



FALL 2018

READ Ministries

Taking Truth to Tough Places

Resources for Evangelism And Discipleship in Ukraine and other parts of the Former Soviet Union

The Changing Face of READ Ministries

By Sharon Sheppard

READ's cup overflows. Exciting new opportunities continue to emerge. God keeps opening borders once thought to be impenetrable. New believers in countries not yet served, are hungry to be equipped. And the prospect of taking truth to new territories warms our hearts. But with blessings often come challenges.

This week *READ Report* visited with two key people about some of these challenges: Paul Sanders, one of the founders and READ's Board Chairman; and Bill Arvan, Foreign Projects Coordinator.

Paul, READ is blessed with new opportunities, but in order to meet this influx of requests, changes need to be made. How difficult do you expect these changes to be?

Sanders: Right from the start READ has been committed to listening to the people it serves. We resolved to do what serves them best from *their* perspective. A great part of our success as a ministry has been related to our ability to see changes and adapt.

How has READ evolved over the years?

Sanders: At one point, we had a successful bookmobile ministry that was an effective tool. Then as media evolved, this became an obsolete method of delivery.

Another big shift came when we began to connect with Bible colleges and seminaries. Our original partnership began with Kremenchug Bible College, and this spawned connections with many other Bible colleges and seminaries throughout Ukraine and beyond.

READ expanded to supplying textbooks for additional Bible colleges that added librarian training courses, including some in neighboring countries. As one administrator expressed his thanks for our help, he said how grateful they are that now 20 students no longer have to share one textbook.

With the advent of digital technology, READ made a timely shift to digital materials, supplying Netbooks and digital libraries.

A more recent adjustment came when Russia imposed heavy tariffs on books, which we had been buying from Christian distributors in Russia. When these tariffs made the cost of books prohibitive, READ facilitated a shift by working with existing Christian publishers in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian economy was in freefall when READ began, and more recently, Russia invaded Ukraine, leaving refugees to flee for their lives. In light of new challenges, might READ change its mission statement to include relief?

Sanders: No. We will continue to do what we believe God has called us to do, and that is to provide *Resources for Evangelism and Discipleship* to Eurasian countries. READ responded to some of the more urgent needs for relief, but we have kept our main focus on providing tools for evangelism and discipleship. For example, following the 2014 invasion, we distributed thousands of volumes of the Camel Story book trilogy to refugee children. Though some have thought we should be more involved in relief, in keeping with our mission statement, we have said no to medical relief and housing.

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What have been some important turning points in READ's ministry?

Sanders: Our ministry in Asian countries has been enhanced by our affiliation with the Euro-Asian Accreditation Association (EAAA). This organization has helped our ministry in Central Asia to emerge from an undercover operation to an indigenous-run ministry, as more and more believers in these countries step up to the plate.

Might READ team up with other ministries?

Sanders: We have no desire to replicate what other ministries are doing, but if we can add strength to what we do through partnering, we might consider this. We have a good bond with *SEND International*, and we co-sponsored with *Joni and Friends* a conference for church leaders in Ukraine who work with families with disabilities.

Bill, as you reflect on the past 16 years of ministry, what changes stand out to you?

Arvan: Clearly, the WHO, WHERE, and HOW of the ministry have changed. That is, READ now ministers to new groups in new places in new ways that differ from those at the beginning of READ's ministry. But the WHAT, the original vision and goals of the organization and the message of the Gospel have not and will not change.

What are some of the most encouraging new developments at READ?

Arvan: Central Asia is at a unique time. With no visa, just a valid passport, an American can go to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Some Muslim countries are more tolerant than they were. This presents a huge window of opportunity. We can help strengthen the churches that are growing in these tough places.

I was recently asked to visit a leading evangelical university in Moldova, which I did on my latest trip. One reason for the visit is that this university has a significant number of students from Central Asia.

One of the first persons I met when I arrived on the campus was a 23-year old Christian brother from one of the restricted-access republics in Central Asia. He had earned his BA from the university in Moldova, and just finished his master's program at an evangelical theological school in Austria. He shared with me his dream of pursuing a Ph.D. at the Oxford Centre for Missions in England and serving Christ's church in Central Asia. And, his older brother, whom I also met, has a similar dream!

It is heartening to meet young believers like these two brothers who lived with persecution for their faith and yet are committed to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Another encouraging sign has been READ's development of church library ministry training.

You recently taught at a librarian conference. What's needed to make librarian training more relevant in the digital age?

Arvan: Internet services, instruction in building and managing websites, help in creating space that looks more like a reading center. Helping our partners organize and manage materials to make them more accessible. Thinking more about the media center concept, possibly adding lectures and apologetics forums. Equipping church librarians to practice "spiritual pharmacy."


What are the most pressing concerns facing READ today?

Arvan: From our humble beginnings in Ukraine, READ has now expanded its outreach from one country to seven, with more countries waiting in the wings, asking for our help. READ still has just one Foreign Projects Coordinator, one part-time administrator, and a few partners on modest stipends in Eastern Europe. So, we need to increase staff and a budget that will support this expansion. Soon it will be time for us to pass the leadership baton to younger men and women who share READ's vision. And READ must engage the next generation of ministry partners. We are asking God to help us learn how to tell our story to a new generation in a way that will inspire them to accept this challenge.

How optimistic are you about transitioning to a new generation while the ministry is in expansion mode?

Arvan: I'm very optimistic about our future. Fortunately, READ does not have a lot of bureaucracy, so we can change, and we have changed. We are trusting God to show us the way.

We deeply appreciate the faithful support of our donors, and we covet their prayers for these transitions as we look at staff and budget initiatives and seek to engage a new generation.

Exciting days lie just ahead. 

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"
Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV)

Central Asia Needs Digital Libraries

In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be entered without much difficulty by foreign visitors. But the other republics are not so open. Traveling this past May, from one of these restricted-access countries, brother “Oleg” (not his real name) met with Bill Arvan in a southern city in Ukraine. “Oleg” serves as the coordinator of a training ministry in his Central Asian home country which is supported by READ. Bill and Oleg met together for fellowship, prayer, sharing reports, and making plans for future joint ministry initiatives.

Currently, in “Oleg’s” training center, 30 men and women are being prepared for church ministry in a bachelor’s level program, and 16 church leaders are studying in a master’s level program for developing Christian leaders. Both groups are in desperate need of access to reliable evangelical ministry tools. According to “Oleg,” *“...it is almost impossible to bring to the country, or buy it somewhere, the necessary literature or information – we can be persecuted.”* A USB flash drive loaded with theological materials and small laptop computer is the delivery system of choice in this context. A few years ago, READ resourced 40 ministry trainees with such tools in this same Central Asian country. Now, “Oleg” has asked for help in meeting the needs of the 46 students currently under his leadership care.

Anticipating this need, READ budgeted, and God has provided, \$10,000 for a digital library distribution initiative for this country, once training resumes later this fall. This sum will allow 22 end-users to receive the tools they crave.

“...it is almost impossible to bring to the country, or buy it somewhere, the necessary literature or information – we can be persecuted.”

But, after the May meeting with “Oleg,” READ now realizes that more funding is needed to meet this challenge. By faith, READ is trusting God to provide an additional \$5,000 in 2018 so all 30 bachelor’s level students can be helped this year. Then, God willing, in 2019 READ will assist the master’s level students with their digital libraries. Please pray for “Oleg” and his 46 students! Pray that God will provide the tools they need for study and ministry. ☰



Digital Library User in Central Asia



Ministry Training Coordinators in Central Asia



Digital Library Users in Central Asia



Valentina – the Church’s Cook Turned Librarian

The weather was perfect on Saturday, June 2nd, in Kremenchug, Ukraine, as fifty students were joined by teachers, families, and friends to celebrate their graduation from Kremenchug Evangelical Seminary (KES). Among these grads were 10 sisters and one brother who graduated from the department of Church Library Ministry, which is sponsored by READ Ministries.

This brings to 473 as the number of church librarians trained for ministry through a partnership network of READ and eight theological schools in Ukraine and Belarus. During this same time, 138,000 volumes have been placed in the church libraries where these librarian/counselors serve. Praise God!

Valentina was one of the church librarian grads and after graduation she was eager to share her story. Valentina lives in the city of Kremenchug and is a member of the

oldest Baptist church in the city. It has the reputation of being the most conservative and being cautious about accepting change and trying new ways of ministry. But, when Valentina, the church’s chief cook with an infectious personality, asked for the church’s blessing to attend KES - they agreed!

Valentina shared, *“I love to cook, but I wanted to learn more. The church wanted to develop and grow our library, so I went to help our library. My knowledge increased, and I liked everything! I am very grateful for the teachers who put in us a lot of love and hard work. I am grateful for the literature which will fill our libraries. Especially grateful for the commentaries that I dreamt about. Thank you very much!”*

Valentina continues to cook for her church. And soul-food is on her menu these days. 🍴



Church Librarian Graduates



Church Librarian Graduates with Bill Arvan



Come and See What God Is Up To

By Sharon Sheppard

When Bill Arvan invited Dr. Alan Tims and his wife, Elna, to “Come and see what God is doing,” this pair did a quick review of Ukraine’s history. Stalin’s tragic War had robbed Ukraine of its national identity, its language, and an estimated 3 to 8 million people, who died from starvation.

Recent events have resulted in further loss of land and lives, and made refugees of more than 2 million citizens. This hit to their economy and morale has left them with a vulnerable population.

After meeting Ukrainian believers, Elna said, “We were so impressed with their passion. They were not focusing on themselves, but on their deep desire to evangelize, not only in the former Soviet Union, but also in far-flung places like Ecuador and New Guinea.”

Though Ukrainians resented being forced to speak Russian early in the 20th Century, Alan observed that their ability to do so now enables them to move more freely throughout the countries of the former Soviet Union.

One of the highlights of their trip was the opportunity to attend graduation ceremonies at Kremenchug Bible College and Seminary, where 51 graduates received diplomas in ministry: including preaching, worship, family counseling, and library science.

Bill Arvan delivered a stirring graduation address, and when the librarian graduates were presented with gift bags of books from READ Ministries, Alan said, “We saw how they valued these resources, and it was as though they had been given gold bullion.”

With their new books and counseling training, these librarians are eager to practice “Spiritual Pharmacy.”

Alan says “What READ is doing makes so much *sense!* People talk about ROI: Return on Investment. This is it! READ is equipping passionate Ukrainians who already speak Russian and have easy access to borders of countries the rest of us can’t enter.”

His advice to others is to *Give and Pray!* ☰




Alan and Elna Traveling by Bus in Ukraine



Alan and Elna Loved Ukraine!

“Ring the bells of heaven, there is joy today....” Shirley Johnson has come home!



READ Ministries would not exist without the creative vision of a few men responding to God's call to begin a ministry to assist churches in the former Soviet Union with training and library resources. Supporting this response has always been the prayers, support and encouragement of our families. Chief among these has been Shirley Johnson, wife of George Johnson, one of our founders. Shirley passed away on July 10, 2018 and leaves a legacy that will be cherished. On her two trips with us to Ukraine and Russia, she immediately made fast friends and offered humble encouragement. She will be deeply missed both here at home and in Ukraine. READ prospers because of her support and she will be sorely missed by all. We are blessed because she was among us. 

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Colin Larson who is celebrating his high school graduation in heaven

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Stan and Sharon Dardis

In Honor of the Marriage of Steve and Judy Tunnell

Paul and Gretchen Sanders

“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” John 9:4 (NIV)

The Changing Face of



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Calvary Community Church
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St. Cloud, MN

Doors open at 6:15 p.m.

*Dinner will be served at 6:30
p.m.*

Please RSVP

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or office@readministries.org

*by September 3, 2018—Bethel or
October 5, 2018—Calvary*



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