



Spring 2009



Dear family and friends,

We greatly appreciate your prayer and financial support, especially during these difficult financial times.



In Memory of Dr. Carl Brown. In our fall newsletter we told you about some very exciting developments with our master's level training for church planting leaders in the former Soviet Union, and we shared with you the tremendous gift we had in Dr. Carl Brown to be the Dean for the program. A few weeks ago we received shocking news that Carl, at age 42, died in his home of an apparent heart attack. I (Joe) preached the sermon at the memorial service in Eaton, Colorado, a few days ago. Please pray for his wife, Angi, and their four daughters. And pray for our training team as we make the necessary changes to carry on this ministry. I will be traveling to Kazakhstan in May to discuss the next steps with our national leaders there.

Linda and Joe will be travelling together for much of May. We will both be in meetings in **Moscow** and in **Baku**, Azerbaijan, and Linda will spend a week in Krasnodar with her women's leaders for southern Russia, while Joe teaches in North Ossetia in our **Vladikavkaz-Beslan Training Center**. See the next page for information on this region.

Research for Best Practices

In January, Joe traveled with a team to several cities in Russia and Azerbaijan doing research. Many of you prayed for our safety and fruitful research as we travelled, sometimes into dangerous areas for westerners. It was obvious that the LORD was guiding our steps. The results of our research will certainly impact the way we train church planters in Russia and Azerbaijan. In October we plan to hold two **Best Practices Institutes in Russia, one in Vladikavkaz and one in Krasnodar**. Pray that we would invite the people the Lord has prepared for this and that the result will be significant steps forward in church multiplication in the region.

Prayer Praise and Requests

Praise . . .

- Safe travel and productive research in January;
- Expansion of the women's ministries in southern Russia;
- Both of us remain healthy enough to travel overseas.

Pray . . .

- For safe travel in May
- For Linda's ministry of mentoring key women's leaders in Krasnodar, and developing a good ministry in Azerbaijan;
- The family of Carl Brown and for those who will need to take on the responsibilities for the masters training in Russia, Central Asia, and the Southern Caucasus/
- And for Joe's teaching in Vladikavkaz in May.

The Northern Caucasus Republics of Southern Russia A Needy Mission Field that May be Ripe for Harvest

Over the past several years a major focus of our ministry has been in an area known as the **Caucasus region**. It is the region **between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea** dominated by the Caucasus Mountain range. The Northern Caucasus region is in Russia, and the **Southern Caucasus** contains three former Soviet republics that are now independent countries: Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. The **Northern Caucasus** contains some of the most volatile republics in southern Russia. This region is occupied by more than 40 ethnic groups, most of whom are Muslim, either religiously or culturally, and they have experienced much violence in recent years. Our original **base of operations was in Krasnodar**, a major Russian city just to the north west of this region. Here is some information about each republic.



- **Abkhazia**—One of two republics that rebelled against Georgia, and have Russian protection. One of our teachers and church planters in Georgia, Zura Astiani, lost his home in Abkhazia when he was forced to flee.
- **Kabardino-Balkaria**—the home to the Kabards and Balkars; their capital is Nalchik, where we have led training for leaders in the region. A few years ago while Brian Hallila was teaching in Nalchik, terrorists took over the major police station.
- **North Ossetia**—The location of Beslan where terrorists blew up a school a few years ago, killing more than 300 children and teachers. I met with the Baptist bishop who lost four children, a niece and a nephew in the attack. Here are **two photos of the gym that was blown up and bottles of water** that the parents have left along with flowers as memorials to their children who were denied water by the terrorists as they suffered for days before the school was blown up. The Ossetians are not Muslim, but are a mix of an ancient pagan religion and Orthodoxy, and many seem open to the Gospel.
- **South Ossetia**—The location of the war between Georgia and Russia. South Ossetia has claimed independence from Georgia, and they have Russia protecting them. We have been asked to help some very aggressive church planters in South Ossetia..
- **Ingushetia**—The home of the terrorists who blew up the school in Beslan. Bridgepoint Bible Church is trying to reach Ingushetians through a project aimed at Ingushetians in northern Georgia.
- **Chechnya**—The scene of two devastating wars between the rebel Chechnyans and the Russians. A leader of one of our church planting teams, Volodya Radjabov, and his family suffered through this war and lost their home and suffered many traumatic scars. Today Volodya serves as pastor of the Open Door Bible Church in Krasnodar and leads a team of church planters focused on the ethnic peoples from Dagestan and Chechnya.
- **Dagestan**—In the 90s TEAM missionary, Herb Gregg, was kidnapped in the capital, Makhachkala, and held hostage for many months. Most missionaries were forced to leave, and some settled in Krasnodar to train Dagestanis to reach their own people. (This was the BLTC.) We support a church plant in Derbent, Dagestan.



Pray that the Lord will open the hearts of thousands of people in the Caucasus region from everyone of the forty people groups.

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