

# To Russia with Love

NOEL MORRIS VISITS RUSSIA AGAIN

August 2017

*“Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” – Acts 15:36*

When Faith in Action Bible School closed in 2010, I never dreamed I would have a chance to go to Russia again. But God gives the desires of the heart, and this August being able to visit my friends in Far East Russia was a really fun trip I never expected. Well, except for the first 48 hours when I put something in my mouth that made me so sick I couldn't preach in a Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk church we had raised funds to finish 25 years ago!



I joined the team from Japan in Sapporo: **Pastor Ishida** (with hat), **Masamichi Ueno**, and **Gerald Goodall** (NZ Missionary in Japan) who was the Japanese to English interpreter.

In Russia, **Elena Eremeeva** was the Russian interpreter as well as the main organiser for the team's schedule. Elena and her husband Victor pastor a church in Poronaysk.

While I recuperating I was able to get better acquainted with my host Pastor Peter, and could meet many friends in **Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk**. Meanwhile the team went to Okha, and we met up again in **Khabarovsk**.



## VISIT TO BIROBIDZHAN

Birobidzhan is a city in the Jewish Autonomous Region that Stalin set aside as a homeland for Jewish people back in 1932-3. Jews came from all over Russia and even other countries to be able to live together and express their culture – both spoken and written Yiddish – without fear of ridicule from others. Today there are only about 2000 with acknowledged Jewish roots, but there is probably a larger number as many changed their names because of later persecution. A large number have already emigrated to Germany and Israel. Birobidzhan is an amazing city where places and streets are marked in both Russian and Hebrew.

## MESSIANIC JEWS IN RUSSIA

We met with **Zhenya and Ira** who lead a Messianic Jewish group, and that night 25 of them gathered for a meeting where Pastor Ishida spoke. He has a burden for Jews and this was evident in his talk. This Messianic Jewish church is one of about 40 registered in Russia, with many more not yet registered.

## KHABAROVSK

Back in Khabarovsk the next day we went to Jesus Christ Church where **Pastor Yuri** has been my friend for 24 years. Pastor Ishida shared about his mission to Russia and Elena invited the people to join a tour to Israel for the Feast of Tabernacles. I was the main preacher for the evening, my message was "Walking in Faith"

## VLADIVOSTOK

On the Friday the other team members flew off back to Sakhalin for the week-end. I flew to Vladivostok where I was met at the airport by two very good friends; Alexei who is my interpreter and driver, and Sergei whose family I have bonded with over the years. I spent the next 7 days in their apartment which we jokingly called the "Smirnov Hotel" because not only me but a stream of others came and went.

**Sergei and Lydia** accept me as one of the family of which there are many. One daughter Katya is a missionary in China, and I discovered another daughter Vera has been serving God in the Philippines. At home now, she returns to the Philippines next month.

## FAITH IN ACTION BIBLE SCHOOL GATHERING

In the evening Sergei and Larissa had arranged for some of the former Faith in Action students to come together to meet me. Nine graduated, spouses, several who had been staff or board members gathered around tables with refreshments to tell stories of what the Lord has been doing since they were in Bible School. Some were from the first group of students in 1994, while others were from later classes. Some had been in full-time ministry, then in regular work when it came time to have their families. Most had been involved as support staff in their churches. It seemed that meeting me again after so many years was as meaningful to them as it was for me.

Over the next few days there was a steady stream of visitors - mostly pastors I have known for many years. One of them, a friend since 24 years ago, told me how much my support helped him into ministry back then. He had been working on a ship, trying to decide whether to stop that work and become a pastor. Our programme of supporting pastors for US\$100 a month was the deciding factor. I think we did this for several years.

I suppose I met a dozen pastors in Russia, and ten of them I have known for over 20 years. They put themselves out to offer hospitality or visit me. I had something else to offer them too: I took files of hundreds of photographs from my Russia visits from 1992 to 1995. Not many Russians had cameras in those days, so this collection of photos represents some of the history of the churches back in that era, and all the pastors were excited to be able to access them. These included many church meetings and outreaches, and several March for Jesus events which many of them had participated in.

Thank you Lord for the great privilege of seeing my friends in Russia again!

**Noel Morris**

PO Box 12357 Hamilton New Zealand 3248 noel@faithnet.co.nz



Zhenya & Ira lead a Messianic Jewish church in Birobidzhan



My hosts in Vladivostok Sergei & Lydia with son David



Nine graduates of FIA Bible School with several former staff met for fellowship



*There is limited space in this newsletter, but I gave a more comprehensive presentation at church and you can watch it on line at: <https://youtu.be/q3o-u6z8CMg>*