learning, celebrating, sacrificing, and standing strong in the face of death. The Eskimo adapted to a way of life that few others in the world were equipped to understand, much less succeed in, and they were proud of their abilities. But there was a lack of

knowledge about God, about spiritual things from the creator of the earth, and there remained an ignorance of liberty that made the life of the Eskimo subject to the forces of evil and satanic oppression.

Axel would be encountering a people who knew the devil, but didn't know the Lord. Satan's work was manifest through the lives of shamans, often known as medicine men, who had absolute control over the lives of natives. The shamans worked in conjunction with demonic spirits to impress the people with their knowledge, their counsel, and reinforced this control through demonstrations of miraculous powers. The Eskimos of the Bering Sea were completely subject to them, and a world of superstition, fear, and ungodliness was maintained from generation to generation by these workers of evil, masquerading as benevolent leaders and guides. There was darkness in the land to which our Swedish adventurers were entering as they plowed the coastline on the SS. St. Paul.

Far to the north, in *Qikiqtaruk*, a gathering of shamans from the northern regions took place. Known for possessing different levels of strength and demonic power, these men often met to challenge one another or to learn the teaching of their leaders, but this gathering was different. According to reports by later Eskimo converts, the shamans began warning the people that there was a “very powerful light” coming from the south, and that when the light reached the region, they would not have the same freedom to “help” the Eskimo, for that powerful light was surely much stronger than their own.<sup>iv</sup>

Axel and Adolph would be those messengers of the light of the Gospel, and while they could not know it, the prophesies of the shamans would be fulfilled. During their five

week journey up the coast, the men were in discussion with others about the best prospects for their mission venture, and they came to realize that there could be greater opportunities for them among the Alaskan natives, especially in the northwestern region that had not been worked by past Orthodox proselytizing.



Adolph made a quick decision to jump ship at Yakutat, where he would build a mission station among the Indian population there. Axel continued north, and disembarked on a beach near the Eskimo village of St. Michael.

When Karlson arrived, he spoke only Swedish and Russian. Visiting in St. Michael was an Eskimo Chief from Unalakleet named Nashalook, and his friend, a Russian immigrant named Sergei Ivanov. Axel was unaware of God's perfect positioning of his people at that moment. In a later story described by Fred Savok, it turns out the Lord had spoken to Nashalook in a dream and said to go to the port of big ships (St. Michael) where he would find a man with a book. The dream said "to bring that man to his village because he has something to tell you." As Karlson was walking down a street near the boat landing carrying his Bible, Nashalook approached him, and using Sergei as his interpreter invited him to come to Unalakleet. Undoubtedly amazed at God's miraculous intervention that showed him exactly where to go, and with whom, Axel agreed and made the 65 mile trek up the coast to the Eskimo settlement.<sup>v</sup>

There he saw many Eskimo and made a number of quick observations: they were suspicious of white people, were superstitious, unlearned, and of poor hygiene. They were the opposite of his worldview and culture, but they were precious children of God who needed to be told of his love. And God had provided him a team to work with, including Sergei's young son, Stephen, who spoke both Russian and Yupik who was assigned to Axel as a translator.



Stephen

During those first few weeks Adolph and Axel had to make a fast decision about staying or going back south for supplies to build their mission stations. Axel knew there was only one ship visiting the region that year, he would either have to stay on, unsupplied and without communication for a year, and trust God to help him get settled in his task. Axel decided to risk it, while Adolph caught the returning boat to San Francisco. God would have to provide, and Axel entered his adventure among the Eskimo, not knowing what to expect.

For the first three months, Axel was forced to live under Nashalook's protection before he could venture freely to build a shelter for himself. Some men threatened to kill him, and he struggled to establish an identity and communicate his intentions with a people who spoke no Swedish or English, but a strange tongue with a variety of dialects. Despite this, Axel made plans to carry out the work: he would learn the language and needs of the Eskimo, and in the greater goal of teaching them the Bible and God's plan, he would build a home to live in, churches to gather the people for worship and teaching,

Schools and orphanages for the needy children he saw. Axel's relationship with Stephen became strong, and the two developed a partnership that would enhance their mission long into the future.

As the spring of 1888 came, Axel had survived the winter, charged with a new vision for his mission, and took a voyage back to the US to get funds and supplies for his new mission station. Adolph also had been busy during the winter down in California, promoting his new venture among the Indians, and bringing another Swedish missionary, Karl Henrikson, to serve alongside him. That summer, Axel and Adolph were back in the villages, working feverishly during the warm weather to build their outposts in preparation for a long period of mission work. As it turned out, they had little time to think about their original call to get across the Bering Strait to Chukotka. There was simply too much to do, and it seemed God had planted them on the Alaskan side.



In the fall of 1888, Axel saved the life of an Inupiaq boy named Uyaraq ("Rock"). Uyaraq quickly learned English and became Karlson's sled-driver and interpreter, and he soon became Axel's first convert to the faith. Adolph had his own troubles in Yakutat, but both men had to show a great deal of patience as they tried to preach God's word to the natives. In their meetings, they used many translators so that all would understand what was spoken. At first, it was difficult for them to grasp the teachings of the Bible, as they had no prior knowledge or conception of the basics of Christianity. The challenges to witness and share about the creator God and the Son who died for their sins were such that only a total commitment of faith, work, and vision could keep these men in the field.

Again, God would intercede in unusual ways in order to prepare the path for Axel. As the first couple of years went by, he was successful in bringing more people to the faith, and expanded the work of the mission station. Eskimos from other settlements began hearing about what was happening in Unalakleet with the white missionary "who was teaching that the man of the sky was the compassionate father of all peoples." These whites were not like the other white people of their past contact, because they sought to bring the light of life to them, rather than come for loot and personal gain. But the most compelling truth coming from those in Unalakleet was the message of freedom from the fear of a satanic power that had enslaved the Eskimo all their lives.<sup>vi</sup>



Eventually, Rock (later called "Paul of the Eskimos") would become an evangelist travelling to northern communities sharing Christ and leading countless natives to accept him. With God preparing the path, in the village of Selawik, the news of an amazing event circulated among the people. An Eskimo named Egaq had a vision of a man dressed in white, descending and stopping about three feet off the floor of his igloo. He said "I am Father of All People. Soon all people will hear about me."<sup>vii</sup> It became apparent to those who heard of the vision that there must be more to life than what they had already known, and being familiar with supernatural powers, many knew that anything is possible.

So it was that as Rock, Axel, and later Covenant missionaries labored to proclaim Christ among the native people, there were incredible results as village after village came to faith and witnessed how the light of Christ overthrew the darkness of the demonic forces that had previously bound them so mercilessly. The Lord was rewarding Axel for his dedication to his great commission, despite all the past troubles he had encountered. His faithfulness in bringing the light of life to the Eskimos was a reflection of the call by the King David in Psalm 56 as he exclaims:

“I am under vows to you, O God:  
I will present my thank offerings to you.  
For you have delivered me from death  
And my feet from stumbling, that I  
May walk before God, in the light of life.”

### *The calling remains elusive...*



Sadly, Adolph became sick while in Yakutat during his third year there, and was forced to go back to Seattle to recover. He eventually had to abandon his plans for the mission station, as well as his prior dream to get into Russia. Upon his recovery, he remarried, raised a family, and continued to promote the work of Alaska to others across the Covenant. Adolph was off the mission field, his quest unfulfilled, but he found new purpose in communicating the goals of the ministry to those who would help support it through prayer and funding.

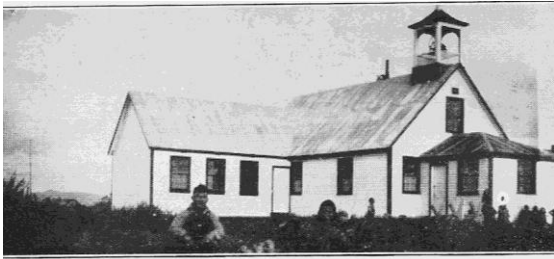
Both Axel and Adolph kept Russia and the native peoples there in the back of their minds, but the opportunity never presented itself as they busied their efforts into the lives of the Alaskans. In 1895, Russian czar Nicholas II issued proclamations against the work of evangelicals inside of the country, but this did not stop Rock and Covenant missionary David Johnson from travelling across the Bering Strait in 1896 to witness in many native villages in Chukotka. The men *broadcast* the news of the Savior, though the audience was limited. They came back with a report stating “the people are longing for the Gospel, and desire to hear about God.”<sup>viii</sup> Any future mission and subsequent broadcasts there would have to wait.



Their original mission went unanswered, but they fulfilled their calling. Eskimo elders who knew Karlson as children remembered him as one who told an unending story, the story of salvation and the Savior who died for them. For these people of the North, accustomed to spending the winter evenings in the telling and hearing of stories, Pastor Karlson became a welcome guest, whose stories eventually won their hearts. He spoke to them in a mixture of English and Eskimo dialects, and for those who were guided by him deeper in the faith, they learned the Christian creeds, the Ten Commandments, the Psalms, and stories of the Bible.

Axel nurtured the people in all matters of the spirit and worked to improve their standard of living. He was kind, patient, and firm, being resourceful as a leader and teacher, a man of strong faith in God and love for his fellow man.<sup>ix</sup> Axel became a spiritual father to an

entire region of Eskimos who found freedom as they committed their lives to Christ. He eventually married Hanna, a Swedish missionary later arriving in Unalakleet, who became his life long and able partner. She was with Axel in poverty and wealth, in sickness and health, and proved effective in helping him oversee a growing mission station with a school, church, and supply post that met a multitude of needs. Axel was the best friend of the Eskimo, understood what was required by them before they could ask, met those needs, and carried out Christ's example to all who came across him.



After 27 years of laboring for his Lord in the far north, Axel died in 1910 and was buried by this church he built in Unalakleet, his mission accomplished, and his tombstone reading:

“When he came to this village, there was here no Christian. At his death, there was no pagan.”<sup>x</sup>

His death did not end God's plan for the Covenant's work in Russia. It was just a beginning that would produce much spiritual fruit throughout Alaska in future generations. Axel and Adolph (who outlived Axel by 50 years) were to be God's first instruments among many subsequent ones that would prepare the field for proclaiming the Gospel to the entire Russian nation, though it would take 100 years to permanently establish themselves on the eastern shores of the Bering Strait.



*Legacy of Axel's ministry in Unalakleet: Eskimo Bible students*



## Chapter 3

### Getting in through the Backdoor



Seven years after Axel's death, a new page in the history of Russia unfolded far from the Bering Sea, as Vladimir Lenin and his Bolsheviks took control of the battleship *Aurora* and fired upon the Russian Czar's Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. It was a final signatory act for a nation struggling with revolutionary ferment, protesting the status quo of Russia's entrenched aristocratic and Orthodox control, and a civil war quickly broke out between Red (Bolshevik) and White (czarist) forces. It was a war by advocates of a socialist humanism devoid of God's presence, with those who sought to maintain the traditions of State and church and the Romanov dynasty that had ruled for over four centuries.

Marxist in thought, and communist in organization, these men challenged the people with a new idea believing themselves the herald of a new age of man's development. Militantly atheist, and committed to the destruction of the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church over the lives of the workers and peasants, the Bolsheviks waged a merciless war on the establishment and introduced a new age of terror and political control over the people, based on the idea of the collective, along with the destruction of any notion of the rights of the individual. Thousands of priests were killed and churches throughout Russia were desecrated, destroyed or turned into warehouses, cattle stalls, or other ignoble functions. As the battles were ending in European Russia with the defeat of the Czarist government, they were still raging in the vastness of Siberia and just beginning to reach the territory of Chukotka.



In 1921, with the outcome of the battles uncertain, it was a dangerous time to contemplate a mission trip, but there was still the need to reach out with the one force that was able to defeat the Bolsheviks and their Godless ideology. That summer, Covenant missionaries L.E. Ost and Nils Hojer along with two Eskimo pastors, put out from the beach at Unalakleet and began to sail northeast to the Chukotka coastline. The route was difficult and dangerous for such a small boat, but they navigated well and landed on the coast at Naukon. Surprisingly, there were granted permission by local officials to land and preach.

What could explain this welcome? Despite the ongoing political battles, there was an understanding among authorities on each side of the Bering Sea to keep their relations mutual, as there had been much trading back and forth and there was some American influence on the Russian side from past business endeavors with Nome.

So the ministry team began their itineration by travelling south on the way toward Anadyr, visiting many villages and proclaiming the Gospel freely to any who they happened upon. When they arrived in Anadyr, which had a revolutionary government committee in place, there were signs of battles and many had been killed. When it became clear that Ost and Hojer needed new permissions to continue, miraculously they

were granted a charter to do missionary and educational work along the coastal villages. What they could not do freely during the times of the Czar's control, the communists granted. But the door to ministry was soon to close.<sup>xi</sup>

As news of their success reached the Covenant leadership, funds were allocated to purchase a new vessel for the missionaries in support of a growing network of 28 preaching sites in coastal villages and fishing camps. There was hope that permanent mission bases would be established, but there was increasing tension on the part of local authorities as the final battles between the Bolsheviks and Whites played out in the territory.



1923 would be the final year marking the Communist's triumph in Russia. That summer, Pastor Hojer took two Covenant missionary recruits, Anna and Ernest Anderson, over to Naukon presumably to set up a new mission station. Following protocol, they quickly met with the Bolshevik authorities in the village. During that meeting, one of the Soviet guards who understood Swedish, struck up a conversation with Anna. Another guard, who spoke no Swedish, became suspicious and agitated, and appeared to suspect that they were somehow plotting against the new government. An argument ensued, and the guard shot the man speaking with Anna in the head, with his blood splattered all over Mrs. Anderson. Ernest and Anna made a hasty retreat and left Russia forever.

In one last attempt to reestablish their ministry, Hojer returned the following summer with native pastors Harry Soxie and George Taruk, and a Swedish missionary named Bohman. They managed to preach in a few villages before being forced to return. On the voyage home, they encountered a violent ocean storm and ran aground 30 miles from Nome. Before they reached the city, Bohman drowned in the Sinuk River. It was a sad ending for a desperate venture, and Hojer ended up with broken health and penniless in Seattle before he died in 1925.



Back in Chukotka, the war was over and the Bolsheviks took full control of the territory. They immediately commenced a policy of propaganda and communist education of the poor native peoples who were now under new masters who promised them a better life under the watchful guardianship of their Soviet fathers. Sadly, the villages that had briefly welcomed the light of God offered by the missionaries would now be told the Savior they learned about was simply a fairy tale told by misinformed men. The worldview brought to them was a scientific socialism that had no place for God. It seemed the forces of darkness had triumphed again with satan using politicians, instead of the shamans, to keep the Eskimos from the Gospel.

It was the end of the Covenant's first phase of ministry to the people of Russia. The denomination's effort in Chukotka was down, but not out, because God was still in control and the vision to evangelize remained, but it seemed impossible to get back in.

## The Ice Curtain emerges

From 1924 until the beginning of World War II, there was little activity between each side of the Bering Strait except sporadic visits by Eskimos to their relative's villages. That changed temporarily during the war with the development of the *Lend Lease* program between President Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin. The Americans would aid their new Soviet allies by providing military aircraft that were to be delivered to Russia from bases in Alaska, including Nome. While Covenanters could not benefit from this new cooperation during the war, there was a building up of facilities in Nome that would eventually assist their future evangelistic efforts to Russia.



American flyers bringing equipment to Russia distributed Bibles privately, with Soviet officials turning a blind eye. They needed the weapons. As the aircraft deliveries ended, all contacts between the sides subsided.

At the close of the war, with Soviet forces taking over Eastern Europe and Germany, political hostilities between the US and USSR were making conditions for a new relationship in the Bering Strait impossible. For a brief period between 1945-47, Eskimos from the Western Alaska coast and St. Lawrence Island managed to make short visits across to their families in villages along the Providenski region. Taking walrus skin *umiaks* (boats) across the water in a 24 hour trip, there was one last season of trading and visiting.

In 1948, the Soviet government informed the US that no more cross border traffic along the Bering sea would be permitted. J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI agreed to the Soviet demand. An ice curtain, thousands of miles from the Iron Curtain that now separated Eastern and West Germany, was put in place that would take nearly two generations to break down. Many Eskimos wondered if they would ever see their relatives on the other side again. It would be another long wait for the native peoples of Chukotka to hear the Gospel, and Axel's dream seemed to be put on hold one more time.

## A New Strategy for Evangelism: Using the Airwaves

During the war, the US military had built up its forward Lend Lease airbase in Nome with a number of facilities, including a small Armed Forces AM radio station called WXLN. On Christmas 1943, Covenant missionaries Paul and Nell Carlson approached military personnel manning the station and requested to make a Christmas program. The request was approved and on December 26, WXLN's 400 watt transmitter broadcast the first Christian programs on radio ever available to the Seward Peninsula and the Norton Sound region. Eskimos living in Unalakleet and other villages who tapped into the Armed Forces network would soon tune in every Sunday to Christian programs recorded by pastors in Nome.

The idea for using radio to support mission efforts in the Arctic was coming into clear focus by Covenant personnel in Nome, and they began petitioning the denomination

headquarters to consider developing a radio station. In 1945, after some analysis on the proposal, the Covenant declined to pursue it, pointing out the technical, staffing, and financial obstacles to establishing a station at that time. Despite this rejection, Roald Amundsen, pastor of the Nome Covenant Church, formulated a strategy for reaching the native villages along the Strait with the Gospel through radio. He would be joined in this passion by a number of individuals who eventually served to make it a reality, though it would take small steps and time for it to happen.<sup>xii</sup>



Roald

To facilitate communication between isolated mission stations, several Covenant individuals got involved in setting up radiotelephone links between the villages and Nome. In 1955, Pastor Amundsen convinced William Hartman, a trained radio engineer from California, to help him purchase and install radio phones in villages between Nome and Unalakleet. With the successful completion of these radio links, general communication in the region was greatly improved, and they aided greatly in coordinating the work of missionaries and small native churches. But radiotelephone service was not the same as radio broadcasting, and Amundsen continued to press for a broadcast ministry. He had strong support for this idea from Ralph Hanson, who had served decades earlier in western Alaska as a missionary, and was now serving as the Covenant's head of World Mission. The time for action was now, but the denomination still had yet to be convinced.

During the winter of 1956-57, Bill Hartman wrote a feasibility study for the Covenant detailing all the technical and logistical factors for developing a radio site in Nome. Coupled with Amundsen's assertion that a station was needed now more than ever, while stressing the fact that broadcasting could effectively serve native pastors in their own language, a new momentum for its realization was developing. Armed with Hartman's report, Rev. Hanson took the initiative and pressed the Covenant board of foreign missions to revisit the idea they had previously shelved. The Covenant agreed to take a second look at the issue.

At the summer 1957 Annual Meeting of the Covenant, delegates were presented the Alaska radio proposal, and it was passed. Two men quickly were assigned the task to begin the developmental phase of the project: Art Zylstra, a missionary who had been working for World Radio Missionary Fellowship's station, HCJB, in Quito, Ecuador; along with Ralph Fondell, a Covenanter with radio experience who had been quietly petitioning the Covenant for a radio endeavor while a student at the denomination's North Park Seminary in Chicago.

During the next summer, housing was built in Nome in preparation for missionary staff that would operate the station, and in 1959, Hartman, Fondell, and Zylstra oversaw the construction of radio towers, electrical generators, a studio building, and the remaining technical infrastructure of the station. In the process, many obstacles to setting up the ministry were miraculously surmounted, quietly proving that God's hand was guiding the effort. For a review of this history detailing the startup and the Lord's many

interventions, the interested reader can go to “Ptarmigan Telegraph-The Story of Radio Station KICY,” by Greg Asimakopoulous.<sup>xiii</sup>



73 years after Axel Karlson’s push to establish the Covenant’s presence in the Bering Sea region, the long process to proclaim the Gospel over the airwaves to the native peoples finally came to fruition. On Easter Sunday, April 17, 1960, Radio Station KICY—*The Voice of the Arctic*, went on the air broadcasting at 5000 watts on 850 khz AM.

83 villages reported the signal. From Unalakleet to St. Lawrence Island and beyond, native listeners could now tune in daily for Christian encouragement and teaching, as well as news and weather reports specific to the region, along with religious and secular music, village news and family announcements (“Ptarmigan Telegraph”), and programs that included songs, teaching, and preaching by native pastors and churches in the region. The light of Christ was being shared into a vast area, and its impact upon the people was immediate. Strengthened with this technical tool for relaying God’s Word, the Church in Western Alaska grew with its native outposts strengthened. No longer were mission stations isolated, but they were now interconnected through KICY, and the station was the conduit of communication focused on being salt and light to its intended audience.



With its unique location and transmitting frequency, KICY was not only taken notice by the Eskimos, it was also noticed by Soviet monitors in Chukotka. The Soviet government filed a letter of protest that year to the US State Department in Washington, complaining of KICY’s transmissions. However, there wasn’t much they could do about it, and unlike Stalin’s usual practice of setting up jamming stations to interfere with American radio signals,

no effort was made to jam 850 khz. KICY’s signal would remain free and clear across the Arctic skies.

While KICY staff had no idea who would be listening across the Strait, the signal was easily received in many of the native villages along the coastline across from St. Lawrence Island. Soviet sailors and radio operators could listen in, but always at their own risk. A favorite tactic by communist planners to keep their citizens from listening was to manufacture radio receivers that purposely excluded certain frequency bands in the shortwave and AM range that were typically used by western stations.

Most communities in Russia were served through wired radio systems that featured 1-3 Soviet channels from Moscow and residents in Chukotka could also receive local materials from studios in Provideniya or Anadyr. But the Soviets could not repress the desire of their people for alternative information, and as listeners in Chukotka with AM

receivers scanned the dials, they often found a way to tune in KICY, though they could never tell anyone about it for fear of repression.

There was definitely a price to pay for someone to listen in to the native broadcasts of KICY to hear the Gospel in their own Chaplinski Yupik dialect, featured daily over the *Eskimo Hour* program of Fred Savok. Savok's broadcast was a compelling fulfillment of God's preparation many years earlier for the Gospel to be proclaimed in the land, as it was his own grandfather, Egaq, whom received a vision of the heavenly visitor in Selawik, stating "I am the father of all people, and soon, all peoples will hear about me."



Fred

What one man received from the Lord, generations later, his descendent would loudly proclaim to all peoples using the airwaves. The Lord was obviously directing his church and his people to accomplish his purposes, and he did it through willing servants using cutting edge technology.

By 1973, KICY had established a strong tradition of broadcasting in the region. Headed by station manager Ralph Fondell, who long entertained the notion of reaching Chukotka by radio, the station and Covenant denomination leaders were intrigued by the potential of carrying out broadcasts directly targeting the Russians across the sea. That year, they applied to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for permission to broadcast in Russian during their late night hours. A justification for the petition was written that KICY could serve Russian-speaking Alaskan natives living in areas south of the Norton Sound, but the implications of targeting Russian listeners in Chukotka was clear, though unstated. It was an unusual request, as no other domestic American radio station had been granted the right to broadcast in that language. Without any objection however, the FCC agreed to the station's petition. Now the challenge was to find Russian programs.

Fondell quickly rounded up a number of productions from evangelical ministries and scheduled them for the 11-11:30 pm timeslot. Across the water on St. Lawrence Island, Wycliff Bible translator Dave Shinen reported that the Russian programs came across strong, without any doubt it could be picked up clearly in native settlements on the Chukotka coast. Years later, Soviet Eskimo journalist, Antonina Verbitskaya (actually an Alaskan Eskimo who was caught on the wrong side of the sea when the border closed in 1948) reported listening to the radio broadcasts every night in her kitchen, listening to a radio set on the floor under the kitchen table quietly, so no one would find out.

The biggest challenge for KICY lay in understanding whom their audience in Russia was, as it seemed impossible for listeners to contact the station directly by telephone or mail, which was forbidden by Soviet authorities. To get around that obstacle, the station arranged for a Swedish mailbox through the assistance of Covenanters in that country, so any Russian who listened to KICY could send a reply through a neutral country.

While there were scattered reports, in general, years would go by without any comprehensive knowledge whom they were broadcasting to, but KICY remained faithful to the call to proclaim the Gospel, while trusting the Holy Spirit to work on the results. It would be 15 years before they had the opportunity to go over to Chukotka to find out.

At this point, the third “Swede” enters our story.

## Chapter 4

### Another Swede's journey begins



Growing up, Daniel Johnson heard stories about Alaska and fondly remembered his doting great Aunt Mabel in Worcester Massachusetts. Her husband, Dr. F. Julius Quist was part of the Covenant folklore in Alaska, serving in Unalakleet at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while Axel Karlson was on furlough. While there, Julius heard of a ship wrecked in the ice near Point Barrow, and was compelled to mount a rescue party. He took Stephen Ivanov with him and travelled by dogsled nearly 600 miles. They reached and rescued the survivors. Julius eventually took

Stephen and Rock with him to Chicago and other cities to promote the Covenant Alaskan mission.<sup>xiv</sup>

F. Julius had quite a career and life following his service in Alaska; earning a medical degree, enlisted as an officer in World War 1, founding a local hospital, serving at the Salem Covenant Church in Worcester, manufacturing vacuum cleaners, and even running a bank. Long dead before Daniel was born, F. Julius' memory was nevertheless kindled amongst the Johnson family as they recounted stories about him over the years, and the family continued to carry on the Covenant legacy Julius had set as they served the local Swedish Covenant churches in Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania and later in Jamestown, New York. But Daniel hadn't made the connection with Julius and Unalakleet. That was for another, more strategic time.<sup>xv</sup>



F. Julius Quist

Growing up in the Covenant church, it seemed logical that Daniel would follow his grandpa Alvin Johnson and his brother in law F. Julius, and attend the denomination's college in Chicago. Entering as a freshman at North Park College, Daniel's adventures would gain him some notoriety (not the good kind) and he entered a period of wavering



from his faith. Chicago did not hold what he was looking for, so he transferred to a college in New York, interested in pursuing a more fashionable career in sound recording, radio, and television. He thought he would end up a famous studio engineer in Hollywood, living in the world of rock and roll and the entertainment industry. But it was a path that wasn't to be.

Graduating from school, unsure of how to proceed, he was a lost soul looking for answers. He hadn't been to church in nearly five years, and the Christian life seemed to have little meaning for him. He was after what the world had to offer, but what he was finding offered little satisfaction. A few days after his commencement ceremony, Daniel struck off to a camp in the Catskills and spent the summer rock climbing, all the while wondering where his life was headed. As August ended, he met up with Christoph, a German friend who had plans to hitchhike across America, and without any hesitation, joined up with him and began sticking his thumb out on US Interstate 90 near the



Pennsylvania border. He ended up in San Diego, enjoying his adventure, but unsure of where to go. He met an old friend named Joe Klun who invited Dan to attend his church, but it wasn't a church he was used to. They walked into a former movie theater on El Cajon Boulevard that housed a new *Calvary Chapel* congregation. As he went to find a seat, Daniel sensed something he had never experienced in a church before. The theater was filled with hundreds of young people, all being led by a single musician with a guitar on the stage, and singing like a choir of angels praising God.

Pastor Mike MacIntosh began preaching and sometime during the service, Daniel was led into the presence of the Almighty God. Unbeknownst to anyone around him, Daniel received a vision from the Lord, transformed by a voice revealing to him that Jesus was real, and all that Daniel had ever learned about him, was in fact, true. He is the Son of God and he lives! In a moment of time, Christ had completely changed Daniel, prepared him, equipped him to do his service. It was the only time in his life Daniel would get this gift from heaven, but it was enough, and as he came out of the vision in the midst of the service, he knew right then that everything was different. Those sitting nearby hadn't sensed anything, neither had anyone else in the congregation, but Daniel was found and ready for his new life. He immediately said to his Savior, "I will go anywhere, and do anything, just show me the way." It didn't take long for that path to be revealed.

Daniel settled down in San Diego, looking to grow in his new faith and new life, when his parents (Harold & Laura Johnson) called him one night to tell him about a missionary opportunity he might be interested in. There was a small Christian high school in Unalakleet, Alaska operated by the Covenant denomination that educated Eskimo students, and they were looking for someone who could teach broadcasting, photography, as well as cook. Would he be interested in this?

At first, it seemed an unusual move to leave this new California life and church that was nurturing him to serve God, and this scenario in Unalakleet was so far from any possibility he had contemplated. But Dan remembered his promise to the Lord that he would go anywhere, so he called his father and told him he was ready. Immediately Harold put him in touch with the denomination's missions office in Chicago, and Daniel applied to go to Alaska.

In the summer of 1982, Daniel put his backpack on, stuck out his thumb and headed up to Alaska, but this time as a hitchhiker with a destination and purpose. It was the beginning of a missionary venture that would take him around the world, doing things he could scarcely think possible. Yet with God, all things were possible.

Unalakleet



Over the next few years, Daniel taught his Eskimo high school students on a spit of land along the beaches of the Norton Sound, surrounded by hundreds of tundra miles and low lying mountains. He was having the time of his life in this new profession of missionary teacher and even overseeing the student-run AM radio station. Broadcasting around the village. It was a great chance to help young people find their way in the world and to provide some spiritual wisdom to guide their future, but he was also having trouble in

Unalakleet with some of the young Eskimo men who didn't like young white guys coming in and out of their village. And a number of these had the last name of Ivanoff.

One day, Daniel was reading the memoirs of an Eskimo woman named Emily Ivanoff Brown.<sup>xvi</sup> Her grandfather was a man named Stephan Ivanov, the spiritual leader of Unalakleet who worked with Axel Karlson. In one of the pages, Emily wrote about a Christian co-worker and missionary named F. Julius Quist, who was best friends with Stephan, and travelled with him around America. In an instant, Daniel made the connection of Julius and Unalakleet and the Ivanoffs. 82 years after his mission work ended in the village, Julius had provided Daniel a personal bridge and a new entry into the people and larger Ivanoff family he was serving. Daniel could now tell those unfriendly Ivanoff boys that his great uncle, and their great-great grandfather were best of friends. From that time on, Daniel's work in Unalakleet went smoothly. God had paved the way, but the path would shortly take a new turn.



In 1984, Daniel accepted a call to go up to Nome to work at the Covenant radio station. Putting his previous radio experience to good use--as a disc jockey at the local AM station in high school and his college radio station-- Dan hoped to be a good addition to the radio ministry and have a wider outreach. Upon his arrival, he was assigned to oversee the late

night broadcasts, including KICY's Russian program hour. Like other station staff, he had no idea of the Russian audience as he dutifully set up the large audio reels that broadcast the Gospel in a language foreign to him. Soon, he would become the station's news director, and on a daily basis, read the AP newswire about US Air Force F-15 fighter jets scrambled from Anchorage to intercept Soviet *Bear H* bombers flying near the Alaskan coast. He didn't have a very good impression of the Russians.



The mid-1980s wasn't a good time for Soviet-American relations, and that was certainly the case in the Bering Sea area. Close call military incidents and even naval activity became frequent news items that Daniel read on the air. KICY's broadcast region was in the middle of an ice curtain that showed no promise for opening up any kind of relations between Alaska and Chukotka. No one even thought such an opportunity possible. During Dan's first year in Nome, he ventured up to the Diomed Islands, and walked out on the ice toward the Soviet forward military base on Big Diomed, going as close as he could to this forbidden part of the Soviet Union. Russia was right before his eyes, but had he walked much farther, he might have ended up a prisoner in a Soviet military barracks.

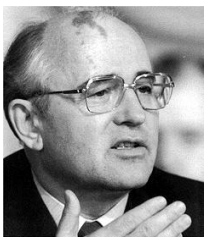
Dan on international date line by Big Diomed Island (Ratmanov)



After three years on the mission field, Daniel felt God leading him to get more training and education, so he applied to and was accepted at Wheaton College near Chicago, to enter the Graduate School of Communication program. During his classes, he had a chance encounter with a famous missionary known as Brother Andrew Van der Bijl, who specialized in smuggling Bibles into Communist countries. Fascinated by the nature of his mission to get God's word into restricted places, Brother Andrew challenged Daniel to do something similar if the opportunity arose. Completing his Wheaton experience with additional challenges from a wonderful faculty, Daniel headed to Alaska, this time, not as a missionary, but as a member of the staff of the University of Alaska Fairbank's Rural College. Fortunately, his position took him back to Nome, and in his spare time, he volunteered at KICY and helped lead the music worship at the local Covenant church.

### **The Vision for Russia reemerges in an unlikely manner...**

A year after settling into Nome, Daniel had a fortuitous and extremely unusual meeting with a local real estate agent and entrepreneur named Jim Stimpfle. Married to an Eskimo from King Island, and raised in Washington DC—his family being next door neighbors to Senator Eduard Kennedy--Jim seemed an odd fellow among many who ended up in this town known as the last habitable settlement in North America. Each person had their reasons for being in Nome, and Jim certainly had his. Most of them had found a way to adjust to the slow rhythm of life in the arctic, and for many years, Jim had his own, but to many he seemed bored and in 1987 he wasn't doing too well selling houses, so he had time on his hands. Daniel didn't have the most exciting life either, and was open to new opportunities to make his life in Nome make some kind of difference.



A world away in Moscow, Mikhail Gorbachev was turning the Soviet system upside down with his calls for *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). Convinced that the USSR needed to make fundamental changes if it was to continue as a viable political and economic entity, Gorbachev and a growing movement of politically-repressed citizens yearning for reform and freedom began challenging every notion of Soviet political control that had been carefully constructed over the last seventy years.

Alongside this call to reform, was a newfound and growing desire by the Soviet populace to get a better understanding of the world outside of their borders, and to promote peace with their adversaries in the west. Of special interest to Soviet peoples was America, its dreaded and long-term cold war enemy, whose war machine was forcing the Communists to devote huge investments in military spending that was bankrupting the nation. But something else was interesting about America that trickled in slow rivulets into Soviet society; its culture, music, religion, material life, politics, and with the introduction of imported home video devices, a new inroad into America through the lens of Hollywood movies and entertainment. Russian teenagers already new about Rocky Balboa, but not Jesus.



As Soviet radio jammers ended their interfering with western radio broadcasts and the *Voice of America*, listeners in Russia were getting new insights into the US and Europe, and the road was being set for a level of interaction with Americans never before thought possible. 1987 was a key and pivotal year as Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan began a series of meetings that sought a new relationship between the superpowers.

If the top leaders of each country could meet face to face to discuss tough issues on the way to a new relaxation of tensions, and perhaps even a friendship, then it might be possible to make this happen by citizen diplomats who had even more interest in making this a reality.<sup>xvii</sup> Out of this environment of hope for the impossible came the fateful meeting between Jim and Daniel, and the means for the Covenant to get back into Russia.

In September 1987, Jim stepped into Daniel's office at the college and said he had a crazy idea he wanted to work on, and wondered if Dan would be his partner to carry it out. From sheer curiosity Dan asked Jim what it was, to which he replied he wanted to open the border between America and Russia along the Bering Strait. At first, Daniel thought the idea *was* crazy, because who in their right mind would think it possible, especially after the recent incident of a Soviet naval vessel intercepting a stranded Alaskan fishing boat and forcing them into the Chukotka port of Provideniya.

Tensions were high at the moment, and why would the Soviets be interested in being friends? But the more Jim talked, the more Daniel became interested. The idea of this challenge was becoming infectious, and each man could make a tangible contribution to the inroads of peace that were starting to develop internationally with the Soviets. As Jim laid out his ideas, Daniel acquiesced to become his partner. Why not? Not much else was happening in Nome, and this seemed a challenge difficult to resist. Besides, an American girl, Lynne Cox had just pulled off a great diplomatic stunt by swimming the near freezing waters off of Little Diomed Island over to the rocky shore on Big Diomed Island where stunned Soviet soldiers toasted her with champagne!<sup>xviii</sup> So the idea wasn't crazy after all.



the Cox swim



Their goal: develop a grass roots effort involving the people of Alaska to petition the American and Soviet governments to allow a one day plane flight of people from Nome to fly to Provideniya on a "Friendship Flight." Immediately, Jim and Dan went to work.

The first task was to establish a rationale why the Soviets would allow this. Being married to an Eskimo, Jim knew that native families on each side of the Bering Sea had been forcibly separated since 1948, and forty years had gone by without them being allowed to visit each other. Second, the US and Russia were close neighbors, with the actual border only 1 ½ miles apart between the Diomedes.



If there was a logical place to develop a friendship between the nations, it certainly should be here where they were neighbors. These facts seemed worthy enough to pursue the daunting task of communicating with all the necessary forces that would have to come together to make it work.

In the late August of 1987, the NOAA ship *Surveyor*, based in Alaska, made a highly unusual port call to Provideniya, the first time an American scientific research vessel had been allowed into northern Russian waters in years. The ship's Captain William Forester returned to Nome, and showed Jim a letter from the Soviet mayor of Provideniya, Oleg Kulinkin. In it, Oleg wrote of his desires for peace and friendship with the people of Nome. 90 years before, business between Nome and Chukotka had been brisk, and after 60 years of inactivity, that letter was enough of a reason to get Jim and Dan excited.



Oleg

So the men divided up their tasks, with Jim being in charge of writing to the various politicians and state departments, coordinating activities with the Alaskan government, community, and native groups who could be involved. Dan would work on the American, Soviet, and international press groups who would eventually be interested in this highly unique effort to make peace. Dan also decided that in order to generate the most publicity for the event, a satellite town meeting, featuring a live satellite broadcast of peoples in Provideniya greeting Alaskans would spark even greater interest across America and the USSR.

Dan at NHK-TV  
Tokyo, Japan



Dan produced video documentaries on the project that were sent to Soviet television and communication committees in Moscow, did interviews with US, Japanese, and European TV networks who were intrigued with the peace initiative, and labored on convincing various partners to invest their time and effort into the project.

On the local front, KICY was soon enlisted to support the "Friendship Flight" and they continued their Russian late night broadcasts, but with an even heightened sense of importance because of a new role they could play to serve the Russian audience they had for so long wanted to know and help. No one on the staff was sure how the project would play out, but God had obviously been putting the pieces of future ministry in place.

The men needed a plane, so they convinced Bruce Kennedy, a Christian man who happened to be the Chairman and CEO of Alaska Airlines, to donate a free Boeing 737 for the flight if it could be arranged. For the broadcasts, Daniel convinced the state's telecommunications carrier, Alascom, to fly over a portable satellite earth station set up inside a GMC motor home, delivered by a C-130 cargo plane. Both companies doubted the flight would come off, but they agreed in principle if Jim and Dan could get permission from the Russians.

As interest for the meeting began to swell across the state and get the attention of Washington and Moscow, it became clear to Jim and Dan that somehow the idea would come off. At first, the Soviets didn't know what to make of the request from Alaska, but the state department in Washington began working alongside the Nome promoters, and the idea was mentioned at one of the Reagan-Gorbachev summits. After only 6 months of work, it seemed like the Russians could be won over.

In early winter of 1988, Gorbachev asked his personal assistant, Gennady Gerosimov to go to Alaska to investigate the matter. Gerosimov, who had been the editor of the *Moscow News*--designed for foreign consumers of Soviet information--was a good choice for the job. A fluent English speaker and genuinely interested in the west, he took on the task despite the extreme winter elements he would face on the journey up to Nome. Arriving in Anchorage to attend a conference advocating US-Soviet ties, he soon flew to Nome where he was given a big welcome by Jim and a delegation from the city. Later he met with Dan and the staff at the college, and then followed Jim and Dan to fly over to Little Diomed Island to inspect the actual border at the international dateline.



Little Diomed had a small native settlement of houses built on poles, with fish and polar bear skins on racks whipping in the strong ocean winds. On Big Diomed, the small Soviet military contingent was in place, with monitors in large field glasses observing the native Alaska National Guard forces who looked right back in their binoculars. It was a surreal moment as Gerosimov arrived in a blizzard and was entertained by Eskimo

dancers in the local high school, who afterward explained their reasons why they wanted to meet with their relatives on the other side of the strait.

Looking at the frozen ocean that could easily allow natives to walk over to Big Diomed, Gerosimov came to the conclusion that approving the Friendship Flight could be a pivotal event to break open the currently stalled US-Soviet summits, most recently manifest by the failed arms control meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland between his boss and Reagan. Gennady flew back to Moscow, and the Nome promoters hoped for a good outcome. They had given it their best shot.

In May, the Soviet state department delivered a letter informing the Alaskans that their request to visit Provideniya had been approved. Swinging into high gear, the men worked with the Alaska governor's office to come up with the flight list of participants, the broadcasting logistics to set up the satellite broadcast, and a host of other details that had to be worked out. On the Soviet side, Mayor Kulinkin, the Communist party leaders of Magadan Oblast (territorial designation of the northern portion of the Soviet Far East), and the people of the city began their preparations to welcome the American delegation.

Unfortunately, KICY staff did not make the final list of participants, but Dan wanted to represent them and the local Christian community somehow. While the visit was strictly a secular, political, and cultural affair—with no proselytizing tolerated--there was great concern that somehow a Christian presence could be made in that celebration of peace.

Dan was contacted by Mina Bacheldor, who with her husband Everett, had been pioneer missionaries with the Plymouth Brethren church and worked with KICY in their early years. They had a decades long passion to minister to the Russians, and while they could never enter the country, Everett used unusual methods to get the Gospel into the hands of the Russians. He resorted to putting Russian language Bible tracts into bottles and set them into the ocean to float over to Chukotka. Even Jim Stimpfle used a variant of that approach when he placed gifts and messages of peace into a weather balloon the year before, letting it fly off the beach into the sky and off in the direction of Russia.

Mina told Dan that she could get him a large number of Russian New Testaments if he could find a way to distribute them. So Dan developed a plan to smuggle Bibles into Provideniya that would make Brother Andrew proud. Because he was assigned to oversee a live TV broadcast of the event, that meant he had to bring cases of television equipment with him and he could find a way to fit Bibles into any number of those equipment cases. A few days before the flight, Dan took the Bibles in Nome, purchased picture post cards of Alaskan scenes (moose, bears, mountains, etc), and pasted one to the cover of every Bible, so it appeared to be a book about Alaska. He got them into the cases and delivered them to the Nome Airport for the waiting *Alascom* cargo plane to load and send over to Provideniya.



On June 13, 1988, Jim, Dan, along with a contingent of Eskimos, politicians, and press boarded the Alaska Airlines' *City of Provideniya 737* and roared off on a one hour flight to Provideniya. Arriving at the airport of this politically-closed regional capital, the Alaskans disembarked into a crowd of awaiting Soviet soldiers, politicians, journalists, Eskimo radio reporters, and small children waving placards with messages of "no war" "peace" and "friendship."

The Cold War was nearing its end that moment as the two superpowers came together in the form of close neighbors embracing as long lost friends. During the day, the Alaskans toured the town, dined with their Soviet hosts, and then had a final late afternoon town meeting to declare their intentions for peace, mutual relations, and a lasting friendship between the Soviet and American peoples. US Sen. Murkowski, Oleg, AK Gov Cowper



Dan was busy overseeing the broadcast setup for the meeting, while TV reporters from the CBS network and Alaskan stations used his equipment to relay their reports—including President Reagan's greetings and congratulations—to audiences back in America. It was the first time anyone had used an American satellite to do a live TV report from the Soviet Union back to the US, and Dan was grateful for God's help in this achievement. But in the back of his mind

were those Bibles sitting in the equipment cases at the town hall site. He hadn't time to distribute them, and as the meeting and day was ending, a crisis was looming.



As the official festivities ended and the Alaskans got on a bus to head back to the airport, Dan was still stuck in the town hall, furiously breaking down his TV set up and trying to pack cases of equipment. Soon, the contingent was on the plane ready to take off, but they waited impatiently for Dan back in the city.

Sweating and fearing he would be left behind, a man standing nearby named Mikhail looked at Dan and asked him if he could be of some assistance. At that point, he was more worried about getting the Bibles out to the Russians than getting onto the plane. The man appeared to be a KGB agent, as he spoke fluent English--like most of the KGB-types assigned to monitor these events.

Dan then told Mikhail he had gifts he wanted to share with people in town, and pointing to the Bibles with Alaskan post cards stuck on them, he agreed to help. Mikhail then went out and gleefully passed every New Testament out to the crowd collected nearby, having no idea what they were. God's Word had been delivered in this very small way, but it was important. With a sigh of relief that his two mission objectives (the flight and Bible distribution) were accomplished, Dan speedily got to the airport, onto the plane, and with the Governor of Alaska and US Senator waiting, the plane door was shut, and they roared off to the Alaska coast and into history.



Each person on board had their own recollections of what had just happened, but for the Christians of Alaska in general, and the Covenant churches of the Norton Sound region in particular, the promise for a new opportunity to share the Gospel with the Russians was close to a reality after so many decades of waiting and lost chances. During the Friendship Flight, the people long sought by KICY were finally identified and it was clearly understood that the radio signal had been listened to.

KICY's *Eskimo Hour* announcer of the past, Clarence Irrigoo, talked with his Eskimo radio counterparts, and then with his Soviet relatives. It was an incredible day, and the 100 year dream of Axel Karlson and Adolph Lydell to reach the Russians was finally achieved.

The future for a new start in missions and for the evangelization of the peoples in this remote corner of the Arctic would soon be unveiled.

## Postscript:

Over the next two years, Jim and Dan were invited to the USSR by Soviet leaders to visit different cities in the effort to investigate the many possible avenues of interaction between each side. Dan developed a working partnership with the heads of various Soviet state television and radio committee in many cities, as well as regional press operations, telecommunication offices, and universities.



In 1990, Dan proposed to the Russians the offer of providing them live American television via satellite. Three regional capital cities agreed, so Dan then brought over and installed satellite earth stations at state TV facilities to bring down TV signals designed for Alaskan viewers. The Soviets then transmitted them live to audiences who could not believe the security service (KGB) and Party leadership would let them watch uncensored programs in English from America. For a nation that spent billions of rubles on jamming stations to prevent Soviets from tuning in, this was quite a reversal allowing the broadcasts directly into their homes. It was a case of *glasnost* at its highest implementation.



In September 1991, Dan made a momentous decision with God's leading to move to Magadan, USSR in order to work on a doctoral dissertation to complete his Ph.D studies at McGill University in Montreal. He was ready to take on new adventures in Russia, and on the side, he would teach at a Soviet university and work as the English editor of a new regional newspaper.

Up in Chukotka, the newly-opened border that God had guided was yielding new fruit for the Kingdom. Pastors from Alaska joined with staff from KICY and Slavic Gospel Association to share the Gospel in native villages and in Provideniya, where an estimated 500 people responded to an invitation for salvation. There had been no Orthodox church presence in the region for over 70 years, nor church buildings in Provideniya for people to gather for worship, so house churches meeting in apartments began to form by those who had kept their faith during the Soviet repression, added by those who were responding to the evangelistic efforts coming over from Alaska.

Eskimo Pastor Howard Slowoko, despite his advanced age, travelled in native villages and baptized twenty five souls into new life in Christ. Clarence Irrigoo, now in his eighties, continued his program "*That's the way I see it*" and went over to Chukotka, where he received many personal thanks from his Eskimo listeners. An increasing

number of Soviet visitors who made brief stopovers in Nome shared their appreciation to KICY for the Christian programming they had long broadcast.

There was a new movement of the spirit of God in that forbidden land, and the Christians of Alaska were excited to see how the Lord would move in even more exciting ways as they watched the Russian people coming to him.

As Daniel worked on secular projects with the Soviets further south, he had little idea what was soon to happen in the following year as the 70 year old experiment of Lenin and the godless communist ideology and control system that had ruined the lives of countless millions, finally imploded.



On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992, with the stroke of a pen, the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist, and a new era commenced as a free people prepared themselves for an unknown future. Russian President Boris Yeltsin promised his people a new start, full of freedom and possibilities for the individual to realize his/her full potential and happiness. But for the Christians in Alaska who had been waiting long for this dream, a new opportunity for taking the Gospel to the people using radio became a distinct possibility. Now, it only depended on God's prompting and timing to make it happen.



## Chapter 5



### Missionary radio potential in the New Russia

One month after the birth of the new nation, on a continent far away, Raymond Dahlberg, was sitting in an airport lobby with his colleague, Covenant President Paul Larsen waiting for his flight to Miami from Quito, Ecuador. Serving as the Covenant's Executive Secretary for World Mission, Ray had been around the globe overseeing mission stations and was always on the lookout for the movement of God.

A fellow passenger walked up to him and sat down. It was Ron Cline, president of HCJB World Radio, whose Christian shortwave radio station was near the airport. HCJB had been working on a cooperative global radio project with other radio ministries called *World by 2000*. The goal was to provide every man, woman, and child on earth the opportunity to turn on their radios and hear the Gospel in a language they could understand.<sup>xix</sup> As he struck up a conversation, Ron appeared very excited about something that had happened in Elkhart, Indiana. He said to Ray, "we have just had a major breakthrough that I have to tell you about! Our engineers just miniaturized an entire radio station and it can be packed in two suitcases! You can go anywhere in the world and install a radio station!" It was a key event in making their global project possible. Then Ron changed the subject and asked, "what excites you Ray?"

The reply was quick: "I have just been invited to Magadan, Russia." "Magadan?" asked Ron, "where is that Ray?" "Well, its right across the Bering Sea from Alaska, and its on this side of the Ural Mountains." Ron thought about geography for a moment and then said "you know, that's one area of the world we can't reach with the Gospel. With all of our transmitters, none of them can reach that place—and you are going there? Ray, you ought to set up a radio station in Magadan!" Ray took the suggestion and said "well Ron, that's your business, not mine." "No, no," said Ron, "you've got the chance to go. At least when you are there, why not ask if you can have a station there in Magadan?" With a big sigh, Pastor Dahlberg said he would ask, but in his heart, he was thinking "I hope they say no."



Back in Magadan, Daniel was busy doing his many projects and getting used to living in Russia. It was a time of complete societal transformation as the government was transitioning from Soviet rule to an uncertain democracy and market economy. No one knew how the country was going to end up, but the key feeling at the time was freedom. In the past, when everything was controlled and individual enterprise forbidden, suddenly almost anything was possible. In this new environment, Daniel found himself able to do things he could not imagine and the whole country lay at his feet for whatever he wanted to pursue. As a foreigner, and especially an American, this seemed highly unlikely, but nevertheless, it was a fact. There was no KGB to stop him or anyone else from attempting new ways of working and living. Dreams were now allowed to come true. It was the new Russia.

In the summer of 1992, Rev. Dalhberg and Rev. Larsen touched down at the Magadan airport, some forty miles away from the city. On the highway, the men travelled down the long road that had been built by political and religious prisoners condemned to the Soviet gulag system of camps. Over two million people had been killed by Stalin's forces in the region and this was the place that Alexander Solzhenitsyn had written his "Gulag Archipelago" about, based on the experiences he had in Magadan. The region had been an area of incredible spiritual darkness, where evil reigned as man's inhumanity to man was carried out ruthlessly to the extreme by a socialist experiment that proclaimed humanism as its deity. But the Lord was bringing his light to Magadan in a very open way.



Upon his arrival in town, they were met by the director of the State Ministry of Culture. The director had previously been involved with a Covenant musical group from Walnut Creek, California (*ONE ACCORD*) for a series of choral concerts in Magadan that Daniel had arranged without Ray knowing it.<sup>xx</sup> As the man welcomed them, he quickly proposed to Ray a musical exchange and a reciprocal visit to America. Remembering the excitement experienced during the Friendship Flight when an Alaskan Eskimo dance troupe shared the stage with Chukotka native dancers, the director proposed to bring dancers over to America, to which the Pastor suggested bringing over Gospel teams to Magadan in return.



With a good rapport quickly established, Ray summoned up the courage to fulfill his prior challenge from Ron, and asked the director if he would introduce Ray to the leaders of the State radio and television company in town, to which the director replied, "well I would love to do it!" So they got in a car with their escorts and headed up the long Lenin Street hill to where the state broadcast studios and the 150 foot TV tower were located.

Walking into what was the Soviet's main propaganda instrument and control operation, Ray and Paul met director Georgi Radchenko along with his staff. Georgi had his position as the leader of the state broadcast organization because of his reliability to the Communist Party, but now was feeling his way through quite strange times, as that party control was finished. He would have to be open to information and cooperation from people and places he would never have contemplated in the past. The studios he administered were the same ones whose announcers had long proclaimed the superiority of atheism as a testament to the Soviet state. And now an American pastor was entering his office wanting to talk to him.

Boldly Ray set Georgi up and asked him point blank: "Sir, we are interested in mission work around the world, and by the way, is there any possibility that we could build a radio station here in Magadan?" Here was a man who controlled everything that had to do with radio and television—it had been his personal domain—and what was he to say back to Ray? Incredibly, Georgi responded, "A Christian station in Magadan? Well of course! Have you not listened to Gorbachev? He has been talking about *glasnost* and *perestroika*, everything NEW! Of course you can, everything is possible!" Ray thought to himself, "oh swell, exactly what I wanted to hear."

The futile reaction he had was due to the fact that he had no one, no experience, and no funds to actually carry it out. For some strange reason known only to the Lord, Ray did not realize that Daniel was in Magadan at that moment, knew Georgi and the radio staff from his past work installing American satellite television right inside Georgi's building, and could have been Ray's assistant for these negotiations. Daniel knew that the Russian Supreme Soviet had recently passed laws on media, relinquishing the monopoly role of the government over broadcasting, and allowing individuals and companies the right to develop print, radio, and television operations. But Daniel wasn't there.

Ray and Paul left Magadan not knowing how to take Georgi's bold proclamation for radio and turn it into the mission opportunity the Covenant had been hoping for in Russia.<sup>xxi</sup> They had in their hands, however, a clear invitation to do something. Later that summer, Daniel left Magadan as well and went home to New York to continue writing his dissertation. It seemed the chance was missed. God would have to work another miracle if Ray's Russian endeavor was to succeed.<sup>xxii</sup>

### **GOD's mysterious ways...**

Back in the states a few weeks later, Ray was on his way to the east coast, headed toward Erie, PA when he encountered a man named Mike Halleen. Mike told Ray he was working on a project for raising money to buy Bibles for Russia, and that he ought to get involved with it. Ray hesitated and thanked him, then said "you know we have no people in Russia." That ended the matter, or so he thought. Ray travelled on to Jamestown, New York where he had been invited to a mission banquet and then to preach at two local churches.

That Saturday night, he had a wonderful time and dinner at the First Covenant Church banquet where he spoke about world mission and outlined what the denomination was doing around the world. In attendance listening was Daniel. Recently he had been working up a strategic plan for developing Christian radio stations in Russia, outlining how the new Russian laws and broadcast regulations could be followed, as well as the technical infrastructure needed to make it happen.

As Ray finished his presentation and we preparing to leave, Daniel came up to him and said "I don't know if you remember me, but we met some years ago up at KICY in Nome." Ray remembered Dan, not only at KICY, but at North Park College where he had some information from his son Mark back in 1976 about this "wayward kid."

Ray said, "what are you doing Dan?" to which he replied, "well I've just come back from Magadan, Russia where I was doing research on my doctoral dissertation and working on communication projects." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a three page letter and said "I have a dream." Ray asked him what kind of dream, and Daniel shared that his dream was to build a Christian radio station in Magadan. Ray stood there in disbelief and said, "tell me about it." Dan went ahead and explained all the parameters of the project, the Russian people and officials he knew at the many state broadcast organizations, and the chances for success in getting a radio frequency and studio built. Then Dan also said,

“oh, by the way, I own an apartment and a car in Magadan.” As Dan was talking, Ray thought to himself, “Yes, but what about the money?”

Ray was also contemplating the past situation with KICY Radio, when it had been turned over from the World Mission department to the Covenant’s Home Mission office. The switch got Ray and the world mission folks out of the radio business, much to his relief--until that evening in Jamestown.



The next morning, Ray was supposed to preach at the Zion Covenant Church, but his voice had given out. Daniel showed up and offered to preach in his place, then shared about his vision for Russia. After the service, Ray left Jamestown bound for Chicago with a check for \$10,000 in his hand. Something was up, and he wasn’t quite sure what. He didn’t commit to anything, and Daniel assumed nothing would come out of it, so he went back home and resumed his studies.

Ray eventually came to a realization; “even a hard-headed Swede gets the impression that God is at work, because the mission is God’s mission, not ours, but his.” He understood that he had to get in line with where the Lord is going, and it was clear that God had to nudge him and even hit him on the side of the head. Ray finally got the impression that God was doing something here and wanted the Covenant to be a part of what *He* was doing.

As he arrived back in his Chicago office, Wally Lindskoog called. This was the same Wally—a Christian philanthropist/cattle raiser--who thirty years ago paid for the Covenant radio telephones sent in to the native mission stations in Alaska. Wally said “Ray, I’ve just been listening to *Focus on the Family* and Jim Dobson who was talking about the *CoMission* project starting in Russia (American Christians invited into Russian public schools to teach Christian ethics and morality), so tell me, what are WE doing there?” Ray responded, “I’ll tell you Wally, we are thinking about starting a radio station over there.” Wally countered, “Ah wonderful Ray! I suppose you’ll need some *money*.” Ray said yeah and Wally asked “how much do you need?” Without an honest clue to the amount required, Ray made a stab and said “half a million dollars.” Mr. Lindskoog, in his reserved Swedish manner countered, “well that’s more than I had in mind, but I’ll send you \$25,000.” The cattle on a thousand hills were starting to add up.



Two weeks later, Ralph Griffey called Ray from a Covenant retirement center in San Diego and asked, “Are we doing anything in Russia?” Ray responded, “we are beginning the idea of having a radio station” and the man on the other end of the line began to cry. His wife Gunny took the phone and said to Ray, “Has he told you yet?” Ray said no, and Gunny looked at Ralph and said fervently, “TELL HIM!” Ralph took the phone back and informed Ray “I want to send you \$100,000.” Ralph would later tell Ray the story of how God gave him the money and how he specifically told him in a dream that he was to invest his treasure in a Christian radio station in Russia.

Three days later, a small 3x5" envelop arrived on Ray's desk with a tiny check with more numbers on it than Ray had ever seen. Before he knew it, another call rang, and this time a man from Seattle, Washington whom Ray had never met was on the line. The caller said "I understand you are starting a radio station in Russia." Ray had no clue how the man got that information, in fact, even the Covenant Board of World Mission was out of the loop on Ray's radio idea. He ended up with another check for \$75,000. Ray sat in his office, marveling at it all. Within two months, he had \$250,000 that he had absolutely nothing to do with raising, but God was saying, according to Ray, "Do you get it?"

Soon after, Ray and Paul Larsen called Daniel and asked him to drive out to Chicago for a meeting. Daniel assumed the men wanted a clearer idea of how the Covenant could get involved in Russia, and figured he could at least serve as a consultant. When he arrived in Ray's office, the subject quickly turned to Russia and Dan laid out a number of possibilities for the denomination to pursue. There were so many options as the country lay wide open for evangelism and new mission activities.

Slowly, Paul took over the conversation and started asking about Daniel's experience and education, as well as his plans. After elaborating long enough, Daniel flatly stated that developing Christian radio in Russia was perhaps the most effective ministry the Covenant could have, and besides, no one had ever done it before, and the challenge was extremely exciting to contemplate. To which Paul replied, "Okay Dan, when are you going to do it?" Shocked, Dan said, "Hey, I thought you wanted me to consult you. I didn't come here looking for a job." Both Paul and Ray then told Dan he was their man, and they felt it God's will calling that Dan should move back to Russia and lead the Covenant's first mission effort there.



Ray Dahlberg, Dan, and Paul Larsen

Everything that God had led Daniel through over those many years seemed to be pointing very clearly to this new call. Daniel immediately agreed. The third Swede was being given the mission opportunity of a lifetime!

Hardly containing their excitement, Paul and Ray went straight to the Covenant World Mission board and they voted unanimously to recommend at the Covenant Annual Meeting in 1993 to make Russia its 10<sup>th</sup> mission field, and to call Daniel Johnson as a special assignment missionary.

That August, Daniel boarded a plane in New York, bound for Anchorage toward his final destination in the Russian Far East. He was ready to put the mission plan into action, but had no guarantee he would be able to accomplish what he set out to do. In a land just coming out of Lenin's steely grip, that would take a miracle.



## Chapter 6

### The battle for Christian radio commences



Touching down at the Magadan airport in August 1993, Daniel was by now familiar with this routine of coming to Russia, getting past the customs officers, looking at the vast rows of smoked salmon for sale lining the airport passenger hall, hopping onto the municipal bus headed down the Kolyma highway, and finally arriving in this city of concrete buildings nestled along the ocean port of Magadan. Each time in, he went past the huge statue of Lenin that was erected to signal the hope of communism to the Party faithful, but now Vladimir looked tired and irrelevant to this expectant population of 130,000 wondering about their future.



He settled into his apartment on Portovaya Street, just a hundred yards from the shoreline along the port where previously, millions of prisoners of the Soviet gulag were unloaded, destined for misery and death in the uranium mines and remote labor camps. Daniel had entered a new Russian world, grasping to find itself, unsure of how to proceed, and for many, fearful for their lives as the guiding role of the state had ceased their cradle to grave supervision. If ever there was a people ready for the light of the Gospel, it was Magadan. But now his role was different. No more would Daniel travel in the privileged circles of high party leaders, state press, or the academic community that gravitated toward him when he was perceived as the unofficial American ambassador. Daniel was now a simple missionary, looking for God's direction to help him carry out his assigned task. And he needed to do it in a society that was upside down, armed only with a new sense of freedom, and the possible.



Daniel found his old friend Victor Soloviev, an engineer who was his guide and translator during his many past communication projects. Victor became a most valuable resource, not knowing the Lord, but used by him, as he helped Daniel understand the myriad legal, technical, and political issues that would confront anyone seeking to develop a broadcast operation in this nation that had never experienced radio beyond the control of the state.

The next person on his list was Paul and Ray's new friend, Olga Rybakova, pastor of the "Revival Church," that had received financial help from the two during their first trip to Magadan. Olga would be key to developing relationships and contacts with newly emerging house churches and other pastors in Magadan. With these two players ready to assist him, Daniel began his new mission.

### Fall 1993

Charting the landscape of Magadan, both for partners and a place to locate a radio station, Dan began by scoping out possible sites to set up a broadcast operation.



There was only one logical choice: the *Dossaf* building, located on the highest point in the city on Potapova street, and just up the hill from the city's first Russian Orthodox chapel that was under construction. Dossaf was a former Soviet military organization (young pioneers organization formed to help raise money for the Soviet army--analogous to the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts raising funds for the US Army.)

In 1993, with the Soviet system unraveled, there was no more active Dossaf operation, but one remaining officer (Vladimir) was named director of the building. Dan made an appointment with Vladimir, and told him his plans for developing a radio station. He knew that a radio group of ham operators had rooms on the third floor of the building as well as short wave antennas on the roof, so there was a reasonable chance to add a few more antennas that could transmit Christian signals.

Taking Dan on a tour of the building, he shows him the former LENIN library room that housed Soviet propaganda materials and books used for indoctrinating the young Dossaf members. It was three level room in ramshackle condition, peeling paint and broken plaster on the walls with steps about to fall apart. The director didn't think it much of a prospect, but Dan could immediately envision a station with three studios and an office in this confined space of roughly 680 sq. feet.



As they returned to his office, Dan asked how much Dossaf would charge for the room, and after making some calculations, Vladimir wrote out a sum in new Russian rubles (which had recently gone from 1R to \$1 US, to 3000R to \$1). It was \$30 a month. Dan agreed to a contract on the spot. God had provided the best possible location for a studio and transmitter site at the most unheard of price that any ministry could afford. It was a great start for the mission. Building in hand, next came the difficult part; getting a radio frequency to broadcast from it.

### **Formulating a broadcast plan**

The city of Magadan had never experienced FM radio before. Eighteen years earlier, a Soviet press publication outlined a proposed 5 year state plan for the Magadan government to experiment with FM broadcasting as an improvement on the low quality wired radio and AM systems the local residents suffered with. But as with most Soviet planning, this effort fell through.



A few years before in 1990, when Daniel was hosted by the Magadan State TV and Radio Committee, during his satellite installations, they grilled him with questions on the latest FM and satellite technology, but even their plans to develop an FM station during the Soviet period went unrealized.

For Daniel, his station idea came quickly into focus: it might become the first independent radio station in the Russian Far East that also happened to be the first FM stereo station, and the first Christian station using the newly-authorized FM radio band of 88-108 mhz. Like so many years ago in Alaska, the Covenant could introduce cutting edge technology to the people it sought to serve. Because this mission project was to bring something completely new to the people of Magadan (*the Good News*) why not bring it in the latest broadcast format with the highest audio quality so people could hear the Word of God in clear, beautiful stereo? The thought of it was an incredible and exciting challenge for Dan to tackle, as God was giving him the chance of a lifetime, both as a missionary, and for his professional development. Dan had the best job he could ever get, and he was working directly for the King of the Universe!

The project was ready to go. New Russian laws purported to make it possible, yet a thousand details remained to be solved before it could all come together. Full of energy, Daniel got down to the nuts and bolts of figuring out what to do next. The first thing he needed to do was to ask the Lord to send him the right people needed to get the job done, and that might take time. It was crucial to form a spiritual team that would take up the task to create this radio station. After all, he was just one American missionary in a foreign land, and if this mission was to work at all, it would be done by the Russians themselves.



As the new year started (1994), Daniel was ready to apply for an FM radio frequency with the Russian Ministry of Communications in Moscow (overseeing all technical access to radio frequencies) and the Russian Federal Ministry for Press, Teleradio, and Mass Media (charged with oversight of federal broadcast laws and operations). While he had a long list of government-stipulated procedures, regulations, and state organizations involved in the frequency process, the impression had been given that starting a station was a straightforward procedure, with a relatively short timeline. It proved to be anything but.

Daniel knew the Soviet government had been a nightmare of bureaucracy and bloated infrastructure when attempting to accomplish anything, yet he did not realize the old system would continue through the new Russian government and its structure for overseeing this new development of private broadcasting. But at least Daniel was counting on a two-point advantage to deal with this: he knew a lot of people who were connected with the process; and his boss was Almighty God, so who could stop him?

Once this initial application process was completed, a very long and complicated journey for this Christian radio mission would begin, but he didn't know that yet. The next step involved finding the people he had been asking God for.

When Dan first talked with Ray and Paul in Chicago about what Christian radio could do, it was with the understanding that the Covenant would come to Russia, not only for evangelism, but to come alongside the emerging church, rather than going to plant Covenant churches in accordance with its usual mission strategy. This meant serving in a

support capacity and as a facilitator for a new evangelical church movement that was growing by leaps and bounds after the demise of the USSR.

Putting this philosophy into action, Daniel sent out a call to all the new house churches in Magadan and their pastors to meet together for a radio conference that would explore the possibilities for a Christian station in their town. He had thirteen small congregations and was hoping to lay out a strategy for these churches to create a legal entity with representatives from each church that would ultimately control and operate the station.



As the pastors and selected representatives gathered inside the old Lenin library rooms, Daniel talked about his dream for a station, how it could facilitate the evangelistic and discipleship efforts of these new churches, as well as the role the Covenant denomination would play in providing licensing, technical, and equipment support for the station. Above all, it was to be a Christian station by the Russians, for the Russians, with the ultimate goal of a united

evangelical Church in Magadan to carry out broadcasting for the long term. No one church had the means to tackle the project, but together in unity, they might. At least this was Daniel's hope.

Sometimes the "best laid plans of mice and men"...unfortunately did not work out in this case. During the discussions that day, pastors from a diversity of doctrinal backgrounds began to argue over questions of control. The Baptist pastor didn't feel comfortable letting the pastor of the large Charismatic church dominate the planning process. The Pentecostal pastor had similar objections. Before he knew it, Daniel was watching this collective group of Christian leaders self-destruct over the issue of ownership and control. It was shocking to see new Christians argue over positions that mirrored centuries-old disputes from the time of the Reformation onward. This was not what he expected, and sadly at the end of the conference, there was no position of unity among the group, and no one willing to carry out the total burden involved in applying for and building the radio station.

Where was God in this critical moment? How was it possible that this mission seemed ready to fail before it even commenced? Where was the love of the brethren that was so critical to building a strong community of believers that could then reach out to the lost in Magadan? It was clear that these pastors lacked training, had no seminary or Bible school background, and were basically self-appointed leaders as the house churches first emerged. But it proved a point. Christian radio could serve to properly educate the church and its leaders with solid Biblical instruction offered by mature Bible teachers and Christian leaders, even though many of them lived a continent away. This aspect of the station's ministry to the proper growth and guidance of the local Church gave Dan all the more reason to succeed in his challenge. Evangelism is the first step, but discipleship was the next, and the radio station could serve in that role effectively, if it could only start operations.

Daniel resigned himself to the following conclusion: he would have to create the station himself, and once it went on the air, offer it back to the churches with free air time and support, maintaining himself as the trustee to ensure its operation without bias against particular congregations. That was a bargain he wasn't looking for. But at least, a number of pastors agreed to support him once the station came on line.

It was enough to go with, and after relaying the news back to Chicago, the Covenant authorized him to carry out an alternate approach for starting the station. Dan then began preparations for utilizing a private Russian company that could conduct media operations and apply for media licenses and broadcast channels. He chose an existing single proprietor firm that would serve as the Russian entity to work on behalf of the Covenant (the ECC had no legal status to operate inside the Russian Federation).<sup>xxiii</sup>

Once the paperwork was completed, Dan went ahead and submitted an official request with the Ministry of Communications for an FM channel. Knowing that other federal organizations and more applications would be involved (with their own timelines) before a frequency was granted, he took this waiting period and focused his attention on the more technical aspects of the station. At this juncture, that chance meeting in the Quito airport once again came into play.



HCJB had been serious about their *World by 2000* project, and when they were informed about the Covenant's commitment to Magadan, they put David Kealy of their Colorado office in touch with Daniel. The two men worked out a deal: if Daniel could secure a radio frequency and studio facilities, HCJB would provide an FM station package along with radio engineers from their Elkhart tech center to install transmitters and antennas. This was a great offer from HCJB, but Daniel had the harder of the two tasks. Getting equipment was one thing, but getting permission to use it was another. Having HCJB as a partner was a big relief, and that partnership would only get bigger in the future, but for now, the challenges remained formidable.

Back in Chicago, the denomination was working full bore on the Russian mission in a multilevel approach that would eventually add a Bible college (based at Olga's church), as well as Bible distribution around the Magadan region. The Covenant continued to get large donations for projected station startup expenses, and for its "Bibles for Russia" campaign. Covenant pastors began thinking about the possibility of coming to Magadan to teach two-week sessions for Bible students hoping to become church planters and missionaries in the Russian Far East. And Covenanters in Alaska continued to make visits across the Strait to encourage new Christians in the many native villages there. KICY's broadcast were more important than ever for their Chukotka audience that could now count many friends in Nome.

### **Bureaucracy and the formidable Russian state**

No one had attempted to do what Daniel was doing in Magadan, but the new state radio company had taken notice of it and they decided they didn't like their wired radio broadcasts anymore, and applied for an FM channel to simulcast on. Still, there was no

precedent for getting a privately controlled channel, no example of success to replicate, only the unknown potential to attempt what the government said was theoretically possible.

Going down his list, Daniel began submitting documents for a vast number of state organs that each had a hand in the process. First he had to apply to make his Magadan company recognized as a company qualified to engage in mass media. Then he applied to the Federal Ministry of Press to be able to use a frequency, should the Ministry of Communication grant them. He was told he needed confirmation from the Magadan city surgeon that his low power FM transmitters would not cause cancer to residents from the radiation they emitted. Permission after permission demanded, with much time taken for each authorization, ate up most of 1994.

One got the feeling the forces of satan that had inhabited Magadan for so long were putting every obstacle up they could. Magadan needed the light of Christ, and to have that light shared over the same airwaves that were previously the domain of those who rejected God, was a vision that kept Dan going.

This certainty of God's supremacy helped him deal with the human element opposing him: a bewildering, frustrating process of bureaucrats clinging to their small positions of power over the lives of people seeking their permission. And all of them would work faster if they were paid bribes (*vzyatku*) under the table. During this time of government transition, the public worker was paid little, so at every opportunity, corruption entered the process. Knowing that he must take a Christian stand on this, Daniel refused to pay any bribes, a move that would end up in interminable waiting periods for something to be signed and moved on. Fortunately, Dan's bosses in Chicago were patient.

Daniel went back for a summer break to Jamestown and shared the mission's progress with his home churches (First and Zion Covenant). He challenged both congregations to help him raise the money to purchase a 250 watt FM transmitter, and they came through. Attending the Covenant Annual Meeting at North Park College in Chicago, he met with Ray and Paul and many of the denomination staff, giving them a better picture of what they were facing in Russia. He left town with the leadership knowing they would have to wait for possibly a long time, as their former illusions of a quick license process were now gone. But they knew that everything comes in God's perfect timing.

A big breakthrough came in the later half of that year when the Federal Ministry of Communication assigned Dan's company two radio frequencies, 102.5 mhz in the newly opened up FM band, and 71.36 mhz in the old Soviet FM band.

With that news, Daniel began a serious search for candidates among the local Christians who had the potential to work in radio. To help with this, he turned to Pastor Olga for advice. The best pool of people he saw were in her church, especially those students who had begun attending the Covenant's St. James Bible College that had just started classes in her building.



It would only be a matter of time before it was clear who would join him, but in the meantime, the licensing process got more intense.

Time continued to pass, and there was no confirmation from Moscow that final permission to use the frequencies he had been assigned by the Ministry of Communication was forthcoming. Something was stuck within the bureaucracy in the capital, and Dan had no clue what was happening. Patience was one of the first words in Russian that Dan learned, and he would surely need it. He didn't have the document he needed that said he could start a radio station, but a document is not a radio station, so Dan refocused on preparing the station building site and finding his radio staff.



## 1995

At New Years, the license was still bogged down in the Moscow federal communications machinery, so Daniel began working on the Dossaf building. He later flew back to the states and began purchasing radio equipment, sending it up to Anchorage Alaska for delivery to Magadan via a Russian airline. He also met with HCJB engineers in Elkhart to go over the logistics of coming to Russia and completing the equipment installation, once the license was approved. In July, he brought over two HCJB-built FM transmitters, but upon arrival at the Magadan airport, the transmitters were impounded by Russian Customs. Claiming he didn't have proper documentation to import the transmitters, Dan showed them his Ministry of Communication documents affirming his FM frequency assignments. It didn't matter. They wanted particular documents from Moscow, issued by an office located eight time zones away.

Without any choice, Dan made arrangements in Moscow to have the needed permission papers signed, and only after two months did they get to Magadan. To add insult to injury, the Customs office demanded additional permission papers from no less than twelve state departments in Magadan, and they also wanted to charge Dan storage fees for the two months the transmitters sat impounded at the airport. Shaking his head at this impossibility, Dan was informed that for a little money, the transmitters could be released. He refused, and then called the Covenant office in Chicago to ask for prayer over the 1-800-fon-pray line. Within a couple of days, Dan went to the airport on a lark to see about the situation, and miraculously, the customs officials acquiesced, and turned the equipment over to him without any further incident.

With a victory won, another battle started. The Ministry of Communication informed Daniel that his new state of the art FM transmitters needed to be certified before they could be used. He could not understand why, as this equipment was better than any thing the Russians had produced. They demanded that he fly the transmitters across the country to a testing center in Moscow, and pay \$6000 for the process. It was just another example of bureaucrats finding effective ways to earn an income. The transmitters didn't even cost that much, but Dan complied, and many months went by and limited mission money wasted on needless paperwork.

Frustrated that the licensing process was still stuck, Dan headed back to the US in the summer and met with a number of people who would help him in the next step of the project, which was building radio studios. He needed building and studio supplies that were not available in Magadan, and someone to coordinate getting it over to Russia. Enter Steve Edlund and the men of Highland Covenant Church in Bellevue, WA. Steve began constructing beautiful radio furniture for the studios, and the men helped with the lumber, drywall, and other items to construct the station. His brother Doug organized a



shipping container and storage for the items as they awaited a vessel sailing over to Magadan from Seattle. Half of the container was loaded with Russian Bibles that the Covenant had purchased from their *Bibles for Russia* project to distribute in Magadan.

Ray Dahlberg, his assistant Byron Amundsen, and other Covenant mission officials made a trip to Magadan to check out the operation, and gave Dan some needed encouragement. They saw for themselves the difficulty of the radio project, but also the promise that Christian radio could have for ministering to this isolated and struggling community.

At the end of August, Dan was down at the port to watch the unloading of the container and happily went into the Russian FESCO shipping office, when he was informed by a customs officer that he had to pay \$7000 before he could take possession of the container. The materials sent were not worth even close to that amount of money, and Dan had to scramble to find a solution, and funds to deal with a corrupt Russian customs office. Satan was working overtime to stymie this ministry before it could start. But with each effort by the enemy, God provided the means to overcome it. Chicago duly wired the money to Magadan, and Dan gratefully guided a large cargo truck with the container, up the port hill to the Dossaf building, and a group of young American missionaries—serving as Christian ethics teachers with the *CoMission* ministry in town--helped him unload it. Dan could now build the radio station and prepare everything in expectation for the final authorization of broadcasting.



During the fall of 1995, Dan set about the task of turning the Lenin library into a center for the Christian propagation of the Gospel. Some of the other missionaries with the *CoMission* were carpenters, so Dan had an unexpected crew of experts to help him build three studios and an office. The studios quickly came into shape and radio equipment was installed that would allow four radio missionaries plenty of room to produce programming and operate a 14 hour daily broadcast. As the station plant was finished, Dan turned to the next challenge: finding the programming resources needed to put something on the air.

One advantage any Christian station in America had over a Russian one, was material for broadcasting. With more than 76 years of Christian radio in the states, there were plenty of stations, radio ministries, churches, musicians, and others who developed programming that could be accessed. But in Russia, there was practically nothing

available. Everything for a new Christian station would have to be developed from scratch. There were no archives of recorded Christian music in Russian that Dan could use, and the new churches in the country usually didn't have access to recording equipment. The newly-developing evangelical denominations in Moscow had yet to put any emphasis on developing media, and few if any private radio production ministries had begun. Most of the material that could be found were old archives of sermons and programs transmitted in years past by international Christian shortwave stations, and most of this would not be suitable in the current situation.

This lack of resources put Dan in a tough position: he would have find the most effective way to program a station that could use a majority of material from the USA, supplementing it with a tiny amount currently available in Russia. In time, his staff would develop enough local programming to fill a broadcast day. To make this work, he decided to create a radio format that would introduce the Russians to a new style of radio: it would be a Christian music station, featuring English contemporary Christian music, Russian church songs, smooth jazz instrumentals (for the jazz buffs in town); short Christian dramas, Bible teaching (primarily produced from a few ministries in the US like *Focus on the Family*, *Billy Graham*, *Through the Bible*, etc), sermons from local pastors, city news, and national news with cultural features on Russian life (provided by the US government-funded *Radio Svoboda*). It would be a radio sound unlike what people in Magadan had ever heard before.

Now the station would just need a name. The only one that came into consideration was the catalyst for the entire ministry effort, and it came from Paul's declaration in Romans 6:4 when he wrote: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

This mission sought to bring people into a new life with Christ. So it was simply called, NEW LIFE RADIO.

After lots of prayer, recommendations, and interviews, Daniel chose four young people from different churches as the foundation of the future station, Victor Chensov, Ludmilla Bulah, Elina Polovnikova, and Kostia Ivanov. While the license was still in limbo, the new team would get busy, producing materials for broadcast, while the churches in Magadan prayed for God to grant the permissions needed as soon as possible.

## 1996

The new year began, and still the Federal Ministry of Press had not provided the final authorization papers to begin broadcasting on the frequencies assigned by the Ministry of Communication. Russia was in the midst of chaotic times, politically and economically, and many people lost hope as the nation was floundering in its transition from Soviet control into a seemingly out of control new Russia. The radio effort was impacted by this state of affairs as government mass media itself underwent restructuring, with federal broadcast ministries renamed, reorganized, restaffed, and duties changed. Sometimes

Daniel would not know who was in charge in Moscow, and a vast tapestry of interconnected offices and peoples involved in the license process formed to what was nearly an impenetrable force of inaction and delay.

How to gain permission to use what has already been assigned to you? That was Daniel's constant refrain as 1996 commenced. It had been two and a half years since the Covenant sent him to Magadan, and still, no station. It seemed the ministry was bogged down in constant spiritual warfare, with a multitude of uncooperative elements blocking their path on the road to broadcasting the Gospel.

Acting in full faith that God was in control, the NLR team made much headway in developing the radio materials they needed. By February, there was an indication that the station would be allowed to start in early spring. So Daniel notified HCJB, and that month an engineering crew from Elkhart arrived to install two transmitters, antennas, and additional radio gear. They feared the Russian customs would again impound their equipment, but as the engineers went through the airport, the inspectors focused their attention on a bag of medicine in one suitcase, completely missing the radio gear in their other suitcases. Another prayer for protection had been answered.



Bob and Jim



As the engineers began their work, the local ham radio club on the top floor registered their protest with the Dossaf manager, claiming the new FM antennas would interfere with their activities. Dan had official authorization to place antennas on the roof, but the radio club was adamant in their objections. The HCJB crew waited while Dan negotiated with the club and the administration, and after the protests were shelved, Bob Trulock and Jim Hulse got busy and set up the transmitters. After a few signal tests, it was discovered the FM broadcast travelled over 30 miles from the center of town, loud enough to be heard in many small settlements in the region. Satisfied with a good installation, the HCJB crew left after praying with the staff and requesting God overcome the obstacles so they could legally turn on the transmitters.

At this point, Dan went back to the pastors of the city and requested they form an advisory board to liaison with the radio staff. It was critical that the radio project was bathed in prayer by the entire Christian community, because New Life Radio seemed beset in spiritual warfare. Satan had been working overtime, fostering disunity among these new congregations, dividing them over questions of doctrine and denominational loyalties, while frustrating their efforts to evangelize the city. The new churches weren't growing, and this was a big problem. The Christians of Magadan needed the Holy Spirit to give them unity and wisdom as they labored to figure out how best to work with each other for their commission of presenting a clear, consistent, and inspired message of the Gospel to those around them. Everyone was concerned for the state of the church and for that radio beacon of hope that had been waiting to shine out since Dan first arrived.

## The False Start

With the transmitters primed and ready to go at a moment's notice, the radio staff was busy with learning the new radio automation system brought over by HCJB—a tool that would allow them to broadcast for hours without a live disc jockey at the controls. Dan had secured a Christian music library from the *Family Life Network* in Bath, NY and jazz from an Anchorage radio station. He contracted with a number of radio ministries for their programming and got it delivered to Magadan for the staff to load it into their computers. One important program source would be the satellite-delivered national news and cultural features from *Radio Svoboda* (“freedom radio”). The station needed daily news to complement its Christian programming in order to attract a secular audience, but to get it, he would have to install a large satellite antenna on the roof of the Dossaf building. No antennas were available in Magadan, so Dan had to travel back to Alaska to secure the equipment, but that would have to wait for the summer.

In April of 1996, a document arrived from Moscow that gave the impression that all was clear for the station to commence broadcasting. Amidst a joyous celebration, Dan and the staff gathered to turn on the transmitters and initiate the start of New Life Radio. There had been no public announcement informing the city of their startup, but not waiting, the switches were pushed, and the Gospel was broadcast in word and song. From the city center to outlying settlements, people could tune in their new FM radios and hear the message of *New Life* in Christ. The staff received numerous positive comments from listeners and the stereo signal was perfect. The years of wait and the struggles over the enemy to shine the light of the Gospel had now been rewarded. Or had it?



Four days into their new broadcasting, two men arrived at the studios and demanded Daniel show them his authorization to broadcast on the two FM frequencies. He showed them his documents from the Federal Ministry of Press, the Ministry of Communication, and the State certification board (for the transmitters). Unimpressed, the men flatly said, “yes, you do have their permission, but you don’t have ours.” The somber-looking officials were local representatives of the Federal *Gossvaznadzor*

Frequency Inspection Agency in Moscow. A subdivision of the Federal Communication service, they were charged with inspecting and overseeing use of assigned frequencies. It was yet another bureaucratic hurdle that would have to be overcome for the station to begin their full time ministry. Daniel was forced to turn the transmitters off, told he needed to get the documentation finished and signed by the Moscow director of *Gossvaznadzor*, and only then could he restart the broadcasts.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Defeat seemed to grab victory by the throat, and the radio staff was at a loss to know how to proceed. Daniel organized the effort to start a new round of applications with the Inspection agency, and was told there was no specific timeline for its completion. He had a station, a staff, a ministry to carry out, but now he was in limbo, and only God could solve the problem. A new battle had begun and the spiritual warfare only intensifying.

In June, another barrier hit the station, as a new federal law was passed that required all radio stations to resubmit broadcast applications to the Ministry of Communication. Everything was again up in the air with no idea where the station would land. Again bogged down in paperwork, the staff stayed busy producing radio programs that would eventually get on the air. Dan travelled to Alaska in the meantime, purchased a large satellite antenna, shipped it on a Russian flight to Magadan, and obtained satellite receivers from *Radio Svoboda*. At least he could work on getting this important satellite programming ready, once the station restarted its broadcasts.

It was now September 1996 and three years had gone by since Dan first arrived in Magadan to initiate the mission. He had no idea when the *Gossvaznadzor* documents would arrive, and the staff and Church community were getting demoralized that the station might never begin its ministry.

Would Christian radio ever develop in this dark land of Russia?



## Chapter 7

### God's victory in Magadan: A diary account of NLR

Diary entry date: September 18, 1996 (DBJ)



Subject: We serve a living God who answers his people in a mighty way.

“How can it be expressed? You sent us out to wage warfare against the enemy in this lost city on the Kolyma: we struggled and persevered through endless tussles, and tonight, after actually engaging in physical battle with those opposed to us and walking home depressed and wondering if a Christian radio station was truly in God’s will, and stating to ourselves that we had no more strength, that there was nothing more we could do, and that it would have to be up to God himself to intervene if He wanted His word to go out to the people in this lost region of Russia....God in fact did take over.”

#### *Personal entry*

“These last two weeks have been two of the most difficult in my entire life, and I think for our staff as well. First, I came back from vacation to find that there has been no movement on our license application. No idea of when it will be finished was the only thought that came to me. A month goes by, I am terribly lonely. Fortunately, the station staff are energetic, believing in God’s answer to prayer. They keep working diligently and I am trying to figure out our next move.

Then we get the new rent bill from our landlord, the Dossaf guys. If we want to stay in the old Lenin library, we must pay roughly \$1000 per month. I check my files and come up with the old rent agreement showing that we originally paid \$30 per month. Within a few days, I and the rest of the building’s renters confront the building director about the unrealistic rent proposals. He does not budge. I then find out that our assessment was overinflated by a large margin after a government economist estimated our proper rent (according to government tariffs) at \$150 a month. No decision was made except that the building would have to install an energy meter to properly determine how much we should pay for heat (they wanted me to pay \$550 to heat three small radiators in our room per month). I figure they could turn off our heat and we could properly warm our rooms just from the heat put out by our radio equipment. The director does not like this idea.

Negotiations are put on hold. If unsuccessful, I have to contemplate giving up the room we have spent so much time, energy, and cash to repair. The station is wonderfully equipped, and I despair at the thought of having to relocate our studios and to find another place for our antennas—since there really was no other proper place in town. I cry out to God, “I have no power over this; the local churches will have problems paying the rent; there is no other place to go, how can this problem with rent be in your will?” No answer. Negotiations still on hold. The director is technically on vacation and does not want to deal with us.

What's next? We are trying to get some movement from *Gossvaznadzor* on our license process. We have only had a license to broadcast from the Ministry of Communication for two years and still their watch dog agency will not give us permission to transmit on the very frequencies they assigned us long ago. I say to myself, 'what is going on, where is the logic, why is it that the only way you can get anywhere is by paying bribes, but of course Dan, you will continue to refuse to bribe, even if all your Russian communication friends tell you to do it and just settle the issue *the Russian way*. How many times did I tell people that even though I have waited three years and now begin my fourth year of waiting, I will wait even longer because it is not God's way to do as the world demands in this situation. We are just little fish for a Communication Ministry that does not want to help us, much less give us the approval documents we need.

I've got to keep going to the station everyday. Lots of work to be done. The churches in town are getting anxious. They see the wonderful station facilities come to fruition, but without the ability to transmit. Still, volunteers from various congregations come in to record programs, preaching, teaching, devotions, and songs. Unfortunately, the radio automation system from HCJB has lots of bugs and is giving us problems. I again despair because the system is not 100% reliable and the staff is afraid it will not work properly once we can go on the air. HCJB promises a new software update to fix the problems, but it will not be available for some time. Still, it's an amazing piece of equipment, but with errors, what to do? I have made the station dependent on radio automation and now the automation does not work right. HELP AGAIN GOD!

Then comes the sly businessmen from the Caribou TV company that occupies part of the Dossaf building. Their programming consists of local commercials and more commercials. The director asks me for some assistance in their purchase of a satellite TV system (they admire the two antennas I built a few years back for American TV). He (Max) starts off by saying, "I understand you guys have not received your license yet from *Gossvaznadzor*. If you help us 'get' this satellite system, you will have your license in two weeks!" Max also said I would have no problem putting up my 3 meter satellite antenna (for *Radio Svoboda*) on the roof. Immediately, I sense some corruption going on, since they officially are not supposed to have any influence with this Moscow agency. I ask him how he can accomplish this. He smiles. I did not like the idea, but still decided to give him information on equipment and pricing. They are my neighbors and I want to act friendly without engaging in their schemes. Then the next day, his engineer comes to me and says, you understand we want you to purchase the system for us. I said, well, if you guys want to pay for it, I can make arrangements for you in Alaska. They said, "but Dan, you don't understand. If you want us to help you get the license, YOU must first buy the system for us."

Once I fully grasp their scheme, as well as the price tag, I give a big sigh and inform them that the arrangement is impossible. All of a sudden, I am no longer their friend. Also, it seems the Magadan Radio Club (just two ham radio operators) are still opposed to my satellite antenna being on the roof, even though my rental contract specifies that I have every right to place antennas on the Dossaf building roof. What's with these guys? Actually, the following morning, the engineer almost ran me off the road leading up to

the station with his car. I remember that Russian businessmen of late are killing their competitors and wonder if something like that would happen to me?

I think long and hard about the consequences of this situation. If I did give in to Caribou's demands, did they really have influence with *Gossvaznadzor* in Moscow, and what was the point, since I would not go along with this corruption anyway. There was always the chance they could have Moscow bury our paperwork (everyone knew the *Gossvaznadzor* director in Moscow used to work in Magadan and maybe the Caribou guys did have friendly ties with him). Once again, I pleaded with God for wisdom. I also questioned whether we would ever get our permission, as there was no prospect, and we were nobodies. I stuck to my guns and told Max one more time that his offer was a no go, and then started to strategize on how to get that heavy satellite antenna up on the roof. Fortunately, my Canadian friend, Brad Callison had access to a pulley system to lift that 500 pound monster onto the roof, but getting it there with the radio club looking would entail a fight.

Last night, I had a meeting with all the ham radio operators in Magadan who were in collusion with the radio club. They proposed that if I gave them \$1000 for an antenna, they would grant me permission to put my satellite dish on the roof. I keep remembering that I don't need their permission and I have proof of it via rental documents, plus an official opinion issued by the satellite department of the regional telecommunications department—courtesy of their deputy director and my good friend, Victor Soloviev. Victor went with me to the meeting and even though he was personal friends with all the ham operators (being one himself), he nevertheless proceeded to tell the Radio Club that they were wrong for opposing our roof installation. Without that \$1000, I would receive no authorization for the antenna. I must have had 20 meetings with them previously on the issue with no result. They claim there will be interference with their antennas, but I don't buy it, neither does Victor. I shrug my shoulders once again and leave the meeting after telling them that I refuse to pay. I also reminded the group that I had paid for the Radio Club's FM frequency application fee (as a goodwill gesture), and that I had received nothing in return—except trouble. This logic did not find any response with them. After the meeting, Victor told me to just go ahead and put up the satellite antenna mounting stand I had built, and finish the job.

So we come to today, September 18. Still no license, rental contract not concluded and we face being forced out due to high rent, no satellite antenna on the roof, and I am feeling sick. The day did start out right however. Dad called me from New York (*note: Harold Johnson, nephew of F. Julius Quist*) and gave me some reassurance. He could not give me any advice on the satellite dish when I told him there might be war (with the Radio Club) if I attempted to put the stand on the roof today. After the call, I decided to press forward and try it. I was within my rights, and three days before, Vladimir, the Dossaf director told me to go for it. Unfortunately, I would have to ask the Radio Club guys for the key to the roof door, as they controlled the access.

The day passes slowly with tension mounting. 6 pm. I am ready, the staff is ready, Brad with his pulley system is ready, the *CoMission* guys come to the station, and so do fellow

Russian Christian brothers. Earlier in the afternoon we informed the Dossaf director that we were going up on the roof, and he made arrangements to give us a key.

6:15 p.m. tonight. War is about to breakout. I attempted to take the satellite stand to a corner of the building, out of sight from the Radio Club rooms to avoid their knowledge of our activities and to avoid an incident. I want this thing to go up quietly. I assemble about eight guys on the roof and then I went down to the pavement to guide the stand. In five minutes, Yuri from the Radio Club goes on the roof and orders everyone down. They don't budge at first. Two of my guys are a father and brother of one of the *CoMission* members. Yuri proceeds to grab Titus Hannon (the *CoMission* leader) and moves him toward the edge of the roof. He then grabs other members who are trying to pull the pulley cable attached to the stand. Down on the pavement I look up and realize what is going on and quickly run the stairs up to the roof opening. At that point, most of the missionaries get off the roof, afraid of Yuri who is getting violent. Then Yuri sits on the small doorway leading to the roof not letting the *CoMission* guys come back up.

Victor Chensov, our radio worker, asks him to move, and with Yuri refusing, Victor nudges him out of the doorway. A shoving match ensues. Yuri screams and shoves Victor and I am afraid that fisticuffs are about to commence. I tell Yuri that he has no right to stop us and I repeat over and over "do not touch any of these guys and do not touch the pulley cable or our equipment. He is beyond control and starts coming after me. At this point I had to make a decision. First, the police should have been there, but it was too late to call them. Second, Yuri is 6'3" and about 250 pounds and probably could do me some damage. So I immediately think about self-defense and grab a metal pipe and hold it up as he comes at me. As I raised the pipe, he stops and tells me "That's my pipe you are holding," so I threw it down and said "Okay, I'm not touching your equipment, but now stop messing with mine."

Fortunately, the *CoMission* guys have numerical strength, so I ease up. But then Yuri goes after Victor again and they are struggling. I yell at them both to stop. Yuri proceeds down the roof entrance, closes the door, and tries to lock eight of us on the roof. With only one small *CoMission* member trying to keep the door open, I lunge to help him and manage to open the door. Yuri leaves. So we begin pulling on the cable, when low and behold, Yuri is next to the stand trying to untie it. I tell him to leave it alone, that he has no right doing what he does, and that I was prepared to call the police or file a lawsuit against him for his intrusion and for his assault on Victor and my *CoMission* buddies.

This was not my finest hour. I was supposed to be a sheep, but was acting like a lion. Why is Yuri so filled with rage against us? I can only think satan is using him as a pawn to thwart us. Victor, myself, and two other American guys go down to the satellite stand and connect it back to the cable, and if it hurts Yuri, he will sue me. We ask him again to leave. He refuses. So we begin pulling on the cable as the stand slowly goes up to the roof, knowing if we lose our grip the steel structure will fall on the pavement and be damaged. Finally Yuri moves, but then he grabs Victor again and a pushing match commences. I tell Victor to just stop. The whole situation is out of control and all we are

trying to do is put up the satellite mount according to the rights given to us. Does God permit us to be engaged in such a confrontation?

I had come too far in this mission to fail. So I went on the offensive. Satan was not going to win this match, but what do I know? Yuri leaves and we get the stand a third of the way up the building, when the cable breaks with the stand falling to the ground. After all this struggle and this happens! I shrug my shoulder again and say to myself, maybe it is not God's will that we have satellite programming or this antenna.

Yuri comes back. I stare at the broken cable. The *CoMission* guys on the roof ask me what to do. After a couple of minutes I just said, "that's it men, no more, lets stop and forget about it today." Yuri was gloating over our failure. He walks away and says there is no way we will ever have it on the roof.

Dossaf roof



I didn't even go back to the studio (there was a recording session going on anyway). So I started to walk back home with the *CoMission* crew, reflecting on what had just happened, how it could have happened, and whether or not it really was God's plan for this radio station to begin. I said out loud as we were walking, "that's it, I can't do anymore, we have tried everything, I can't do anything to get this license, this is my fourth year here with no result, I have no more power, if God wants this station to go on the air, he is going to have to do it himself, its up to him." My poor companions listened to my rambling lament and then invited me to their apartment for dinner.

8 times zones to the west, our representative in Moscow, Tatiana went the same day for a meeting in the main office of *Gossvazndazor*. Ten agency employees tried to block her access to the director's office in her attempt to bypass channels and meet directly with him to get his signature on our approval papers. Nearly five months had passed since our transmitters were shut down, and no one seemed interested in moving our application forward. She was desperate for a breakthrough. On the other side of the country, I was just as desperate.

Back in Magadan, its 8 pm. We sat down to dinner and I began asking my big questions out loud to the assembled group of believers sharing the meal. I remark on my sadness concerning the altercation on the roof. I bemoaned about the many problems we have faced and whether all of these problems were signs that perhaps the Lord has something else in mind. Oh me of little faith. Here I was supposed to be a leader, and I was turning into a doubter. Good thing the guys in Chicago weren't around observing me.

Waxing philosophical, I noted that it was arrogance for me or others to assume that we know God's will on issues like these and that the Lord usually provides indicators or confirmation through various means so we can decipher whether things happening are in his will. One visiting American seated at the table said, "I cannot see how it is God's will that His Word should not go over the air to the people of Magadan." Inwardly I agree, but at the moment I am not so sure, given all the trials we went through. Nobody at that table felt good about what had happened on the roof. Are Christians supposed to be

soldier-like in a time of crisis to stand up for their rights, or should they hold back, be passive, and let the situation continue unresolved, with no end in sight?

How many times had I taken the dove stand in order to be gentle and hope that people would see a Christ-like witness in me? I guess today I lacked the wisdom I asked God for and decided to go on the offensive. How much longer would I have to deal with Radio Club's obstinate, illegitimate opposition? I certainly was not pleased with my performance and I let those around the table know it. I felt like I had been fighting a demon sent to destroy us, and this day, I was not going to let the demon win without a fight. But what point was there to the fight?

We had failed in our objective and this was our second attempt to get the satellite system on the roof. The group spent the rest of the evening wondering what was going on, and if we had been right or wrong in our actions. For sure, I was depressed about the whole day and I bid everyone goodnight.

As I arrived to my apartment, I got on the phone and called Moscow to see if there was any news. Tatiana picked up the receiver and informed me that *Gossvaznadzor* had just issued New Life Radio final permission to transmit on the radio frequencies of 71.36 and 102.5 FM in Magadan. We could go on the air TOMORROW! All we needed to do was pay another \$800 to cover our re-registration process with the Ministry of Communication. I quickly gave her instructions for making the payment and then hung up the phone.

I stopped for a moment, shook my head, and marveled at how God indeed took things into his own hands when his battle weary kids threw up their hands and placed everything into his. HALLELUJAH, PRAISE THE LORD, THANK YOU JESUS! It was the most incredible timing for God to answer with this news. How badly we needed it, how unexpectant it was, how beautiful, what a wonderful gift he gave in giving us once again, absolute, concrete proof of his reality and power! The darkness of Magadan was about to receive the light of the Gospel over the airwaves, and I could only think about Isaiah's prophesy of the coming Savior as he wrote:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light:  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.*

This tired man could not contain his joy. I rushed back to the *CoMission* apartment and told everyone the news. They too were joyous and wondered about God's miraculous intervention at the most appropriate time. We wondered together what his will was, and he gave us a mighty, immediate answer. We all went into the living room, got on our knees and indulged in some serious communication with the Almighty, giving him thanks and praise. I like this kind of prayer: power communication with God. You ask, He answers.

Not knowing the news, Victor Chensov was leaving the station, feeling dejected. He went to the Revival Church for their Wednesday night prayer service. They must have been in

serious prayer all night, probably knowing about the earlier roof confrontation, and were pleading to God for his intervention. How long had Pastor Olga and the congregation been waiting for the radio station. I called Victor's house. No answer. I called the Church and he picked up the phone. I said, "Do you know what happened today? *Gossvaznadzor* gave us our license!" I think at that moment, God must have given the special answer Victor had been in most need of. He had been through a terrible day, but God ended it with triumph. His only response to me was, "Can I share this with the Church?" I said, of course, and wished him a good night. Too bad I wasn't at the Revival Church when the news broke. I bet the roof must have raised up a couple of inches from the praise and shouting.

Well, that's the short version of a long story. It is just the beginning and we must remain ever on our knees, praying for God's mercy, intercession, wisdom, grace, and power. Spread the news, New Life Radio is going on the air as we seek to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the farthest reaches of the world, FOR HIS GLORY!

End of diary entry.

### **Postscript:**



**Victor C. and Victor S.**

Shortly afterward, Daniel--with Victor Soloviev and Victor Chensov--got the satellite system on the roof and installed it successfully. Within a few weeks, the rental agreement with Dossaf was concluded at a reasonable price, ensuring that NEW LIFE RADIO would be able to broadcast over the long term at that site. The staff continued their programming preparations during October and worked out the problems with their automation system. The goal was to have the radio format perfected, with all the programming resources in place to operate a 14 hour broadcast day.

On November 3, 1996, with a gathering of the city's Christian community and pastors assembled at the Dossaf building, Daniel turned on the two FM transmitters, and New Life Radio entered the Lord's service and history as the first Christian FM radio station in Russia.

**Elina Polovnikova**



The Gospel was broadcast over two antennas situated high above the entry port of Magadan where decades before, Soviet prisoners arriving by boat, destined for death in the camps, wondered if there was a God, and was he able to save them. The only radio they knew said God didn't exist. Years would pass, yet God's Word and the assurance of new life in His Son was now boldly proclaimed to new generations of Russians who were asking the same questions, but now listening through different frequencies.



**City guests at NLR opening day**



**CoMission team and friends at NLR**



It was a glorious day, a day of fulfillment for the Christians of Magadan and for the Covenant. The mission that Axel and Adolph had ignited was now even more firmly planted on Russian soil.

But the rest of the country still waited for Christian radio, and a new chapter in mission was about to commence.



## Chapter 8

### Time to reach the nation with the Gospel



As New Life Radio's broadcasting was underway, word spread throughout the region about the unique message and music that had never before been heard on radio stations in that part of the country.<sup>xxv</sup> The radio missionaries were getting more experienced with each day and the Christian community lined up to support them with prayer and participation in programming. NLR was presenting a well-balanced program schedule targeting Christians during the early morning, noontime, and evening hours, and non-Christians during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon business hours (with smooth jazz/*Windham Hill*-style instrumentals, *Focus on the Family* short programs, God spots (Christian worldviews on culture and society), along with news and cultural features from *Radio Svoboda* via satellite.

Only six weeks into their broadcasts, technical problems with the primary FM transmitter and radio console forced them off the air. It seemed nothing would be easy for the mission. Daniel quickly packed up the gear and headed back to Elkhart. After a quick fix and 12 hour return flight, the station got back on the air and the operation stabilized.

Daniel reported back to the Covenant that local believers were thankful to God for access to outstanding Bible teaching and preaching programs (from Billy Graham, *Through the Bible Radio*, Earl Poysti, Charles Stanley, and others). The radio would stand to provide sound doctrine for the Christians, and clear Biblical positions for the dominant atheist population seeking answers to life's biggest questions. In addition NLR's teaching programs served as a doctrinal check for those congregations led by pastors who had no training and sometimes espoused unsound theology or practices.

As with everything new, not everyone in town--both Christian and non-believer--was sure what New Life Radio was up to, especially since it was perceived as a western-oriented radio operation seeking to introduce new ideas and ways to this previously restricted Soviet community dominated by committed Communists. Magadan had been a politically-closed city for a reason--founded as a prison and mining center, without any prior Russian Orthodox presence--and a spirit of darkness was still very evident even as the radio mission got underway. That spirit worked to keep people from listening to the Gospel broadcasts and even impacted elements of the fledgling Church as well. Some of the house congregations held back their support to see what was going to happen with the station, especially those led by pastors who felt threatened as parishioners compared their teaching to what they heard on the radio.

In essence, no one in Magadan had known what Christian broadcasting was, or what it should be, but the station pressed on from its outset in a non-denominational, evangelical Protestant orientation, ready to encourage churches to engage in partnerships for building the Christian community and for effective evangelism. It had many enemies, as Jesus told his disciples that as the world hated him, it would hate them as well, but this would

not stop the radio staff--nor their colleagues from among the believing community who helped them--from fulfilling their purpose.

What NLR became for many, was a daily companion of Christian encouragement and inspiration--opening up a wider world of life and understanding as seen through the lens of Jesus' teaching and example, and the global perspective of the new programming. It's stereo sound and unique format impressed many in the city and it looked like New Life Radio could serve as a role model for how Christian radio might subsequently develop to bring the whole nation of Russia to the Lord. If faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, then radio could be a tool to share the Gospel to a people scattered across eleven time zones, representing the furthest ends of the earth as Jesus described two millennia prior.

Christians in the city realized what a unique gift they had from the Lord. But Daniel started to wonder, why was it that only one city had this special gift of Christian FM radio to proclaim the Lord to the lost? While he was joyous and excited with the potential of the Magadan station, he was not content with the status quo of the largest country in the world having just one FM station, and even that in one of the smallest cities in Russia. At this point, God started to move him with some interesting new dreams that would make even Axel and Adolph flush with excitement.

Not sure how his bosses in Chicago would react, Daniel determined that his main task in Magadan was finished, took a leap of faith, and told them his desires to bring Christian radio into every city and settlement across not just Russia, but the entire former Soviet Union. He wasn't sure how it could happen, but he knew if God was in it, it surely would.

### **The Dream of National Christian Radio Takes Shape**

Daniel started doing his research and discovered that except for NLR, there were only two other small Christian AM radio studios, each broadcasting on rented state channels to audiences in the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>xxvi</sup> A span of 7 time zones could be walked across European Russia and Siberia without finding another Christian station. Surely Russia was much bigger than Magadan and God wanted his Word to be placed across the whole of the nation, not just a part.

The Magadan station was the only one that had its own frequencies, and Daniel was mindful of the tremendous difficulties in obtaining licenses, the overall costs in setting up a station, and the need to effectively provide Christian resources to the thousands of communities within the vast territory of Russia that still needed to be reached. So he began developing a strategy based on finding the easiest means for establishing low cost stations at the local level. He also was looking for a method for interconnecting such stations into a national network that could foster ministry activities in evangelism and discipleship throughout the country. Quite a challenge, given the newness of Christian missions and the basic state of minimal cooperation or communication among Russia's developing Christian community.

But how to interconnect Christians and stations? Digging back into his past experience setting up satellite TV downlinks in the Soviet Far East for American broadcasts, Daniel knew that given Russia's expanse, the only practical way to tie small stations together was via satellite. The technical aspects of it were easy, the challenge would be to work with Christians in cities nationwide to obtain local FM licenses, find the right satellite, provide free programming, as well as the equipment needed to downlink a signal and retransmit it on FM.

If this could be done, a small church or group of churches could easily afford a local affiliate of a national station, needing only to pay for maintaining a license, space costs of equipment (housed in a church building), and the electricity to run the transmitter. Given the fact that most congregations could not even pay the salaries of their pastors, a radio ministry effort had to be as low cost as possible if it had a chance to succeed.

NLR in Magadan had a four person staff with outside financial support. If a local church could find a few volunteers to oversee the equipment and even produce local programs, that would be sufficient to have a Christian radio station that could be effective for each community in evangelistic outreach and discipleship support. That was the plan Daniel settled on. The only question would be, would the Covenant get behind it, and would the Russians take up this vision? There was no way he could do it himself.

Daniel presented his strategic outline to Paul and Ray, who sensed the great need for facilitating nationwide evangelism through media support. With their initiative, they made the case to the Covenant. In early 1997, the Board of World Mission passed a proposal by Daniel to attempt to create a national satellite-based Christian radio network for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States nations (Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan). The dream could work: a thousand cities could get the Gospel from a single studio, and the local Church could have a wonderful tool to reach their neighbors for Christ. Charged anew with a different challenge, our third Swede went on to tackle a nation.

### **Off to St. Petersburg!**



After nearly eight years of involvement with Magadan, it was clear that if this project was to succeed, it would have to be done in cooperation with the leadership of the many new evangelical denominations, most having their headquarters in St. Petersburg or Moscow. So Daniel packed his bags and moved to St. Petersburg, the former capital but now the most progressive city of the new Russia. From here, Peter the Great set forward his plans in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to remake the vast nation into a strong and powerful people, enlightened, and ever seeking knowledge, prosperity, and religious strength. Where Peter and later

Communist dictators failed, God's people could succeed. Daniel knew he would need to find Christian leaders to help him, so after settling into his new home on the Moscow highway, not far from Peter's summer palace, he began his search.

A short walk from his home was the campus of the St. Petersburg Christian University. Daniel managed to meet their new President, Victor Avdeev, and explained his vision for a national network, and how the University and their students could become an active part of it. Excited with the prospect, Victor agreed to partner together.

Next, Daniel found the small AM Christian studio across town near Peter's fortress on the Neva River. It was called *Radio TEOS* and was led by a Lutheran pastor named Evgeny Nedzelski. He explored the idea of pooling together the programming resources of different radio studios and developing a 24 hour radio schedule from them. All of the material could be collated by a single studio and transmitted nationwide via satellite. The idea seemed workable, but there were a host of legal, technical, and economic factors that would have to be overcome.



Turning to his Magadan partner HCJB, Daniel contacted their Colorado Springs office and submitted his strategy for a national network. From the outset, the HCJB leadership was excited by the idea, and put David Kealy in charge of working with Daniel to flesh out the project ideas further. With a Russian and American partner in hand, he went on to contact many other western mission organizations with interests in Russia, in order to create a consortium of partner ministries that would establish and finance the satellite operation.



Sadly, during that first year (1997), the Russian government ended the free religious state of the nation and unrestricted open evangelism by both Russian and western churches, when they enacted a restrictive law *On Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations*. The law (deemed in violation of the Russian Constitution) was formulated and pushed by the Russian Orthodox Church, communists, and secular nationalists--in a manner most undemocratic--that President Boris Yeltsin vetoed the bill once, before finally acquiescing to it under intense pressure. It was a sad state of affairs for the free practice of religion and faith that had been so nobly won during the ending period of Gorbachev's USSR, with the passing of the 1990 law that gave freedom of religion to Russia after it was taken away in 1917. The government now intended to regulate and control all spiritual activity in a major step backward.

Under the new law, churches had to prove their legal existence 15 years prior to 1997. Few if any, but the Russian Orthodox, could meet this definition. While the Baptists found legal registration histories from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, practically all of the new evangelical churches, independent mission agencies, and individual missionaries would now be subject to rigorous federal control and yearly inspections. Religious associations meeting the law's statutes might be formed, but they were still subject to the state for authorization to engage in ministry practices. Without state recognition, no individual or group of believers could engage in public worship services, distribute Christian literature and materials (including the Bible), and no hiring of foreign clergy or missionaries could

be done. The effect of the new law was to discourage independent-style and evangelical missions and churches such as Baptists or Pentecostals--as well as this new evangelical Christian radio network that Daniel was working so passionately to develop.

In this environment of political and Orthodox Church control over religion, the era of unrestrained mission efforts and church planting was ended. It seemed the old Czar-Orthodox Church state control system was reestablished. From that point forward, the future of developing Christian media in Russia was extremely problematic. It was the same spiritual battle being waged, but now under new conditions of a state and particular denomination working against the free proclamation of the Gospel.

### **Pressing Forward**

Mindful of the restrictive conditions he faced, especially when seeking to develop independent broadcasting that required authorization from a government that had total control over mass media operations, Daniel trusted the Lord that somehow the project would still get underway. A separate organization needed to be created outside of Russia that could handle the planning and fundraising efforts of those ministries that would eventually work alongside him. By this time, Daniel had convinced five organizations to cooperate in the network: The Covenant Church, Russian Christian Radio, Peter Dyneka Russian Ministries, Through the Bible Radio, and HCJB. The Covenant proceeded to establish a non-profit organization called *Russian Christian Satellite Radio Support Association*. In St. Petersburg, Daniel, along with President Avdeev and Yuri Shugaev (a former Russian State Telecom vice president), registered a Russian non-profit organization called *Satellite Radio Group*.



With the legal entities formed, Daniel started looking for a location in the city that could serve as the network control center. Walking down Nevsky Prospekt, he found an old German Lutheran church with an unused basement that could be converted into studios. After talking with church staff, leasing details were confirmed, and Daniel only had to raise the money. He also began looking for potential staff to man the network.

Over the next year, Daniel continued his development work, looking for the full amount of funding, staff, and program partnerships needed. He also looked for suitable satellites, and the technical relay systems in the city that would be needed to connect to them.

Unfortunately, the logistics of the operation in St. Petersburg were such that it became clear to Daniel that he would not be able to start a radio network there. The required elements were simply not coming together, including the radio studio partnerships he was hoping for. There were potential licensing issues that could not be resolved, and all the while, he was unable to secure the funding required. As in Magadan, it seemed that he would have develop the network and programming on his own. He was asking God daily to help him solve the problems he encountered, but to no avail. The Lord must have had other plans and different people for Daniel to work with. So in September 1998, he hopped on a train and headed down to Moscow.

Finding himself a stranger in this city of 10 million, Daniel quickly found a small apartment and settled in to yet another uncertain life in Russia. Starting from zero again, he began visiting a number of ministries in town. The capital of Russia certainly afforded better options and possibilities for putting together all the components needed to develop a radio network. One of his first visits was to the *Christian Center*, a new building in the southern part of Moscow on Namyotkina Street that housed five US-based ministries (Campus Crusade, Russian Ministries (RM), Russian Christian Radio (RCR), Child Evangelism Fellowship, and the New Life Bible College).



Finding friends in the offices of Russian Christian Radio (a ministry that aired Earl Poysti's Bible programs over Russian state radio), Daniel went over the strategic plans with their staff and compiled lists of possible denominations that he could cooperate with. It didn't seem too difficult to begin organizing the project, as he could rent a room in the Christian

Center for his office and studio, while finding potential staff from among young people attending the Bible College. In addition, Moscow afforded easier access to satellite facilities, or so he thought, because of the many state telecom and radio organizations that could route audio and radio lines across the city and nationwide.

Everything seemed promising, but he had yet to raise the full amount of funds needed to broadcast. One of the stipulations Ray Dahlberg had given him in Chicago was that he had to raise the money outside the Covenant budget. While he agreed to the condition, he wasn't having much luck accomplishing it. Without those funds, he could not hire staff, get studios built, pay for satellite time, etc. There were so many unresolved issues aside from money, and time quickly slipped by with no radio network in sight. It seemed it might end up again like Magadan, waiting three years to get things working.

During this timeframe, another development took place that would usher in a new political climate and impact future progress of not only Christian radio, but freedom of the press as well. The new democratic Russia of President Boris Yeltsin, with its sense of possibilities along with the freedoms he stood for, ended with his early resignation, and turning over the reins of power to the former head of the state security services (FSB), Vladimir Putin. With Putin's ascension to the Kremlin throne, a completely different orientation of government control and press restrictions began that bode ill for those seeking to use the airwaves to proclaim a different kingdom and ruler. Daniel found himself amidst another new spiritual battleground, faced off against ruthless men who had no intention to support the kind of freedom of mind and spirit he was advocating. If the radio project was to succeed in Putin's Russia, God would certainly have to engineer it on his own terms.

And he was merciful, as Daniel soon got the breakthrough he was hoping for. The Covenant denomination and HCJB committed themselves to a greater share in the overall financing, and the other partner ministries agreed to contribute toward the first year of operations. An elder statesman of Christian radio, Colonel Ridgely Ryan, of *Through the Bible Radio*, was especially encouraging to Dan as he committed \$20,000 so that young people could hear the teachings of the great Bible scholar, J. Vernon McGee. These signs



of support gave Daniel the confidence he needed, so he went ahead and began looking for potential staff. Heading back up to St. Petersburg, he spent time at the Christian University and found Andre Nazarov, who had just graduated that June. Back in Moscow, Dan put out a search request to area pastors for candidates, but months went by before any appeared.

News of Dan's project was spreading fast among the evangelical community that could sense the possibilities of having a national network to facilitate the work of the wider Church. Daniel was notified that a small group of believers working to develop Christian press and media were organizing a "Russian Christian Television and Radio Broadcasting Association," and he quickly attended their first meetings and offered his services to the group.



Key to his involvement with the Association was their networking potential across Russia with churches, denominations, and ministries that could promote local radio affiliates and help with frequency applications. In short order, this new collective prepared for a national conference that would be attended by Christian media promoters from hundreds of cities. This was the constituency that Daniel would draw from to develop the local affiliates that would form his network.

### **Putting it all together**

He had broadly advertised his concept for all, and now the pressure to make it happen was definitely felt by Dan each day. He still did not have staff or studios, nor a satellite, but it was a challenge that he seemed up to. One day in his office at the Christian Center, a pastor named Igor stopped by with a recommendation for someone he thought would be a good candidate to work with Dan. His name was Dmitri (Dima) Vatoulya. Igor praised Dmitri, who was a Moscow university graduate, and recently completed a degree at the Moscow Baptist Seminary. He was a musician, computer expert, electrical engineer, theologian, and good at legal logistics. Daniel needed a man with many skills, and after years of waiting, God delivered him at his doorstep.

At their first meeting, Dima was given the vision and practical logistics for creating this network. As with most, Dima had no radio experience, but he had everything needed to become the manager of a Christian radio station. The project explained to him had not been done before, at least not the way Dan was attempting to do it. It would take men of vision, maturity, talent, strength, perseverance, creativity, and prayer to pull this off. When Dima agreed to join up, Daniel knew that God would give him the perfect set of personnel that could provide Russia a resource to receive Biblically-focused, Christ-centered teaching and encouragement.

Dima's first assignment was to dig into the logistics of helping Dan find the right satellite, facilities to broadcast from, securing additional staff, and communicating with churches that were soon interested in applying for radio frequencies. Shortly after hiring Dima, Dan began the process to outfit a studio within one of the rooms used by Russian Christian radio. He only had two very small rooms to work with, but RCR allowed him to share a third studio they had previously built. Using equipment Daniel had brought over from the states, the two quickly built a complete audio studio that could be used

immediately for radio production.

Soon after Dima, Dan hired three more young men, Andre Nazarov from St. Pete, Grigory (Grisha) Roxmestrov from Omsk, and Alexander (Sasha) Borodkin from Moscow. Thanking God for sending the right people, Dan had his nucleus of creative young Timothys, and began their training, or immersion, into his world of Christian radio philosophy and operations. God was going to do something great through all of them.

Since he first arrived in St. Petersburg, Daniel had been actively researching which satellites could serve as the backbone of the network. The Soviet-built *EXPRESS* satellite series had the potential, and their costs were reasonable compared to western satellites. They were low power birds that required large satellite antennas to download a signal (like the 3 meter dish on the roof at NLR-Magadan), but at least they were usable. Unfortunately, Dan could not find a studio location in St. Petersburg that had audio relays to the satellite earth stations connected to the Express series—a primary reason why he abandoned the city for Moscow.

Back in Moscow, Dan was informed that a new *EXPRESS* A satellite with higher power would be launched from the Baikonour space center in October 1999. This gave him confidence that a new and reliable satellite could be available for the network, if only he could figure out the next problem. The Christian Center had no fiber optic links or telecom lines out of the building that could connect with *EXPRESS*. While he had a great building, surrounded by Christians and with sufficient studio space, he could not transmit to the satellite from it—a major problem for a budding satellite radio network.

He had hit a brick wall and had no idea what to do. Somewhere in Moscow there had to be a place he could access in order to get his radio signals up to the satellite. Calling his friends and asking around for some time, they finally got wind of a possibility from one of the members of the new Christian broadcasters association, Andre Nekrasov. But no one could think that place possible.

**LOCATION:** Nikolskaya Street, #7, directly across from the GUM Department store and 50 feet from Red Square and the Kremlin walls. Name of the building: MAIN CENTER for CONTROL OF RADIO BROADCAST NETWORKS of the Russian Federation.

**FACILITY:** highly restricted federal communication control center, staffed with KGB control directorate over broadcasting; facility created by Joseph Stalin to maintain strict Soviet state oversight of and control over all national radio broadcasting; housing massive control room capable of engineering nationwide radio silence and interruption of all signals inside the Soviet Union upon the command of the Soviet politburo; central oversight of transmission of communist propaganda conducted since the beginning of radio by Lenin in 1921; *but* with available fiber optic cables to various satellite uplink facilities used by *EXPRESS* and other satellites, and having a few extra rooms available on the top floor of this aging building!



Daniel couldn't believe it. Was this the only place in Moscow useable for setting up his satellite network? While he believed in miracles, he didn't think one was possible for this location. He came up with a number of reasons why he would not get in.

1. This is a highly restricted, federal broadcast control site, manned by tough former communists who willingly enforced censorship and cooperated with the KGB.
2. Why would they let some American guy walk in and set up a completely independent nationwide radio network using their facilities, but beyond their control to influence or manipulate.
3. Why would the Russian government tolerate a private, even western Christian entity in their secret building that was not connected with the Russian Orthodox?
4. There was no financial need they had for generating rental income: they didn't need our business.
5. Why would they allow Americans and a young Russian staff to freely come in and come out of this guarded, passport controlled building doing whatever they wanted?
6. Why shouldn't they not assume Daniel was a CIA spy trying to penetrate their facility?
7. And a building that close to the Kremlin must cost an awful lot of money!

Well, why not? He was ready for more miracles, so Daniel contacted Andre--who himself worked in a small radio studio inside the building --and asked for a meeting with the director of the facility.<sup>xxvii</sup> To his amazement, the director agreed. On the assigned day, with fear and trepidation, Daniel entered the first floor checkpoint of Nikolskaya 7, surrendered his US Passport to the building guards, and was shown to the director's office.



Upon entering this extremely large Soviet-era room with a single desk, a place he knew Stalin called on a regular basis, he was welcomed by a very small, yet smiling elderly man, named Anatoly Titov. After formal introductions were made, Daniel sat down and recounted his past experiences in the Soviet Union, from opening the border, to working with Soviet broadcast committees and setting up American TV, and then creating NEW LIFE RADIO in Magadan. He was not looking to brag, but was trying to find a way to prove to this man that he was no spy and that his intentions were completely honorable and somehow benefitting the Russian people.

Then Daniel laid out his plan to create a Christian radio network for the country. Ending his presentation, he told Anatoly that to make it possible, he needed to set up two studios in rooms on the third floor, and he needed to connect those studios to the fiber optic relay room on the second floor, right behind the huge complex of monitoring desks that controlled the nation's primary state radio networks. There it was; what did he think?

Expecting to get a polite but quick refusal, Anatoly took a few moments for thought, and quietly said, "Okay, I agree!" Daniel was floored by his response. It took him a moment to recover, but within himself, he was praising God almighty in the highest heavens at the top of his lungs. He could not believe it. Was it that simple? The toughest place in town to get into, was an easy real estate deal for the King of the Universe. He was going to broadcast from the very building that Stalin had constructed to voice the Communist faith of atheism on the airwaves; now the Gospel was to be proclaimed across Russia from a site not far from the Central prison where Axel Karlson had been interned 117 years before! Christian radio from the Kremlin gates: it was simply incredible, and Daniel left

the meeting knowing beyond all doubt that God was going to have his radio network.

The words of David in Psalm 66 captured the moment:

*“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name: make his praise glorious! Say to God, how awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you!”*

The work of those who were enemies of the Lord would now provide the place for his message to go out! Nikolskaya 7 turned out to be a perfect spot for the soon to be NEW LIFE RADIO Satellite Network. It was at the very heart of the city and nation, and it had perfect technical connections to the needed earth station. Fortunately, the rental price asked by Anatoly was very reasonable and within Dan’s budget. After finalizing the details for the room rent, fiber optic line access, and lease conditions, Daniel quickly signed the contract and made plans for constructing two studios on the top floor, just down the corridor from the KGB office overseeing the building. He thought to himself, “only God can make things like this happen.”

Making haste, Dan began ordering glass and building supplies that would be needed for the studios. Dima, Grisha, and Sasha scoured street markets for other supplies and within a week, the shocked guards at Nikolskaya 7 watched these young men smiling and chatting as they carried 2x4s, drywall, and glass up the three stairways to the top of this restricted building. The Christians had come, free as birds, and ready to build the radio that would proclaim their Savior.



Dan and radio team build the studios



Fortunately for the crew, Dan was hosting a retired couple from the US, Wayne and Pat, who happened to be construction experts at building radio studios. As the young men carried in supplies and radio gear, Wayne directed the studio layout and selectively pounded the nails into beautifully paneled wood walls that would resemble a Finnish sauna. After two weeks, the studios were ready for final wiring and the installation of

studio equipment. HCJB sent Bob Trulock once again to complete the job, and within a few days, the radio staff began producing programs in preparation for the start of the network. They also began making friends with the KGB staff on the third floor who liked their attitude and camaraderie.

In October, the first Christian broadcasters conference commenced in Moscow at the Izmailov Hotel Complex. Dan was an invited speaker at the event and laid out his vision to the attendees: a Christian satellite radio network, providing free 24 hour a day programming to FM radio affiliate stations, originating from studios in Moscow with indigenous producers from across Russia providing eighty percent of the content.



To sweeten the deal and encourage serious responses from Christian leaders, Dan and HCJB offered free studio equipment and low power FM transmitters to any city that could secure an FM frequency. In addition, Dan and his team would provide the legal and technical expertise to guide local radio promoters seeking FM channels, a benefit gained from the three year struggle

in Magadan. At least he could show them concrete proof of how FM radio could be created, and people were extolling the Magadan FM station and its new concept of Christian broadcasting as an example to emulate.

### **From Catastrophe to Opportunity**

Daniel had nearly everything ready to go. His staff was formed and getting the station geared up; Christians in different cities were applying for FM radio frequencies to form the network; he had the money he needed to pay for a satellite channel; and he had the legal organization needed to do broadcasting. Now all he needed was for Express A to go online.

Shortly after the conference, Russian news agencies reported the explosion of a rocket launch in Kazakhstan. *ITAR-Tass* reported the Russian Space Agency's announcement of the total loss of the *EXPRESS A* satellite. As Daniel heard the news, he saw his network also go up in smoke. There was no replacement for Express, and other satellites simply were not viable or affordable. He contacted Chicago and his partners with the news. It seemed he had prepared an operation with no place to go. He needed another miracle if God was willing. Who could know that a friendly gesture between American and Russian space engineers would result in Dan's rescue?

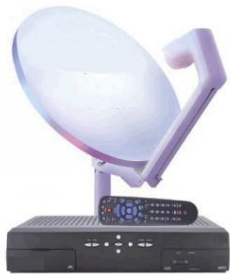
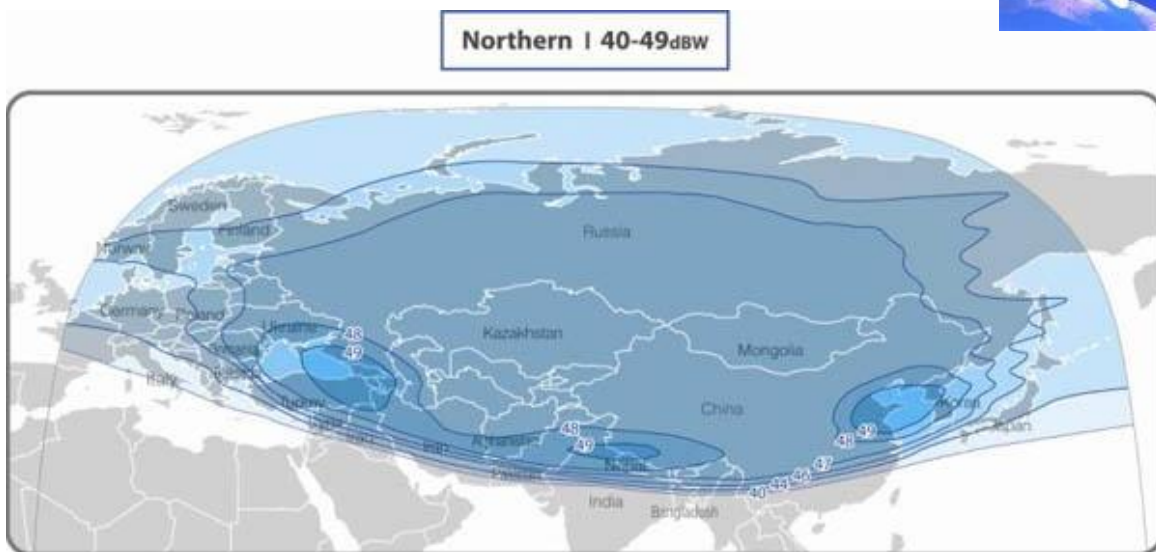
Not long after the Express fiasco, news reports announced the results of a partnership between Lockheed Martin, the US Defense contractor, and *Intersputnik*, the Russian state satellite company. The partnership would result in the launch of a new telecommunications platform, with high power transmit capability in the KU band that could provide digital direct to home satellite broadcasts across 11 time zones of Russia and the former Soviet Union, to satellite antennas as small as 90 centimeters!

The moment Dan found out about it, he realized that God had provided an even better solution than he could dream of. His network plan assumed using a low power C-band

satellite, requiring large antennas that would only be practical for radio stations relying on a network feed. If what Lockheed Martin said was true, this would be the very first time in Russian history that a commercial, high power, KU band satellite signal would be available throughout the country. The potential seemed limitless: it would be possible to not only serve radio stations, but with such a small antenna, anyone, anywhere in Russia could get New Life Radio in perfect digital stereo. And the cost of a satellite system was under \$180, a price affordable for any home.

All of a sudden, everything had changed. The means for getting the Gospel in practically every community using this LMI-1 satellite and cheap receiving equipment was now more possible than ever. New Life Radio would not just be a radio network with affiliates; every home in Russia could become an affiliate, not even needing a local radio station to transmit the station's signal. Fortunately for everyone involved, the Proton rockets lifting the LMI bird worked perfectly, and Lockheed Martin proudly announced the successful launch of their new endeavor with the Russians. LMI was ready: now Dan needed to find a way to connect to it--and get this ministry finally off the ground.

#### COVERAGE AREA FOR NEW LIFE RADIO VIA LMI-1



**New Life Radio available in digital stereo via satellite using small antennas and simple free to air satellite receivers** (signal from Germany to Japan)



## Chapter 9

### NEW LIFE RADIO on the air from Moscow



Time was running and expectations were growing after the news of LMI. Daniel had to do some fast footwork to locate a company that could help him connect. He and Dima scoured Moscow telecommunication firms that were available for commercial operations and eventually hit on one listing: *Network Services*. Calling the company, a single man answered the phone and invited them to talk about his service.

Dan and Dima travelled across town to the site of another federal telecom building and entered the restricted facility giving up their passports again. They were met by Anton Bondarov, the company's director. It turned out *Network Services* was a company of one, that had no prior experience with satellites, and had little equipment to work with. But Anton had ambition, some technical knowledge, and a desire to become a big player in the new world of Russian commercial satellite broadcasting.

Listening to Dan's goal of connecting to LMI and introducing direct to home satellite radio to Russians, Anton assured him that he would be able to get the New Life Radio signal up to LMI. But then he told Daniel the costs, and it seemed a game changer. Daniel quickly discovered that while this new satellite could give him basically the whole country, it would come at a premium price (\$14,600 a month) plus some up front money for additional equipment that Anton needed for his small satellite uplink booth located inside a ship cargo container. The average cost for a C-band satellite was \$6000 a month. How could Dan pay for this? Leaving Anton's building, he started his same old conversation with God and begged for another miracle. The technical solution was there, but the bank account wasn't. A lot more cattle would be needed.

#### Enter the partners

Dan called Chicago again and gave them the bad news. But for this group of experienced spiritual and prayer warriors, the Chicago team didn't seem fazed. They felt that while the budget would dramatically increase, it certainly was doable. Dan did some quick math. If the Covenant were to send three or four missionaries to Russia, each at a different location, it would cost about the same amount to pay for this satellite signal that could penetrate into nearly every city, village, or remote settlement across 11 time zones. All of a sudden, this \$14,600 didn't seem so unrealistic.

But there was another catch. Daniel wasn't sure there would be enough FM affiliates right away to justify the added expense, and there was no large nationally-developed market for personal satellite receivers in Russia. It was a technology waiting only for market forces to exploit further. Dan knew there was an existing base of home receivers scattered across the country, but it was not large—mainly hobbyists. Putting his fears to rest, Daniel knew this whole effort had to be taken on faith, because it, like the famous baseball movie *Field of Dreams*, was based on the notion, "if you build it, they will come." The baseball analogy perfectly fit Dan's dilemma. In order to attract people to

make the investment in home satellite equipment or low power FM radio frequencies, there had to be something on the air FIRST, otherwise it simply would not develop. People had to see, in order to believe, which meant the programming had to precede their investment. In the back of his mind, Daniel figured he would be lucky if he could get twenty FM radio affiliates, but the potential for millions of individual home receivers was entirely possible given time.

Chicago and HCJB understood the dilemma, and met the challenge. Each committed additional funds of \$50,000 per year (for 3 years) that would allow Dan to make the first year's budget of \$270,000. After that, everything would be up in the air, depending on how the project succeeded. So the decision was made, and NEW LIFE RADIO signed a contract with Network Services to uplink a digital radio channel to LMI, for retransmission throughout the satellite signal range, including an area stretching from Germany to Japan. The only regions not reached were the western portion of Magadan Oblast and Chukotka: the Covenant had these areas covered with NLR-Magadan and KICY in Nome.

This arrangement would entail a number of "firsts" with NLR eventually becoming the first radio station (of any type) in Russia configured as a direct to home satellite radio service; as well being the original Christian satellite radio network in the country. They would be pioneers in a land desperate to hear the Gospel, and would use cutting edge technology to transmit Christ's teachings in loud, clear, digital audio. No more would the Russians have to depend on scratchy (though vital) shortwave signals from far away. They would hear God's Word beamed down, literally, from the heavens.

Now it was only a matter of time, but the NLR team could not know that another year would go by before the actual transmissions started. Daniel had to remain patient.



Grisha, Andre, Alex, Dan, Dave, Dima

The beginning of the new millennium (2000) passed and found the boys on Namyotkina Street busy producing and compiling programs for the network. Dima, Grisha, Sasha, and Andre formed a tight team of creative radio men who took the pulse of the nation and developed Christian responses to it in their "God spots" and teaching programs. Using format outlines from the Magadan station, the team built up a sizeable catalog of programs and music that would be effective in reaching their target audience: young people from the age of 18 to 45-- the future of the Church.

The focus on youth was critical for the Church, as it was well known that most decisions for Christ are made in the teenage and early adulthood years. New Life Radio would fill a tremendous void in Christian content that could not be heard in the secular mass media, especially since the enactment of the 1997 Law on Religion. In the recent past, western ministries had been able to purchase air time on both state and commercial radio

channels. Now that window of opportunity had passed, as pricing for airtime became astronomical, or simply withheld from western evangelicals.

In response to this action, Christians in a number of cities intensified their efforts to obtain frequencies for both radio and television broadcasting. Dan worked with HCJB and other leaders in the new Christian TV/Radio Broadcast Association to assist radio efforts underway in Bishkek, Vladikavkaz, Smolensk, Tartu, Tallin, Tambov, Voronezh, Riga, Nalchik, and Zaparozhye.



Sadly, the best time to start a Christian station was in the Yeltsin era between 1992 through 1996, but the evangelical Church had missed the opportunity. Few groups had the money or expertise to obtain a license and then develop an actual station. By 2000, everything had changed. Putin's control of various state broadcast structures made the license process extremely restrictive. Commercial stations in major cities took most of the available frequencies, and the price of licensing became prohibitive. NLR in Magadan received their frequencies for less than \$5000 in actual processing fees (not counting other costs), and in 1992, an FM channel in the capital of Moscow could be had for under \$50,000. Now, applicants in large cities would pay far more than that, and a license in Moscow was in the millions of dollars. In reality, churches could not make the payments, and even if they could, under the new state oversight of evangelicals, there was no guarantee that anyone would get a frequency, especially if Russian Orthodox authorities were opposed. Nevertheless, many Christians undertook the challenge. All of them were waiting for NEW LIFE RADIO to start on LMI.

In October 2000, the second annual conference of the Christian Broadcasters Association met again in Moscow, filled to capacity and offering multiple opportunities for attendees to study a range of Christian media. Daniel and his team, now including Ekaterina Mshenskaya, updated the conference with the progress of the radio network, and manned display tables filled with home satellite receivers, dishes, and low power FM radio transmitters. They made it plain how easy it could be for anyone to get Christian radio from the LMI satellite.

The conference ended with a great sense of excitement by those who strongly felt that Christian radio at the local level was an essential tool for evangelism, and now possible. Jim Leonovich of *Russian Ministries* announced on the conference floor, "The satellite project is one of the greatest things I have ever been involved with. It will revolutionize the way distribution of Christian broadcasting will happen right across the former Soviet Union."

Dan had shared with them a dream and a practical plan they could achieve, and it became clear that this was the best means—at present—to develop low cost Christian radio nationwide. The broadcast association quickly compiled listings of people and cities that were interested, and the NLR staff went back to work preparing for the eventual start of the network. As the Russian revolution got its start in the month of October, a new revolution would begin the same month.

After tedious months of waiting, primarily due to construction delays for Network Services' satellite uplink as well as licensing obstacles, New Life Radio was given the chance to engage in experimental satellite broadcasting, using an old *EXPRESS* satellite until the time when LMI could be properly engaged. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, the fiber optic switches at Nikolskaya 7 were turned on, and Daniel initiated broadcasts from the third floor studios to the *EXPRESS* 6 satellite. The signal coverage was similar to LMI, but there was not much of an audience for the low power C-band signal, yet it got the station on the air and the staff began implementing and fine-tuning their radio format.

### **The Dream becomes reality: NEW LIFE RADIO begins its service to the nations**



On December 29, 2000, New Life Radio switched over to the LMI satellite and initiated its direct to home satellite radio service to all of Russia and the former Soviet Union.

For the first time, individuals living in apartments scattered across multiple time zones, and living in Russian cities from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok could hear the word of God broadcast in perfect digital stereo over their home satellite systems. Over 100 years of believing in God's leading to reach the Russian people finally

bore fruit. For the first time, from *inside* of the country, the whole nation could hear the Gospel from a single source, free to proclaim, and ready to serve. From Axel and Adolph's first forays into Russia, to the newly-initiated NEW LIFE RADIO Satellite Network, the waiting and the effort and trials had been worth it!

Dima read an opening statement on the ministry of the station and an overview of the network's goals. New Life Radio was to be a servant of the Church, engaged in evangelism and discipleship support for all called to Christ's service, and configured as a non-denominational ministry ready to work with all believers, ministries, and congregations that were committed to proclaiming Christ and his Kingdom.

Paramount in their quest as broadcasters was the realization that God is in the process of transmitting truth; Truth about Himself—His majesty, power, grace, and love; truth about mankind—his sin, weakness, failure, and dependency on God to be saved; and consequently, the truth of how Christians view others—that we can understand their needs and obtain the tools of wisdom, understanding, and forgiveness as revealed through God's Word. In order to be good transmitters, NLR would focus all programming and efforts through the lens of Scripture, that the Russian listeners might perceive this truth.

While the secular world took scant notice, the news of NLR went across the country and encouraged Christian media promoters and churches nationwide. If NLR could begin broadcasting, perhaps their local efforts could be successful as well. Church leaders from a variety of denominations quickly went on the air from the Nikolskaya studios, and Christian musicians and praise bands flocked to the station to have their music and testimonies broadcast. NLR put out a very strong teaching team over the airwaves with

the best of Russian pastors and teachers from leading seminaries and Bible schools, in addition to Russian program versions of Billy Graham, Earl Poysti, J. Vernon McGee, James Dobson, Charles Stanley, and other well-respected American teachers.

The NLR listener would get solid, balanced Biblical instruction every day without sectarian bias. While the Russian Orthodox Church was given opportunities to participate, their leadership refused: in a policy of friendship, NLR broadcast daily news reports on the Orthodox world as provided by various news agencies.

Initial listening reports came in from the following cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Ivanova, Smolensk, Tallin, Tartu, Novi Cherkaz, Neprepratorsk, Kiev, Rostov on Don, Bryansk, Novosibirsk, Bishkek and Satpaev (Kazakhstan), Vladikavkaz, Zaparozhye, Tambov, and Voronezh. It was a good distribution of cities and regions, and after obtaining these reception reports, the NLR staff was extremely encouraged.



### **SEEDS scattering (broadcast) across Russia**

A man could now walk from the Gulf of Finland to the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk and at every stop along the way, tune in the Word of God from New Life Radio. The potential to reach out to peoples long repressed from hearing the Gospel over the Soviet-built media system, was now simply waiting to be exploited.

As word of the station's availability leaked out across the nation's Christian community, enterprising individuals with a passion to share the message with their neighbors found ways to obtain satellite receivers that were now appearing in local electronics stores. NLR would benefit from the discovery made by Russia's fledgling commercial TV operators in Moscow that the best way to increase their audiences was by turning to satellite broadcasting to reach every region of the country.

As a result, nationwide publicity campaigns promoting consumer adoption of home satellite reception generated a huge interest in this new form of broadcast media. Fortunately, New Life Radio was ahead of the curve, already positioned with a signal on the best satellite, and reaping the benefits of massive promotion of the very tool needed to get the Gospel into homes, courtesy of the financial investments of these private broadcasters. With no PR budget of its own, God provided for them through others who were solely interested in profit, and soon a revolution in broadcasting by direct to home satellite was underway.



Letters and reports came into the Nikolskaya 7 studios describing a myriad of ways people shared these broadcasts: in a tiny Russian village, a believer buys a satellite receiver, hooks it up to loudspeakers on a street pole, and blasts NLR's signal to people walking past his home; an engineer in Ukraine makes a home-built FM transmitter, connects it to his receiver, and transmits

Christian songs and music to the neighboring community; a missionary sets up his satellite gear in a remote location to share the Gospel with people visiting in his home; a believer goes to the local wired radio center and gets permission to insert NLR into the town's 3 channel wired system that feeds small loudspeakers in every apartment. In the city of Dnipropetrovsk, Christian taxi drivers recorded NLR programs off the satellite onto cassette tapes, and then played them in their cabs as they drove passengers around the city: their evangelistic fervor was coupled by a booming business as customers eagerly sought them out for rides—their cabs even blessed by an Orthodox priest.

The NLR team knew that as long as a signal was present, God's enterprising people would find ways to share it in unique ways. Soon, the radio network was engaging in ministries that it had never even imagined. The evangelical Church across Russia and Ukraine saw the radio now as a means to support their local outreach efforts, and a number of cities organized to apply for radio frequencies to become NLR affiliates.

Churches purchased receivers and installed satellite antennas on their rooftops, inviting young people to listen to contemporary music and NLR's innovative *GODspots* that challenged them with a Christian worldview that was diametrically opposed to what they were now viewing on the multitude of secular channels appearing on their TV screens. A common link between American and Russian youth was MTV (Music Television) and music from the pop music industry; in this void of Godless content on existing channels came NEW LIFE RADIO--as a living breath of fresh air filled with Christ's message of life and true love, able to satisfy every need and longing. Overnight, NLR had become Russia's premier youth ministry outlet.

The comfort of the Gospel found a ready place in ministry sites Daniel could hardly contemplate: Christians called to a diversity of missions brought the radio with them to their worksites, and soon, NLR was engaged in prison ministry (with as many as 40 Russian prisons being wired for retransmitting satellite feeds within inmate cells); drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers (operated by local churches); hospital and compassion ministries in clinics, hospices, and state hospitals; halfway houses for abused young women; orphanage outreach to teenagers; broadcasts over campus radio systems in the university town of Novosibirsk, and even broadcasting inside Russian military barracks in the city of Voronezh to young Army draftees.



Listeners got the message they would never hear before on radio: JESUS SAVES. Staff got used to reading letters like this one:

*"One minute of silence on the air is terrible! I can hardly imagine even one day without NLR. New Life is a music-information wave where there is fresh and genuine information, interaction with interesting people, great music. We listen to New Life and rejoice, get encouraged, inspired, learn and change our lives for the best! Many people got new life in Jesus through this radio. New Life is too precious for me to lose it!"*

***Yana, from Moscow***

The scope of outreach exceeded the staff's wildest expectation, for it was the hand of God moving to insert his Word inside places normally off limits to missionaries of the Gospel. The Lord was able to destroy strongholds long built up in Russia against the Christian faith, though the struggle to grow and reach NLR's goal of a national radio network with local FM affiliates would be fierce and fraught with challenge. No one said spreading the seeds of God's word would be easy, and the Biblical description of the ways people responded certainly played out accordingly across the Russian landscape.

### **Growing the radio network**

Within six months of their start, New Life Radio programs were being retransmitted in the following cities: Bishkek, Kazakhstan (FM); Vladikavkaz, Russia (Radio MCC on FM), Radio Station Center (Moscow on AM); and Tartu, Estonia (AM). These outlets were allowed to pick and choose any programs off the satellite, as NLR gave blanket permission to both consumers and radio affiliates to use their broadcasts any way they chose, without restrictions or acknowledgement. It was part of an "open radio concept" designed to empower the Church with media resources that did not have to be paid for, nor controlled. NLR was only seeking to provide assistance to grow a national Christian radio voice that included partners of differing means and capabilities. Some radio stations that came online only needed small amounts of material, whereas other sites applying for FM channels would be designed primarily as translators of the Moscow signal with occasional local content inserted.

Expectations were high for those who took the leap and applied to the Federal Committee for Press, Teleradio Broadcasting, and Mass information for local FM radio channels. The entry costs were becoming high, and only the most organized churches with financial resources (aided by Christian businessmen) were willing to make the attempt. Daniel and Dima guided many of these cities through various stages of the license process, but as 2002 began, it became clear that barriers were being set too high by a Putin-led government that showed increasing hostility to the evangelical Church—often at the behest of the Orthodox leadership. In every city, save Moscow and St. Petersburg, there were plenty of radio channels available for exploitation, and in smaller cities, only three or four channels in the entire FM band were being used. This fact gave some Christian promoters hope that state communication planners would allocate frequencies in order to provide humanitarian and moral/spiritual outreach to listeners in these communities.

In the meantime, some cities decided to bypass the federal process and simply make deals with existing license holders to lease channels. In the early years of commercial radio development in the 90s, media organizations applied for multiple channels—given the low application costs—and ended up with unused frequencies. It was these channels that Christians in the cities of Bryansk, Volgograd, and others rented in order to retransmit the NLR-Moscow signal, and the network affiliate list grew accordingly. In these cities, residents were pleased to hear a different type of radio they had never heard before, as they drove around in their cars with Japanese FM tuners or listened in on their transistor radios or home stereos systems. The staff in Moscow began getting letters and emails

from these cities with grateful listeners expressing their excitement with what they were hearing and how God was speaking to them through the broadcasts.



NLR orphanage radio site

Another type of radio affiliate eventually appeared: pirate FM stations carrying the NLR satellite feed. Though the station never sanctioned such actions, Daniel soon got interesting reports from individuals living in small communities in both Russia and Ukraine who reported their joy in getting Christian radio. All of these stations were usually the result of a single individual with a satellite receiver obtaining or building a low power FM transmitter and then turning it on for all to hear. It was the remote or village sites reporting these broadcasts, usually without federal broadcast inspection authorities (*Gossvaznadzor*) nearby who could locate the transmitters and terminate them.

One listener wrote in:

*I found NLR on satellite, and my husband (an engineer) loved NLR so much that he built a small low power FM transmitter and started transmitting for our little town. NLR is also played out loud in the car shop where he works. Wishing NLR big blessings from God.* **Oksana from Ulyanovsk, Ukraine**

The town of Druzhkovka, Ukraine was the most conspicuous of these pirate stations, with NLR being transmitted illegally for years before being shut down.



In one instance, however, Daniel was complicit in assisting a pirate station, and this was at a high security Russian prison on an island near the city of Perm, Russia. American missionaries from New York formed a “Perm Mission Network” and intended to set up a satellite receiver in this prison after receiving authorization from the director, in order to minister to the most hardened criminals there. The territory of a Russian prison is perhaps the only place in the country where the prison director is the “law unto himself”, so Daniel took a chance and purchased a 1 watt Ramsey FM transmitter from a Rochester, NY factory, and sent it along with the missionaries.

After reaching the prison site, the mission team set up a satellite system, and then with permission, connected it to the FM transmitter. Beyond the territory of the prison was a village where most of the prison staff and their families lived. With the transmitter turned on, Christian radio was delivered not only into the cells of the prison, but also on FM far beyond the prison walls, ministering to the outlying community. The Gospel was delivered to the prisoners, able to set them free within their cells, and to those who guarded them. It was a pleasant reminder of the story in Acts 16:31 as Paul could minister to the prison guard asking *what must I do to be saved* ultimately, leading to the salvation of him and his family.



## A litany of trials along the path of Service

Sadly, the FM affiliates using leased channels were eventually shut down by federal broadcast authorities under a variety of pretexts, proving that without owning frequencies, few cities would have a chance to have long term broadcasting. This was critical for NLR's network expansion. The difficulties faced by those advocating Christian media development were also true for the evangelical Church in general, as increasing state restrictions on religious freedom and burdensome federal oversight demanded by the Law on Religion clamped down on the ability of individuals, congregations, and denominations to pursue their calls to mission and discipleship.

After years of warnings about the windows of opportunity closing for missionaries, foreign mission operations, and even Christian media, these predictions came true for many, including New Life Radio. But with any difficulty, God always provided alternative doors to step through, so Daniel and the radio team took up every challenge they faced, relying on God's provision and protection to carry them on in their task to proclaim the Gospel through the many media avenues the Lord gave them. It turned out that direct to home satellite radio would remain the primary means of broadcasting as the network of affiliates dream collapsed due to the lack of cities obtaining radio frequencies.

Organization changes and government attacks would soon come on the operation itself. In 2001, the Covenant officially ended their administration of NLR, with the result of Daniel forming a new ministry to take it over, titled *Christian Radio for Russia* (CRFR). A board of directors was created that included the outgoing leadership of the denomination (Emeritus Secretary for World Mission, Ray Dahlberg, Emeritus Secretary for Church Growth and Evangelism, Dr. Robert Larson) as well as Covenant laypersons and encouragement from recently retired President Paul Larsen.<sup>xxviii</sup> CRFR would continue the NLR operations alongside HCJB to keep the network vital and growing.

CRFR founders



In 2002, a property dispute between the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov and Russian state telecommunication officials—over ownership of Nikolskaya 7--forced NLR to abandon the studio facility in their building next to the Kremlin. With a one week notice to completely vacate the premises, Dan and the staff frantically dismantled their studio rooms and equipment, and relocated their operations to the *Christian Center* building. Unfortunately, the station was unable to access a fiber optic line to the satellite uplink facility for 6 months afterward, forcing it into an automated mode of broadcasting without live announcements.



Sasha, Andre, Grisha, and Katya vigilantly recorded programs for airing, that were subsequently taken by Dima across town to the Network Services uplink site for loading into the station computer. It was a catastrophic situation for any developing radio network, but the staff took it in stride and continued their service

to a signal area that witnessed an ever-burgeoning increase in home satellite reception rates across Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltics, and other republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States. NLR's audience was vastly increasing and its outreach continuing to effectively serve the evangelical Church.

In 2004, NLR and Network Services lost their right to broadcast on LMI as the satellite was put up for sale by Lockheed Martin. The station quickly moved to the Eutelsat W4 satellite, which had a Russian listening audience of nearly 600,000 individual homes connected to it, courtesy of the commercial NTV+ Television network. NLR also added a second satellite, *Yamal 100*, to extend its broadcasts across to Siberia and Magadan Oblast (region), with programming picked up by NLR-Magadan for local FM distribution.

The NLR-Magadan radio staff was now led by station manager Andre Salmonov, with Olga Krasnikova, Elina Polovnikova, and Ludmilla Bulahx continuing their ministry to support evangelism in the community. It remained without sufficient local church financial support, so *Christian Radio for Russia* increased its responsibility to ensure the station had sufficient funds to operate.

Andre S.



This dependency would mirror most cooperative efforts in Russia between western and Russian Christians, and limit the scope of what the church could do with media inside the country. The leading evangelical denominational unions with headquarters in Moscow (Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Independent) continued to rely on New Life Radio to communicate news, relevant information, and sound biblical teaching (courtesy of their seminaries and teaching pastors) to their member churches nationally, despite their inability to help offset transmission costs.

For isolated missionaries in remote posts, NLR was a daily companion providing encouragement and support, and the station received ongoing reports of ministries engaged in a host of activities using the radio programming.



Especially exciting was the rapid increase of its prison radio network, as NLR was working closely with *Russian Christian Radio's* prison ministry department, along with prison radio developers at the *Association of Christian Churches of Russia*, based in St. Petersburg. The government had estimated that nearly 25% of all Russian men had been incarcerated at some point in jail or prison, and if Christian radio could meet men with the Gospel during their imprisonment, it could potentially change the nation with redeemed men.

No one could see how the future would play out for NLR, with many Christian leaders standing on the sidelines wondering when it would cease its operations, either through financial uncertainty or government interference. Without this critical component of national Church support, the network's coverage of Siberia and the Far East was lost in 2004 after NLR discontinued its use of the *YAMAL* satellite for lack of funding.

Fortunately, God continued to protect the radio team and provided sufficient resources so their mission could continue on. He accomplished this through a unique partnership between a small group of believers in America who provided the means to broadcast, while the Russians took responsibility for programming and utilizing the network to reach their own people for Christ.

On the other side of the country far up in Chukotka, people could listen to a four hour nightly program of Christian music and teaching from NLR, as it was rebroadcast by KICY Radio in Nome from 8 pm to 12 midnight Chukotka time at 50,000 watts! Moscow feeding Nome for broadcast back into the land so eagerly sought by the Swedish missionary duo of Axel and Adolph. They could not foresee that, but God certainly did, and in his own timing, He carried it out.

### **The door closes in Magadan (March 2005)**



After nine years of faithful broadcasting to the people of Magadan, New Life Radio-Magadan was forced to stop broadcasting while its station relicensing efforts (for its third 5 year license) were being considered by the Russian Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications.

When its application was denied, the staff appealed the decision and reapplied for a license, as the state did not follow clearly defined procedures, nor could they claim the station

committed any violations of broadcast law or practices that would justify a license denial.<sup>xxix</sup> In fact, the station was to have received an official warning by the government had such a violation occurred, but none had been issued.

Nearly a year went by in the appeal process, when the management of the Magadan-based CARIBOU TV station illegally made an offer to NLR suggesting they could influence Moscow's decision-making, if NLR would give their main 102.5 FM radio channel to CARIBOU for commercial purposes, keeping the extremely limited 71.36 mhz FM channel in the old Soviet band for Christian radio. Few radios in town could tune into this radio band, and the NLR team refused this blatant attempt to take over their channel, or to endorse an inappropriate offer of interference with federal oversight.

2006 was a very difficult year beginning for both Magadan and Moscow. Always, when trouble was brewing, the radio team would turn to the Lord in faith, and cling to the words of the Psalmist as he declared in Psalm 46: 1

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the  
mountains fall into the heart of the sea...*



Ultimately, the radio station situated on top of Magadan's mountain by the sea was denied their appeal, and the end of Christian broadcasting in that city was at hand. Many questioned how God could permit such a thing to happen, after all, it was for Him and for His praise and glory that the station existed. So much time, effort, prayer, and work had been put into it. Magadan was still very much a spiritual battlefield, but Satan had no victory here. With the time they were allotted, the station broadcast the Gospel to the people selected to hear it. Those who sought it out were met by the Savior.

The local church was strengthened through the radio ministry, and now it was their responsibility to continue the general mission. As with all things, there is a time and a season for everything, and while the sad news about Magadan filtered throughout the country and a curious Christian world--as the first Christian FM station in Russia was forced to end their ministry--what would God have in store?

A few loyal staff members remained to pursue the potential to engage in Internet radio broadcasting for the region, though this would not happen for some time due to the lack of adequate telecommunication infrastructures affording efficient Internet access. They kept hoping for a miracle, but the miracle would not necessarily be on behalf of the people there, but Russian-speakers many thousands of miles away on distant shores.

### **Network Trouble back in Moscow**



In July of 2006, NLR-Moscow was notified that it would be forced off the W4 satellite, as Russian government officials in collusion with business media interests moved to restrict access to this popular satellite--as part of its new efforts to control independent broadcasting. This was the second time the network would be bumped off a satellite, losing an established audience of direct to home users. Daniel and Dima—who by now had been made station director—had to again scramble to find placement on a different satellite, and deal with the task of completely rebuilding their satellite audience.

In August, NLR temporarily moved to the Intelsat 904 satellite. The potential audience vastly diminishes due to the fact that this satellite is not very active on the Russian market, and the station assumes this a temporary move to a better and more stable satellite solution. Faithful listeners across the country continue to move with the station, changing their satellite antennas slightly to pick up the new orbital position and lock in the NLR signal. The staff experienced much stress as the station struggled to find new options to regain its audience. For Dan it was another period for patience and dependence on the Lord.

That summer represented the nadir of NLR's existence as a Christian broadcaster. Compelled to submit to so many drastic technical changes beyond their control, and desperate to cling to their audience and serve the Church, few people during that time could foresee how God would open up even greater opportunities and audiences for these

radio missionaries to serve. Listener responses coming in kept the team in good spirits with comments like this:

*Hello New Life Radio. Your title is 100% justified. When I listen to you - your music, programs, Christian drama, I really enjoy it! Everything that happens, happens with the will of God. I wish everyone could hear New Life Radio every day. Your radio station is a beam of light in the darkness of the world. Music is wonderful! I wish our state would finance you because this is really good for our country and for people. But I know that the Lord is with you. I wish you only light and wonderful things. Vadim--Mozdok, Russia*

### From One City to the World: NLR emerges as a Global Broadcaster



Grisha, Nadia, Dima, Luba, Dasha, Timur

New Life Radio had passed its blackest moments and it had survived. As the Apostle Paul recounted his running the good race, and all the trials and tribulations he faced in the process of serving his Lord, the Moscow staff clung desperately to God's promises and his blessing. By September, the Lord must have figured they had waited patiently enough, so he decided to give them an audience that could be found anywhere around the earth he created.

Ever-sensitive to using innovative technology to advance the Gospel, Daniel and Dima began exploring the potential to use the Internet to reach listeners not only across Russia, but in every nation where Russian-speakers could be found. As far back as 1995, Daniel had written in his doctoral dissertation about creating an Internet radio network for native peoples in Alaska and Chukotka, despite the Internet being in its infancy. Eleven years later, the technology and communications infrastructure, along with digital encoding advances and the mass availability of personal computers in Russian homes made this dream a distinct possibility.

Like direct to home satellite, NLR would once again be in the forefront of introducing a new broadcast medium to Russian listeners, so the station investigated potential telecom and Internet streaming providers, and by the end of the month, connected their satellite signals to a broadcast server in Atlanta, Georgia that provided them unlimited 24/7 Internet radio via a *Windows media audio* stream. With a flick of a switch, New Life Radio's ministry via **www.NLRadio.net** went global!

If NLR's original goal of a national network of small FM radio stations could not succeed, God obviously had something quite sufficient instead, and far beyond the reach of any small 200 watt FM transmitter broadcasting to a single location. As Dima and the team opened their microphones each day, they could now assume that someone in Siberia as well as Seattle was listening to them. And this was true! From the most remote Russian village (with Internet access), to the most populated city centers around the world, people could hear the Gospel in the Russian language.



NLR Studio B

Every global capital city has concentrations of Russian-speaking immigrants from different republics of the former Soviet Union, and Daniel was excited about the possibility to listen to his own radio station while visiting his parents, Harold and Laura, in Jamestown, NY. He estimated that many of America's seven million Russian-speakers could probably tune in as well, and a vastly increased ministry field opened up for the Moscow staff.

### **Another gift from God...**

Reveling in its new worldwide outreach, the Lord gave the network another special gift to further propagate his Gospel. In October, as Daniel was desperate to get off Intelsat 904 to a better satellite, God gave him the biggest one ever, and he did it for NLR through the land of his promised people, ISRAEL. The *Hotbird* satellite was the premier commercial direct to home broadcast satellite for Europe, Eastern Europe, and the European portions of Russia. Its signal even went down to Israel, where two million Russian immigrants were now living. In his provision, God led Daniel into a connection with an Israeli-telecom company in Tel Aviv (*RRsat*) that could get his Moscow signal up to *Hotbird*, and into an estimated 93 million homes that included millions of Russian ones.



The station seized the opportunity, and Daniel signed a three year contract for a guaranteed signal that could keep the radio network stable and available to a huge audience. That God would bring the Gospel in Russian down to Israel, a major consumer of *Hotbird* for entertainment and international channels, was simply incredible, and He opened a new ministry for the station to proclaim the Messiah to the people living in the land of His birth. NLR would transmit the testimonies of the Hebrew prophets pointing to their promised Savior, and Isaiah in chapter 53 proclaiming *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?* Things were definitely looking up and Daniel could see the hand of God moving in wonderful ways as NLR remained faithful to Him, in good times and bad.

2007 was a banner year! NLR experienced new growth in its distribution as its Internet audience increased exponentially, and miraculously the station was able to get back on the LMI satellite (now renamed to ABS-1) to complete its full coverage of Russia and the CIS once again using two satellites. NLR's Bible teaching programs could be tuned in by a student at a Russian university in Vladivostok on her laptop computer; a disabled Russian Jewess confined to her home in Jerusalem could listen over her *Hotbird* satellite channel; a young Russian inmate (among 10,000) at the *Kresti* Prison in St. Petersburg could pick up the signal through his simple wall mounted audio speaker using an on-off button; and a lonely young man stuck in his farming village in the Ural Mountains region could be encouraged through his \$100 satellite receiver tuned to ABS.

The only sad point that year was the decision by HCJB to end their partnership in the NLR network due to financial difficulties from a major downturn in their donor base. It was a bad year for many ministries affected by a deteriorating US economy. CRFR was

on its own to continue the network, and they were certain of God's continuing provision for the ministry.

But good news was around the corner! NLR added a new FM station to its network in Norilsk, Russia. Norilsk—described as the most polluted city in the country from its nickel smelting operations—also was a place with the shortest human lifespan. Located above the Arctic Circle, this closed city known for its harsh and cold weather, was home to a Baptist pastor named Mikhail Dolgikh. Mikhail had a vision for Christian radio and how it could bring the city to faith in the Savior. He happened to be employed by a state telecom company and had the skills and expertise to successfully obtain an FM channel. Mikhail built a studio inside the state facility to oversee the broadcasts of the NLR-Moscow feed, supplemented by programming from a staff he formed locally. After getting an FM frequency, he only had to wait for a satellite signal, as NLR had yet to go on the ABS satellite that had a signal that far north.



Some time would go by before Mikhail was able to initiate broadcasts. One day his son died, and as he was returning from the cemetery after burying him, he was told the NLR satellite signal just came on line and that he could begin broadcasting the Gospel immediately. So that day Mikhail turned on the transmitter, and the message of eternal life in Christ was shared over the airwaves with this northern town as his own son had just received it. For many, the burden of ministry is great, but God's promises and blessings are even greater!

Within a year, Mikhail would start another FM station in the nearby city of Dudinka. He was driven to serve the Lord through radio, just as the NLR team far away in Moscow was. It was typical of the spiritual partnerships formed by God's people to relay his message of NEW LIFE in his Son. It is an ongoing story that compels us to listen, and for many, this listening is done through radio as a mouthpiece capable of transmitting the simple message of what He has done for us. And the radio would be a voice for a grateful people to express and broadcast praise to the Lord, as so aptly written by the Psalmist:

***It is good to Praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, Oh Lord; I sing for joy at the works of your hands...*** Psalm 92

### **The Mission carries on**



The intervening years saw continued changes in the network and in those who staffed it. The Evangelical Church in Russia and the former Soviet Union possessed a ministry tool to aid its work. But with every challenge, came new opportunities, and New Life Radio continually

expanded its outreach across a variety of media platforms available in nearly every nation in the world. People were being saved as they heard the Word of God and learned about his love for them. From a tiny plant of one station in Magadan, to a service of proclaiming Christ 24 hours a day in ways receivable by all Russian-speaking people across God's earth, the story of New Life Radio was a miraculous one.

Through trial and struggles, the transmission of God's Truth and the fulfilling of his purpose in Christ's call to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth was, *and is being* accomplished. It was done through the calling of those countless generations of Christians, ready, able, and willing to risk all for the Savior who died in order to set them free.

From Cyrill to the Russian Patriarch; Luther to the Pietists; the *Svenska Missionsförbundet* to Axel and Adolph, and from the Covenant pioneers in Alaska to Daniel and the many called to serve alongside him in mission, God's work was done, and continues to be carried out to this very day by his people, until the time when our Lord comes to take us home.

Now the question we ask for the future is this: What wonders will God work in the life of this special radio ministry to the people we seek, and what will your response to it be, so we can continue to serve those needing the light of life, as revealed in this listener letter:

*O Lord, please bless these guys at NLR and thank you that they are there.  
Because of your work, thousands of people have come to Christ. I also  
found the Truth and became alive thanks to your work. You are superb!  
I cannot imagine my life without Christ, I cannot imagine it without NLR.  
I am always with you. May Guarding Angels protect you!*

**Maxim from Norilsk, Russia**



## Chapter 10



### Continuing the Mission: the Future of Christian Radio in Russia

*BACKGROUND: timeline 2016*

*NEW LIFE RADIO was designed to meet a need for providing Christian radio to a nation whose political history blocked the development of the free transmission of the Gospel. Its function is two-fold: to reach the lost; and to equip the Church to build the Church. NLR provides a media voice to those called to preach, teach, and encourage in the faith.*

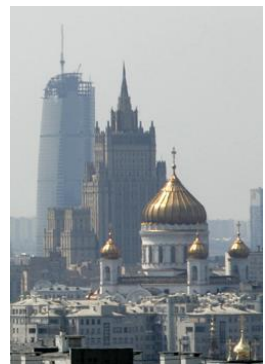
As of late 2016, Russia has entered a new era of restrictive state control over the evangelical Church. Anti-terrorism laws passed by the Russian Duma and signed by President Vladimir Putin in July 2016 have imposed harsh penalties for Christians who would engage in public and private evangelism, Christian literature distribution, and even conducting home Bible studies where a non-believer is present. In addition, these new laws spell the end of any subsequent development of Christian mass media—which is now defined as engaging in missionary activity subject to legal restraints.

Russia is struggling to assert itself on the world stage, despite its internal weakness and lack of moral or spiritual strength. It continues to be dominated by forces of atheism and the religion of materialism, possessing a national media with little cognizance of, or information on the God who created them and who seeks to give them eternal life.

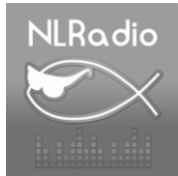
The evangelical Church in Russia—estimated at just 1% of the population—is unable to insert its voice and wisdom into the pressing issues facing Russia—due to its inability to appear in secular mass media, or influence government leadership with a Christian perspective. Except for the few outlets like New Life Radio, the Church’s public voice is somewhat mute and limited in helping shape the future of the nation, in part, because it cannot get its message to this media consuming population of 140 million people. Fortunately, their Savior can penetrate the strongest walls of opposition, and Christians pray to that effect, but nevertheless, the state continues to clamp down on those seeking to proclaim Christ over the public airwaves.

The Russia of today is a nation of unrealized dreams and aspirations, and the Church in this land also faces internal struggle between a traditional faith backed by federal power, and those outside its control who claim the historic faith of the Apostles with their concern for reaching the whole world with the Gospel. In recent meetings of top evangelical leaders, claims are being made that the evangelical Church is not growing. For some, Russia seems indifferent to faith, and its people are staying away from an active life of belief and worship—a paradox for a nation whose Russian Orthodox leadership claim 80% public affirmation of the Orthodox creed, while witnessing only 2-4% in weekly church attendance.

Moscow skyline



At present (2016), the New Life Radio Satellite Network finds itself reaching out to a troubled people domestically and internationally in a multitude of ways over numerous media platforms with the simple message of the Gospel. Its network structure consists of one direct to home broadcast satellite (*Hotbird*) with a published audience statistic of over **103 million** individual homes across Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and Israel able to receive its daily transmissions.<sup>xxx</sup>



New Life Radio's 24/7 Internet radio broadcast features unlimited simultaneous user status, targeting an estimated 80 million+ Internet user base in Russia, 40 million+ in Ukraine, and millions worldwide--operating on multiple streaming formats including handheld mediums such as Apple iPhones and Androids. NLR maintains two FM radio station affiliates in Aktubinsk and Dudinka, Russia. The NLR network is able to reach far more people in 2016, at less cost, and fewer staff than it could at its founding in 2000.



New Life Radio today is a team of radio missionaries charged to reach the Russian world from their two small studios still located at the *Christian Center* in Moscow. NLR is composed of Andre Ryabenko, Vladimir Gorlan, Nadia Zakirova, Dmitri Vatoulya (station manager); not pictured—Alona Moiseva, Katya Vatoulya, Artyom Novikov (webmaster), and Daniel Johnson (network manager). For the last few years, this team has

been drastically understaffed, due to lack of available funds for additional members, but they have worked heroically and sacrificially to keep the network operating.

Given the fact that the Putin government since 1999 has prevented any serious development of Christian broadcasting, we see no change in his administration's position on basic freedoms--including religion and the press--that would give any optimism for future growth of traditional broadcast media that could transmit the Christian message. But we know that this is all within the control of our Savior, and we continue to pray for the freedom of the Russian people.

Alternative media has been the only avenue available for the Evangelical world to pursue, primarily using the Internet. With every Russian Internet provider forced by law to connect to federal state security computer controls, Christian media over Internet remains a tenuous proposition, subject to political consideration. Only in direct to home satellite broadcasting, using western-controlled satellites, can the threat of government interference best be prevented. Given his dependence on western financing, investment, and technology to grow the Russian economy, Putin would be well advised to avoid past Soviet strategies of radio frequency jamming to prevent unwanted information filtering in from the west. Should these barriers be put in place, CRFR has strategic planning ready for implementation to reorganize and reroute its programming, if worst case scenarios occur.



## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the many advances in receiving technology and vast networking potential worldwide, the primary challenge for NLR is to transmit the basic *content* of the message that will bring the Russian world's media users into a vital relationship with the Savior.

This is the ongoing statement of purpose for *Christian Radio for Russia*—to maintain a minimum base for New Life Radio to continue broadcasting the message of the Gospel, while seeking out new spiritual partners to provide the financial means for expanding the network's staff and quantity of outstanding Biblical materials and broadcast content that will lead listeners to Christ.

It is this task to aid the evangelical Church that NEW LIFE RADIO can excel, especially in relation to witnessing to a most critical component of Russia's people: *youth*. NLR's radio format is successful in relating Christ's claims and the Christian worldview to young people in a target age range of 18-45. Listener responses confirm this! It is well known that a large percentage of people coming to Christ do so in their late teens and early twenties. This statistic is a powerful argument for NLR's programming orientation and ministry. NLR is able to serve a vast core of youth ministry efforts in churches throughout 24 time zones, and remains attractive to young people who are in tune with contemporary Christian music, drama, and the complexity of living out their faith in a secular, non-believing world full of contrasting and opposing messages and paradigms.

CRFR's current donor base in the United States is composed primarily of elderly Christians and a core of local congregations who see the need to bring Russia's youth to Christ and the guarantee of freely-available radio. Since its inception, this nucleus of believers has been crucial to keeping NLR on the air, as Russian denominations still claim a lack of financing to make any viable investment into this radio network that effectively serves their national communication and evangelistic needs.

That NEW LIFE RADIO maintains its ministry--under conditions that might bankrupt other media operations--proves that God is carrying out His purposes through the radio staff and their technical infrastructure used for broadcasting. As the world gets smaller and more integrated through the interconnectedness made possible by communications media, future Christian ministry using these media will be increasingly important to encourage and financially support.

CRFR's immediate goal for ensuring the current ministry, is to reach a stated and necessary budgetary target of \$20,000 per month for the New Life Radio operation in Moscow. This will allow:

- a. NLR continuing its service to the evangelical Church in Russia and Ukraine by subsidized the costs of distributing Christian news, information, and excellent Christian program materials produced from a wide variety of ministries, churches,

and individuals whom God has gifted to share the Christian faith to Russian speakers. (*note: NLR has never charged Russian producers since its inception*)

- b. NLR will be able to provide its international audience with free satellite radio, FM, and Internet signals, while maintaining the potential to serve future Christian stations with free programming material, thus keeping station costs for new sites to a bare, and affordable minimum.
- c. The Russian public will have the ongoing opportunity to discover Christian radio as they explore and channel surf various satellites and Internet channel listings—a needed opportunity to be confronted with God’s Truth revealed by Biblical teaching and preaching programs. With the absence of Christian information on secular broadcast outlets, this aspect of NLR will be vital to maintain.

The New Life Radio station budget is equivalent to supporting four or five American missionaries in specific locations in Russia. NLR in its present makeup cannot continue for long without new sources of support to increase staff and cover basic and emergency expenses. The stated sum is not an amount comparable to similar Christian networks in the west, where the costs are far higher. NLR has been a pleasing example of being perhaps one of the most cost effective Christian radio networks ever developed, giving its donors a tremendous ministry *bang for the buck* and exceedingly low administration overhead.

**THE LONG TERM GOAL** for *Christian Radio for Russia*, is to ensure that New Life Radio will be able to capitalize on every new media format to be developed in the future that will have Russian-speakers accessing it. Christian radio has a long history of seeking the latest technology to transport the Gospel over it, from AM radio in the 1920s, to shortwave radio in the 1930s; from FM and cable radio in the 1960s, to direct to home satellite TV in the late 1980s, leading to experimental Internet radio in the mid 1990s and cell phone broadcasting in the late 2000s. Few today may know what the evolution of media development will entail, but regardless of the technology employed, it will be just one more channel in a vacuum, if it is without a relevant message—and with this opportunity, comes our continuing work to ensure the placement of Christian content.

Having access to new broadcast technologies is important, but New Life Radio is also concerned with cultivating Christian content in word and praise that will bless its audience and worship God.

With additional sources of funds, NLR hopes to establish a separate production division in Moscow, composed of a recording studio complex designed to support Russia’s emerging Christian composers and musicians in order to develop extensive archives of music that will form the core of necessary materials used to support future Christian broadcast schedules. Russia’s music industry with its lack of copyright protections has made it impossible for Christian musicians to support themselves financially, and with professional recording studio costs beyond the means of most Christians to afford, an

available studio at NLR with free engineering and support will generate large amounts of music designed in praise of the Creator.

NLR also seeks to continue the development of broadcasters, in conjunction with HCJB, as they offer yearly “Radio Schools” to train young people with the skills needed to become effective Christian communicators and media professionals.

*Christian Radio for Russia’s* sponsorship task is to guarantee full financial support for a well-equipped NLR radio missionary team, coupled with a stable and growing Christian support base made up of Russian Christians, Slavic believers around the world, and American congregations serious about taking Christ’s call of the Great Commission to the furthest reaches of the earth—represented by Russia. This is a ministry of service we hope the Lord Almighty will allow us to achieve.

The Russians are charged to proclaim the Gospel over New Life Radio. Their brethren in the west, and from all parts of the world, are working together to ensure they have the tools to reach their own people, regardless of where they are located. It is a vision to reach a nation for Christ, and ultimately the world.

We have shared the story of God’s faithfulness to a few who sought to serve him in mission, and how those efforts have led to his Gospel finding a place in the hearts of millions destined to hear the living message of grace, hope, peace, and eternal life from a loving Father who sent his Son and Spirit to bring them into relationship with HIM.

This is the story of NEW LIFE RADIO, and it can become part of your story of faith and commitment to the call of Christ and his Great Commission, if you so choose to invest in His Kingdom along with us! You could be the next “Swede” in this unfolding tale!

Thank you for your willingness to hear this story, and may God richly bless you with His peace and NEW LIFE IN HIM!

*For more information:  
Contact:*

**Christian Radio for Russia**  
**Box 428, Jamestown, New York 14701**

**Email:** [crfr@juno.com](mailto:crfr@juno.com)  
**[www.CRFR.org](http://www.CRFR.org)**  
**[www.NLRadio.net](http://www.NLRadio.net) (live audio stream)**





## *Three Swedes on a Mission*

**endnotes:**

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Bible\\_Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Bible_Society)

<sup>ii</sup> Paul Larsen, "Russia and the 100 year Vision." *The Covenant Companion*, June 1993, p. 8

<sup>iii</sup> Karl Olson, *By One Spirit*, (Chicago: Covenant Press), 1962 p. 411

<sup>iv</sup> Fred Savok, *Jesus and the Eskimo*, (Fairbanks, Alaska: HLC Publishing) 2004 pp. 54-55

<sup>v</sup> Report on the Covenant Russia committee meeting: "History to the present." Paul Larsen and Raymond Dahlberg. August 27, 1993.

<sup>vi</sup> Jesus and the Eskimo, p. 87

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid.* p. 56

<sup>viii</sup> *Covenant Memories: 1885-1935* p. 159-160

<sup>ix</sup> L. Arden Almquist, "Missionary Pioneer leads hard life in Alaska" 1962

<sup>x</sup> Karl Olson. *By One Spirit*, P. 428

<sup>xi</sup> Russia and the 100 year vision. Paul Larsen. In *Covenant Companion*, June 1993. Page 9

<sup>xii</sup> An excellent history of KICY' development can be found in Greg Asimakopoulos, *PTARMIGAN TELEGRAPH, The Story of Radio Station KICY*, (Chicago: Arctic Broadcasting Association Press) 2004

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ptarmigan Telegraph, The Story of Radio Station KICY*. P.

<sup>xiv</sup> Karl Olson, p. 426: also see "Report on the Covenant Russia Committee" P. Larsen and R. Dahlberg

<sup>xv</sup> 60 years after his death, Julius was still impacting students at North Park through a scholarship fund set up by his widow Mabel.

<sup>xvi</sup> Emily Ivanoff Brown, *The Roots of Ticasuc: An Eskimo Woman's Family Story* 1981

<sup>xvii</sup> The remainder of the chapter is referenced in Daniel Johnson, "Alaska and Asiatic Eskimos—Broadcasting and Communication Developments across the Bering Strait," Ph.D dissertation, McGill University, Montreal 1998

<sup>xviii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xix</sup> Lynne Cox swam over to Big Diomedes from Little Diomedes in June 1987. A long distance swimmer who had crossed the English channel, Cox wanted to contribute to the peace efforts between America and the USSR, and convinced the Soviets to let her swim up to the shore of Big Diomedes after setting out from Little Diomedes. Jim Stimpfle monitored her in a small boat as she crossed.

HCJB Global. Dan Anderson and Marla Bender. "Technology Center in Indiana to celebrate 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary." Dec. 9, 2011

<http://www.hcjb.org/HCJB-Global-News/technology-center-in-indiana-to-mark-25th-anniversary.html>

<sup>xx</sup> Pastor Randy Schott, of Hillside Covenant Church in Walnut Creek, California, led the ONE ACCORD singing group to Magadan for a musical tour from July 20 to August 4, 1991. Also: Randy Schott, Hillside Covenant Church, to Daniel Johnson, Nome Alaska, March 13, 1990. Letter of request for assistance to organize a Magadan tour.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ray Dahlberg. Sermon text delivered at Northbrook Covenant Church, Northbrook Illinois February 12, 2008.

<sup>xxii</sup> Paul Larsen and Ray Dahlberg had a side trip to meet with Olga Rybakova, a Russian teacher who had been converted and was starting a small church in Magadan. The men provided some funds for her to put a downpayment on a mortgage for a building. The relationship bore fruit a few years later as the Covenant developed the St. James Bible College, that was located in Olga's church, called "the Revival Church." Barbara Larson from San Jose, California also accompanied the men as a translator. In addition, Ray managed to get Georgi Radchenko to agree to broadcast a Christian children's video series produced by

---

the Covenant (Quigley's Village) over the Magadan state television channel, once the series was translated into Russian.

**xxiii** The company Dan used was called MARIF, registered in Magadan and able to embark on a wide variety of commercial activities including broadcasting. Owned by Margarita Fyodorova of Magadan.

**xxiv** The paperwork needed to obtain the Gossvaznadzor permission in Moscow was done by Tatiana Fyodorova Johnson, daughter of Margarita Fyodorova, founder of the MARIF organization in Magadan.

**xxv** While NLR was the first Christian FM radio station in Russia, it was not the first Christian studio to broadcast inside the new nation. In 1992, a young man named Andre Nekrasov in Moscow managed to rent an AM radio frequency owned by the government, and set up a tiny studio at a location next to the Kremlin. He began sporadic broadcasts of Christian programming each day, and called his station, RADIO CENTER. A few years later, two pastors of a Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg formed a small studio, rented an available AM frequency, and began broadcasting as Radio TEOS.

**xxvi** An addition radio ministry in Khabarovsk and Valdivostok, FEBC, were renting broadcast time on government AM channels as well by that time.

**xxvii**

**xxviii** The original board of directors of Christian Radio for Russia included Ray Dahlberg, Robert Larson, J. Matthews Hagberg, David Schmer, and Jerrold Thelander, with their organizational meeting held in June 2001 at Chautauqua, New York. It is a 501©3 non-profit organization registered in the State of Illinois.

**xxix** The MARIF organization that controlled the license was in the hands of an individual in St. Peterburg who had threatened the staff over a private lawsuit. This caused a delay in the station signing off on a particular aspect of the license renewal application, and may have been partly to blame. However, after the official license appeal and application, the station by law should have received their license again. Sadly, this did not happen.

---

**xxx** for reference data on Tricolor TV see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tricolor\\_TV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tricolor_TV)

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

---

### Historical Document

#### **NLR-Moscow opening broadcast text: Dec. 29, 2000**

"This is the initial broadcast of New Life Radio, transmitting live by satellite from Moscow. Owned and operated by Marif, a private organization with offices in Moscow and Magadan, New Life Radio is dedicated to serving as a unifying instrument of Christian ministry to the people of Russia and the CIS countries. As our name implies, we believe that God has given man new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is our intention to assist the development of a comprehensive, national Christian broadcast infrastructure, which can bring together and effectively assist the evangelistic and discipleship activities of Christian churches and ministries nationwide. In essence, this service will be known informally as New Life Radio Satellite Network, being the first stage of a larger effort to create a system of local Christian radio stations in communities across Russia. Such a network can ultimately become a communication tool of vital importance in providing Christians with new, information, and teaching as contributed by believers from all regions of Russia, the CIS, and across the world.

New Life Radio began with a dream, a calling, in which God gave us a vision to proclaim the great hope of a new life in Christ, a hope which provides the answers to mankind's deepest questions concerning who and what we are, and how we are to live our lives and find meaning to our existence. We proclaim Christ

---

crucified, resurrected, the author and finisher of our faith—the Holy Son of God, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Through him alone comes our salvation and access to the Father in Heaven. We proclaim God's Word, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, as the true source for our knowledge of Him, and New Life Radio will orient its broadcasts using the sure foundation of the Bible as the core and definer of all we say and do on the air. Knowing God is the ultimate unity, understood by the Trinitarian concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, New Life Radio has one of its priorities, the goal of seeking unity among all Christians who love and serve Christ, and as such, will conduct its activities on the basis of a non denominational orientation, being inclusive and open to all those who cling to the saving grace of our Savior. Those who hold to the Apostles Creed will find fellowship with us. We hold high the reality of freedom in Christ, as well as the wonderful nature of his bride, the Church, which is made up of a diversity of parts, each important to the whole. These are the cornerstones guiding our efforts to be of service and cooperative with all those who call on the name of Christ.

It is indeed a miracle that the Lord has provided us the opportunity to develop and expand Christian radio in our country. We understand the price others have paid in laying the groundwork for building Christ's church, the sacrifices made by those fearless believers who trusted and put God first in their lives. We know the cost involved in proclaiming God's word in this land. In memory of those saints who have gone before us, and of the suffering Christ who gave us the ultimate example of how to live and love, we humbly ask for the prayers and assistance of all Christ's followers in Russia to make this ministry effective and pleasing to God.

Therefore, we invite all believers, denominations, parachurch ministries, and others to assist us in two primary and ongoing tasks. The first task concerns the programming you will hear. New Life Radio will broadcast 24 hours per day, across 11 time zones in Russia, and this will require us to collect and coordinate vast amounts of information in the form of news, announcements, Bible teaching and preaching, special interest programs across a wide variety of themes from a Christian perspective, music, and other items of interest to the Christian community. Our Moscow staff is ready to receive your information and materials, and will coordinate the distribution of this information back to every region of the country. We need to know what is happening in your community, and we offer Christians at the local and regional level a national forum to represent your views, as well as to share the contributions in new, teaching, and music that God has enabled you to develop.

The second task relates to the expansion of our listening audience, via the development of our technical network. New Life Radio has the ability to reach your community through a variety of means, including distribution over local Christian FM stations, secular FM and AM radio (including government radio); through the wired radio system in your town (*radio tochka*); into your individual home or church facility through direct satellite broadcasts (similar to NTV and possible if you purchase a low cost satellite receiver and antenna); or through local cable/TV radio networks. New Life Radio will send its satellite signal nationwide using the new LML-1 satellite, located at 75 degrees orbital position, and can directly reach the majority of the Russian landmass. Believers in every community have the ability to decide how best to establish Christian broadcasting, using any one of these methods, but it will not happen without you.

The staff of New Life is ready to provide consultation on the best option for your community, and there are possibilities to receive radio equipment for those cities that can successfully obtain local radio frequencies. You may contact us by phone, or check out our website for more exact information ([www.Christianradiorussia.org](http://www.Christianradiorussia.org))

With your prayers, labor, and perseverance, we can bring the Word of God into every village and city of Russia. We will provide the signal, but we need you to make our signal heard in your location, and in doing so, we can together be faithful in fulfilling Christ's call to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples and to the ends of the earth.

May God richly bless you as you receive His Word from our programming. Again, we ask for your prayers, and as God leads you, for your financial support, as this is a ministry directed by, and on behalf of

---

the people of Russia. This is your Christian radio station, and we urge you to work with us in whatever capacity you can to make this ministry into what God would have it to be.

We invite you to listen daily. Tell your friends and family about us, and share this news with those near you who don't know Christ. May you enjoy our programming, and please remember, we are always glad to receive your constructive comments concerning our broadcasts. We thank God for this privilege of serving Him, and YOU—our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. May His name be praised!  
In Christ and for his service,

The Director of MARIF/New Life Radio-Moscow”

End of transmission.

*(daniel johnson)*