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ABSTRACT

EXPANDING THE ECCLESIASTES WORSHIP CENTER  
IN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, BY USING A  
DOCUMENTARY OF THE RUSSIAN REFORM  
MOVEMENTS

by

Udo Sokolovsky

Adviser: Steve Case

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: EXPANDING THE ECCLESIASTES WORSHIP CENTER IN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, BY USING A DOCUMENTARY OF THE RUSSIAN REFORM MOVEMENTS

Name of researcher: Udo Sokolovsky

Name and degree of adviser: Steve Case, PhD

Date completed: August 2017

### Problem

During the last decades of the twentieth century, the Greater Sacramento area of California became one of the largest Russian-speaking communities in the United States. According to Russian American Media, there are approximately 300,000 Russian-speaking residents. Many of them came to America as victims of religious persecution. However, today only about 30,000—just 10% of the total number of immigrants—are active members in different Christian churches. One reason for this is that the Russian Orthodox Church is trying to intensify its impact on Russian immigrants by linking all that is Russian with Orthodoxy. As a result, many Russian immigrants do not identify with Protestants in America, and a great number of them are not connected with any church.

## Method

Ecclesiastes Worship Center was established in 2011 to minister to this immigrant population. Over time, to the initial target group of “unchurched” was added “disenchanted”—those who had previously attended church, but eventually left. In order to offer Russian-speaking immigrants free choice of belief, and to dispel the myth that Russian Orthodoxy was the only religious group in Russia, members of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center created a documentary about the religious reform movements within the Russian Empire. This documentary was produced in cooperation with the Ugol Studio in Sacramento and members of other churches.

## Results

The creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements became a missionary endeavor for everyone involved in it. This joint effort consolidated members of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center. Multiconfessionality of the creative team introduced new friends and made everyone more open to believers from other churches. As a result of this work, a documentary serial was created, which one and a half million people have already viewed. Furthermore, production of additional documentaries in the serial set has continued.

## Conclusions

The post-postmodern generation differs from the previous ones by subjective rather than objective acceptance of truth. Therefore, there is a need to bring information in a way that is most effectively perceived: through the Internet and social networks. This information must be submitted in an appropriate form, which a person will be able to analyze independently. In this case, the video format would be the most acceptable. This

was demonstrated in the example of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center, which was expanded by creating and using this documentary about the Russian reform movements.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

EXPANDING THE ECCLESIASTES WORSHIP CENTER  
IN SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, BY USING A  
DOCUMENTARY OF THE RUSSIAN REFORM  
MOVEMENTS

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Udo Sokolovsky

August 2017

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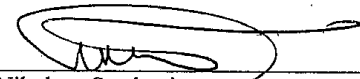
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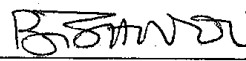
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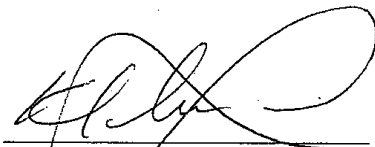
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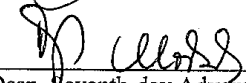
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EWC	Ecclesiastes Worship Center
LOTOS	Literaturnoe Obshchestvo Tvorcheski Odaryonnih Sakramentchan Литературное Общество Творчески Одаренных Сакраментчан Literary Society of Creative and Gifted Citizens of Sacramento (Association of Russian Poets and Writers)

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gratitude to our parents Yan and Elita Sokolovsky, and Paul and Valentina Panchenko, who constantly prayed for me and supported with their advice and encouragement.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A healthy church is a growing church. A significant amount of literature is devoted to the methods and challenges of church growth. However, each case has its own peculiarities. In this project, I present another model for establishing a church and showing ways of its development.

#### **Description of the Ministry Context**

This project pursues two tasks. The first is local: establishing a new Russian-speaking Sabbath-keeping church based on the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The second is global: creating a documentary film about the Russian reform movements and emergence of Protestant churches in the territory of the former Soviet Union.

The local task, the establishing of a church in Sacramento, has a goal of proclaiming the imminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ, to warn local residents about the time of God's judgement, and to call them to repentance. The ministry of the church is to influence the local community.

The second task, creating a documentary about the Russian reform movements, is global, because this task goes beyond impacting the local community. The documentary is primarily addressed to newcomers in our new church. However, it is also addressed to every person who is interested in the history of Christian reform movements in Russia and the surrounding territories.

The process of making the documentary by the local church in collaboration with other churches is designed to unite members of our church and to introduce new friends to them. However, because the documentary is available online, it covers a much larger audience. It is available for Russian-speaking communities in different countries of the world. In addition, the translation of the documentary into other languages (English and Polish) further expands its audience. Since 2015 this documentary has been used as a tutorial for students of the Faculty of Linguistics of Zaoksky Christian Institute of Arts and Sciences. The use of the documentary in the educational process makes it popular as a learning tool. Through this documentary our congregation helps other churches and influences people in other countries. In this respect, the ministry of our church becomes global.

### **Statement of the Problem**

During the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Greater Sacramento, CA, became one of the largest Russian-speaking communities in the United States. According to Russian American Media, there are approximately 300,000 Russian-speaking residents (Russian Perspective: Slavic California Official Web Portal, 2011). Although many of the Russian-speaking people came to America as victims of religious persecution, today only about 30,000, just 10% of the total number of immigrants, are active church members in Christian churches (this figure I determined as a result of the research of Slavic churches in Sacramento). An alarming number of Russians are not connected with any church, thus presenting a great need and opportunity for evangelism. Because Russian immigrants do not identify with Protestants in America, most cease to be involved in church once they get to the United States.

## **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project is to develop a historical documentary to help Russian immigrants see and understand the roots of the Christian reform movements in Russia. The documentary is intended to reach Russian-speaking immigrants, and to help them make a deliberate and free choice in their search for God. In addition, this documentary is intended to help young Protestants discover the roots of their faith.

## **Delimitations of the Project**

It is necessary to place some delimitations on this Doctor of Ministry project. These are identified in the ensuing paragraphs.

This project has a limited timeframe. The documentary, which I am directing, will include 10 separate films or series. It represents the history of Russian Church from the Christianization of Kievan Rus in the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. My project includes only part of an ongoing filming of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. It is delimited to the documentary *Moscow—The Third Rome*. The next series will include the specific names of our ancestors, parents, and contemporaries. How the history of Russian reform movements, first presented in video format, affects the audience may be a topic for further research, but is not in the format of this work.

Members of other churches, who starred in our film, started different video projects in their churches after participating in the filming of our documentary. What was the impact of our film at their churches? Did it become a stimulus for growth in their congregations? This is another theme raised by our project, but is not the object of this research.

According to the testimonies of parents, youth and children who participated in the filming of our documentary began to take a keen interest in biblical history. The relationship of young people participating in the filming process and their spiritual growth could be an interesting topic for further research. However, again this topic is also beyond the scope of my project.

### **Description of the Project Process**

The project process contains the following items: establishing a theological foundation, reviewing relevant literature, developing and implementing the intervention, results, summaries, conclusions, and recommendations.

#### Theological Reflection

For theological reflection, I will center on four basic themes. First, the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20) as the spiritual foundation for spreading the knowledge about salvation and practical discipleship is the main condition for church growth. Second, unity is the main condition for receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit is the source of personal growth in faith and a Christ-like character, which spiritually transforms a person and a church (John 16:13-15). Third, there is a bridge that God makes between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and modern history. This bridge in time connects the establishment of the Old Testament church at Sinai with the New Testament church in the Jerusalem's upper room and connects them with the Reformation in Europe and Russia (Exod 19:1-6; Acts 2:1-4). Fourth, God's methods for information transfer include visualization as one of the most important elements. This one can observe in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament (Dan 7:1-27; Ezek 37:1-10; Rev 21:1-4).

Additionally, I will consider, in the light of the Bible, issues related to the reform movements in Russia of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russian reform movements of Strigolniki and Judaizers, the concept “Moscow—The Third Rome,” and preparation of members of the church to maintain a visual transmission of God’s message.

### Review of Literature

Since the topic of my research covers a broad time period, the literature I present in this review was also written at different times. Most sources were written in the last 10-15 years. However, there are older sources, some written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The literature review for this project will cover quite a wide range of topics. It will include historical materials relating to Russian colonization of America in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the processes of the reform movements in Russia, and the major waves and causes of Russian immigration to the United States. Also, included will be a review of sources concerning problems of recent Russian immigrants, the aspirations of the modern Russian Orthodox Church to unite all Russian immigrants under the authority of Orthodoxy, and issues related to the role of the Protestant community in the adaptation and integration of Russian immigrants into American society. The literature review will also include the history of Bible translations into the Russian language. I also interviewed historians and religious scholars in the development of this documentary film.

### Development of the Intervention

Establishing a Russian, non-denominational Sabbath-keeping church in Sacramento paved the way and significantly influenced the development of the

documentary. Because of this, a description of establishing this church is foundational to the intervention with the documentary.

This project will have two phases. First is the establishing of a Russian nondenominational Sabbath-keeping church in Sacramento. Second is the expansion of the established Russian church through the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements.

Chapter 4 will be divided in four major sections. The first two of them will concern establishing the new Russian church. The first section will analyze the Russian-speaking population in Sacramento, CA, and Russian churches in the Sacramento area. The second will present strategies and methodology for establishing a new Russian nondenominational Sabbath-keeping church in this area. This part of the chapter will include reasons for establishing such a church, the core team selection, choice of location, casting the vision and creating the mission statement, and choice of the name for the church, as well as the style of worship and social activities for the future church.

The third section will describe the intervention of expanding the established Russian church by creating a documentary. This section will also include the difficulties and challenges in growth that directed the church to create a documentary of the Russian reform movements. And in the fourth section I will give a description of practical steps for implementing these strategies and methodology.

#### Structure of the Intervention

Together with my wife Lidia, our daughter Solvita, and her husband Boris Kovach we started this project as an answer to God's call. We conducted demographic research, determined the number of Russian residents in the different cities in Greater

Sacramento, and the number of Russian/Slavic churches in these cities. As we analyzed the needs of local people and opportunities for ministry, we determined the location of our future church and found a building for worship. We selected the leadership team, named the church and cast the vision and mission statement. We started worship services and in partnership with other local churches became involved in the social services of our city.

Despite the fact that our Church has experienced significant numerical growth in the first years after opening, disagreements about the nondenominational status of our church caused part of the regular visitors to leave our church. This result forced us to reevaluate priorities and to expand our target audience. Proceeding from the current needs of our church, our leadership team developed a new concept of ministry for Ecclesiastes Worship Center. One of the unifying factors for church activities was a video ministry, which resulted in the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements.

Because of changes, about which I will write in Chapter 5, new people came and the church began to grow again. In Chapter 5, I include some stories of these newcomers. Working on the history of the church, which is actually the theme of our documentary, has united these people. They perceive the opportunity to present their work online as a missionary project. And since the documentary involved participation of people from different cities and countries, our team has become international. In addition, since this program gathered members of churches of different denominations, this project can be called interdenominational. Our church has established friendly relations with many churches whose members participated in our project. To date, about 1.5 million people

have seen several sequels of our documentary in different film festivals, TV channels, and online.

### Results, Summaries, Conclusions, Recommendations

I want to note that a small group of dedicated people organized our new church. The main conditions for that organization were a response to God's call, dedication to the chosen purpose, vision and goals, and trust in each other as we worked together.

When the church goes through difficulties caused by differences of opinion, the best means to restore the vitality of a church is the joint work of its members. The turning point in the life of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center was the decision to participate in the creation of the documentary about the Russian reform movements, which united members of our church with each other and with many new friends.

The documentary, created by the church, is a mission work. Nowadays, traditional evangelistic campaigns have lost much of their effectiveness. The post-postmodern generation trusts more willingly in the Internet than the pastors of the church. For today's younger generation, there is no immutable truth for all to follow. Information must be submitted in a form that a person can analyze independently. The motto of our team is: "People should know the facts; they will make the conclusions themselves."

Participation in creating the film is also one way to raise the immigrant's self-esteem. Every human being must develop his or her creative skills. For young immigrants, this is complicated by the fact that they must adapt to new life conditions. Trying to express themselves, they sometimes make wrong decisions and commit illegal acts that often lead to crime. Participation in creating a Christian documentary helps a



young person to feel valued, raises their self-esteem, and helps them adapt to the new environment.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this part of this chapter I present definitions of some key terms used in the text of my project.

Ecclesiastes Worship Center (EWC) is the name of a nondenominational Russian-speaking Sabbath-keeping church that our core team established in Sacramento, California, in 2011. The core beliefs of this church are based on doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our documentary is a 10-serial documentary-feature film about the Russian reform movements, which members of our church created in cooperation with the Ugol Studio, an International Christian ministry with video recording equipment, located in Sacramento, California.

*Russian reform movements* is a term denoting the reformation processes that occurring in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which eventually contributed to the formation of Protestant congregations in the Russian Empire.

The Strigolniki was a religious movement of the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, occurred in Pskov, and then spread to Novgorod the Great and Tver. It renounced ecclesiastical hierarchy, monasticism, and sacraments, and exposed the venality and vices of priesthood, demanding the right to a sermon for laymen.

The Judaizers were followers of the religious movement, which arose in Novgorod the Great and captured the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The movement acquired this name because they kept the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest and worship and adhered to keeping all 10 commandments.

### **Summary**

This introduction represents the essence of my project. This project is dedicated to a new Russian church and the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. This is a summary of the entire process of the project—preparation, implementation, and the results. I hope that this project will help people to become involved in church planting and then expand their church plant by being responsive to what God had done in the past and what he desires to do now.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This chapter presents reasons for the establishment of a new Russian-speaking church in Sacramento and expanding it by creating a documentary of the Russian reform movements. This chapter is divided into four major parts.

1. The Great Commission of Jesus Christ
2. Unity as the main condition for receiving the Holy Spirit
3. God's bridge between the Old Testament, the New Testament and modern history
4. God's methods of information

#### **The Great Commission of Jesus Christ**

The apostle Matthew, an eyewitness of the farewell meeting of Jesus and His disciples, left a testimony for all subsequent generations of Christians:

Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'  
(Matt 28:18-20 NIV)

In this passage two things attract our attention. First, according to Matthew these were the last words of Jesus Christ. They were something that He would like His disciples to remember, something vitally important. Second, Jesus started His short speech in an unusual manner—emphasizing His new role: “All authority in heaven and

on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). In other words, He emphasized that from the standpoint of the Master of the Universe, there is nothing more important than the ministry of making disciples or new citizens for His Kingdom. Why was this so important for Jesus?

“Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matt 16:18 NLT). This statement of Jesus Christ contains several important lessons. First, Jesus Christ is the Rock (Greek, Petra). He is the foundation on which His church is built. Second, according to the passage mentioned above, He is the builder of His church. Third, His church is an impregnable spiritual fortress for those persecuted by the powers of the evil one. And fourth, everyone who declares by one’s own life that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, like Peter did (Matt 16:16), can get the title of builder like Peter, Petros, that is a derivative of Petra, the Rock of Ages, the name of Christ. To be a builder of the church, what Paul calls “the administration of the mystery” (Eph 3:9 NIV), was the most important and privileged role of every disciple in the first apostolic congregation. That ministry remains the primary task for the modern church of today, making church members co-workers with the Savior.

The process of making disciples is known as discipleship, a great method for sending the deepest ideas forward with strength and longevity. A core of devotees is essential to the discipleship model. The relationships are crucial to one’s success and must be based on mutual trust and support. The leader allows these followers access and shares the reasoning behind the message, not just the message itself. Because these followers will carry the message forward, the support and encouragement from the leader

is integral in the formation of the core. The leader must be ready to defend these followers because of their dedication to the cause. Jesus promised this support to His disciples: “I am with you always” (Matt 28:20 NLT).

Discipleship contains much more than passing information or sharing the knowledge about Christ. Traditionally, discipleship has meant making disciples. To do this one has to be active in sharing one’s faith and then needs to find someone unchurched or some Christian who is younger in the faith to demonstrate how to be more mature spiritually.

The current view of discipleship contains total openness between the participants in the process.

Discipleship is not a code word for evangelism, nor is it a hierarchical system for spiritual growth, a way for professional Christians to pass on their best practices to novice Christians. Making disciples requires not only ‘sharing our faith,’ but also sharing our lives—failures and success, disobedience and obedience. (Dodson, 2012, p. 15)

This was the model Jesus Christ presented through His ministry. Twelve disciples were not only the witnesses of His miracles on the sea, where He revealed the mighty Creator calming down storms and winds. They were with Him in the towns and villages where He healed the sick and resurrected the dead. They were also with Him during times of His rejection and suffering. He shared His daily life with them and His communication was transparent. He did not draw the picture only in pink shades, hiding gray and dark colors of His fatigue and frustration from them. Discipleship based on such a genuine relationship can initiate church growth.

According to dictionary.com, a disciple is a “person who is a pupil or adherent of the doctrines of another” (n.d.). This definition is true as long as it concerns science,

business, sports, or community. However, in the Christian context, discipleship has a slightly different model of development: it changes both the pupil, and the teacher. How? The person who is in the role of a teacher in fact is a pupil or a disciple of Jesus Christ. And the teacher's mentorship in the process of discipleship is effective only when the teacher is open to changes that Jesus, the Master, accomplishes within him. So, in Christian discipleship, the Great Teacher, Jesus Christ, is present all the time. Therefore, the purpose of discipleship is to make the person a better follower. Christian discipleship adds to this formula a transformation of every human involved in the process. Interestingly, the Greek μαθητεύω (matheteuo), translated in the King James Version as "teach all nations," has two meanings: "to be a disciple of one" or "to make a disciple," which is reflected in the New International Version and other modern Bible translations where the word is interpreted as "making disciples." So, the Gospel describes discipleship as the process in which everyone gets direction: "Go, transform and be transformed!"

The ideal model of discipleship brings us into the atmosphere of the Apostolic congregation where everything was shared (Acts 2:44. 4:32), relationships were genuine, and passion for the unsaved was high. How could such a radical change occur in the disciples, who recently fought among themselves for supremacy.

## **Unity is the Main Condition for Receiving of the Holy Spirit**

Between the ascension of Christ and the powerful establishment of the Christian church was a day of Pentecost, the day of transformation. “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4. NKJV).

This passage starts with a reminder of the spiritual condition of the relationship between the disciples gathered in that upper room. The Greek ὁμοθυμαδόν (homothumadon) means “with one passion or one mind” and reveals unity among the disciples. Their transformation would never have happened if spiritual oneness had not united them. This unity was a fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11 NIV). After the inspiring sermon of the Apostle Peter, three thousand new believers gave their hearts to the Lord, the second part of that prayer found its fulfillment:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. (John 17:20-23 NIV)

The example of the unity of the Apostles became contagious for the first Christian converts. However, all these events happened by the influence of the Holy Spirit. In the

beginning the Holy Ghost was the initiator of that process of earnest prayers among the disciples and afterwards He was the fulfillment of that spiritual revival. So, the first condition for receiving of the Holy Spirit is unity: oneness in hearts, minds, and sacred goals.

### **God's Bridge Between the Old Testament, the New Testament and Modern History**

The book of the *Acts of the Apostles* contains the following story:

Being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. (Acts 1:4-5. NKJV)

Why did Jesus order His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost? We can assume that they were not ready, and that supposition could be true. However, there was another reason for the delay of pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Birthday of the Church**

In the Bible, the Day of the Pentecost has another name as well: the Festival of Weeks or in Hebrew *shabuwa*, known as Shavuot today. "Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God" (Deut 16:9-10 NIV). So, the start of that countdown was the next day after Passover.

The book of Exodus presents the story of the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and God's order to celebrate Passover. The Lord sent the shepherd Moses, who 40 years before was the one of the highest noblemen at Pharaoh's court, the educated and brave adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 3:10). In the name of the Lord, Moses came to his nation, the Israelites, and after some miracles performed through



God's power, convinced them to leave Egypt. Pharaoh did not let them go until the very life of every Egyptian was in danger. However, the Israelites were prepared for that situation in advance.

“The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ‘this month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year’” (Exod 12:1-2 NIV). According to God's command, in the 14<sup>th</sup> day of that first month all the members of the community of Israel celebrated the first Passover. The same night they left Egypt. If the Passover was in the middle of the first month (Nisan 14), then the Festival of Weeks (7x7=49) was in the beginning of the third month (Sivan).

On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God. (Exod 19:1-3 NIV)

According to the Bible's story, God, through Moses on Mount Sinai, gave to His people, Ten Commandments on stone tablets written by His own hand, and the Torah. Since the Israelites had received religious and civil laws and regulations, they were transformed from a crowd of escaped slaves into God's chosen nation, the church of the Old Testament. In other words, Shavuot or the Festival of Weeks was the Birthday of God's Church.

And now it becomes clear why Jesus chose the Day of Pentecost (which was in reality the Festival of Weeks) for the outpouring the Holy Spirit on His disciples. It was the Birthday of God's Church of the New Testament. All explicit signs of God's acts in the New Testament repeated the signs of the Old Testament: whirlwind, loud sound, and fire. Obviously, God made a bridge between the Old and New Testaments, showing to

everyone that His goal for the Christian church is an extension of His goal for the Church of the Old Testament (Davidson, 2016).

### The Bridge

For the apostles, it was very important to be convinced that Christ and His teaching are tightly bounded with the history of Israel, the history of God's chosen nation. Jesus's statement that "the Scriptures point to Him" (John 5:39 NLT) became a driving force for their research of a Tanakh. It was so important for the early church that the apostles were liberated from other activities (Acts 6:2-4). In modern terms they established a research institute of the Bible texts. One of them, Mathew, was the one who included discoveries of that research in his later writings, in the Gospel, binding the life and activities of Jesus Christ with Torah and Tanakh (Gordon, 2015). The Gospel according to Matthew reveals how important it was for God to show people that Christianity is a continuation of an ancient history of His chosen nation and religion established by Him.

The Apostolic Church spread this message about the ongoing history of salvation around the world. Unfortunately, from the time of the official recognition of Christianity as the state ideology, the ruling Church has distorted the truth of God's interaction and relationship with man. Therefore, the Reformation that followed the dark Middle Ages became the bridge that connected mankind with God and the Church with its origins.

### Reformation Processes in Russia in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Today an invisible bridge connects modern Protestant churches, including the Seventh-day Adventist church, with the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While the

history of the Reformation in Western Europe is extensively researched, knowledge about the reform movements in Russia remains a privilege of a narrow circle of professionals.

It is believed that the first Protestant churches in Russia appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they were established by Western missionaries. In fact, the Russian Reformation processes began more than one hundred years before the European Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014). However, the causes of the prerequisites for the reform movements in Russia were similar with ones in Europe.

#### Russian Reform Movements of Strigolniki and Judaizers

During the time of the Tatar-Mongol invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church gradually became a commercial enterprise and church offices were sold for money (Stetsyuk & Sokolovsky, 2014). The gap between the clergy and the world had become an abyss. People rebelled against this clergy and were not ready to accept illiterate priests who had paid bribes to obtain office. “Bribery is not an invention of the Soviet period,” notes Professor Sannikov. “It is a much earlier invention. In any case, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century this led to the appearance or resurgence of the early Protestant movement, “Strigolniki” (Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2014).

Residents of the Great Novgorod, the former capital city of Russia, began to read the Gospel and found that such payment was not needed. It was not in the Gospel (Sinichkin & Sokolovsky, 2014)! There were several reasons why the Great Novgorod became “the cradle of Evangelical movement in Russia” (Karetnikova & Sokolovsky, 2014). First, it was a city with a collective republic-like self-government. Second, there was a trading post or Kontor (office) of the Hansa League, the European trading

community that made Novgorod the richest Russian city (Rybina, 2009). Trade contacts with Western Europe and the Byzantine East explain how citizens of Novgorod got the Scriptures. Third, and most important, Novgorod stood out because of its general literacy (Sannikov, 2014). More than half of the surviving birch bark letters and memos were written by women, indicating a high household literacy rate, and this at the time when the majority of Russian princess signed their names using crosses (Karetnikova & Sokolovsky, 2014). By reading the Law of God themselves, people found many inconsistencies between the traditions of the church and requirements of the sacred books of the Bible. Even though Russia was called a Christian country at that time, in fact people just combined paganism with Christianity, but did not replace one with another. Paganism and Christianity were practiced at the same time. In Russian history, this period was called “dual faith” (Golubinsky, 1904). So, the Strigolniki movement was most likely a natural process rather than an accident.

“If shepherds become wolves, sheep must lead each other.” This phrase from the 14<sup>th</sup> century book *Word About False Teachers* (Klibanov, 1973, p. 138), succinctly expresses the essence of the Strigolniki movement, which was headed by two deacons, perhaps former monks, Karp and Nikita. They were supported by the representatives of the lower but educated clergy, monastics and laity. “Strigolniki formed the first congregations. They couldn’t build houses of worship. Instead, they put up crosses and gathered around them. They preached in the city squares and by the crossroads. There was evangelism and teaching, which included moral requirements” (Karetnikova & Sokolovsky, 2014). Study of the Scriptures convinced those in the movement that in the Bible only Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25) connected money and ordination, and for that he

was cursed. “Anyone who begins to study the Holy Word will sooner or later become a Protestant, whether he wears a robe or a civil suit” (Turchinov, 2014).

Some researchers attribute the Strigolniki movement with the influence of the Balkan sect of Bogomils, the West wing of which was known in Europe as Albigenses and Cathars (Nikitskiy, 2011). Like Bogomils, Strigolniki denied the Church institutions and considered the class of priests unnecessary. They denied the veneration of icons, did not believe in the sacrament of confession and the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, and opposed attendance and participation in Liturgy. Like the Bogomils, Strigolniki believed that the manifestation of true Christianity is living a life according to the gospel, which they carefully studied and preached (Nikolskiy, 1990).

“The Strigolniki movement was a very original, authentic Protestant movement. It began with a protest, was accompanied by the protest, and was suppressed as a typical occurring Protestant movement by the state apparatus” (Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2014). In 1375, the Constantinople Patriarch Nile’s messenger arrived with a letter against “heretics Strigolniki.” The Novgorod chronicles of the same year have a message that Nikita, Karp, and others were drowned, by being dropped from a bridge. This entry reads: “In the same year in Novgorod on the Volkhov River, Strigolniki heretics were drowned saying, ‘it is written in the Gospel: whosoever shall seduce one of these little ones, it were better that he have hanged about his neck a millstone and be drowned” (Alekseev, 2012, p. 184). But in spite of such a brutal massacre, in 50 years the Strigolniki communities were not only in Novgorod, but also in a neighbor city Pskov. However, the

Russian Inquisition continued persecutions and the annals of 1425 stated, “so many were drowned that the Volkhov could not carry its own water” (Alekseev, 2012, p. 195).

However, the Strigolniki movement prepared the way for another Russian Protestant movement: Judaizers. Judaizers got their name because they obeyed God’s 10 commandments and observed the seventh-day Sabbath. The movement of the Judaizers was a kind of continuation, or even a culmination of all the previous spiritual grassroots movements that had occurred on Russian land. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this Novgorod-Moscow movement of believers actually enveloped the whole country and all walks of life, ranging from simple people up to princes. It even touched the royal family. Political leaders of that time, who determined the political and economic policies of the country, shared the ideals and beliefs of the Judaizers’ movement (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014). There is no doubt that the first people who were carriers of Protestant ideas were ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church. And this so-called heresy of the Judaizers, which had no relation either to the Jews or Hebrews, was an original movement, an original search by Russian and other Slavic people to find the truth of God which is in the Gospel (Franchuk & Sokolovsky, 2014).

### Keeping Identity

As for the apostles, who were Jews, it was important to know that the teaching of Jesus Christ was nothing less than a continuation of worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the extension of the religion of their ancestors. The apostle Paul, by his own definition of being “the Apostle of the Gentiles” was so close to his people that some of his writings are confusing for the readers. “In the presence of Christ, I speak with utter truthfulness—I do not lie—and my conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm that what I am

saying is true. For my people, my Jewish brothers I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them” (Rom 9:1, 3 NLT). It is the strongest testimony of how important it was for him to be part of his people.

For the Russian people, it is also very important to be part of their nation, even if they are immigrants and were persecuted in their homeland. They can distance themselves from a particular government or political system, but they continue to associate themselves with the historical Russia, and feel part of its people. Therefore, for Russians it is important to know that the Protestant church is not a religion imposed by the West, but a result of the search for God by their compatriots, who lived for several generations before them.

#### The Concept of “Moscow—the Third Rome”

In their writings, philosophers of the Russian Orthodox Church wrote about the special mission of Russia in world history (Soloviev, 1912). According to this theory the Russian Church is the successor of the Western, Roman and the Eastern, Constantinople Christian churches. Since the 16th century there has been a religious-philosophical concept of “Moscow—the Third Rome.” This concept was proposed by Zosima, the Metropolitan of Moscow, and later was substantiated by the monk Philotheus. Philotheus wrote to the Grand Duke of Moscow that the First Rome, the heart of Christianity, had fallen into heresy influenced by the Gentiles. The Second Rome, Constantinople, fell under the blows of the Turks, “the children of Hagar,” which planted Islam. Moscow, the Third Rome, is the only remaining center of true Christianity. “Therefore, the Prince, all Christian kingdoms came together in your one. You are the king of all Christians” (Sinitsina, 1998, p. 364).

This theory, that Moscow is the Third Rome, took roots with the marriage of Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow and the Byzantine princess Zoe Palaeologus, niece of the last Emperor of Byzantium (1472). Their descendants assumed the title of Czar, from the russified Caesar, and began to consider themselves the heirs of the Byzantine throne. The Russian Orthodox Church that publicly announced that she is the heir of Byzantine Christianity received the greatest benefit from this situation. According to the Byzantine model of Caesaropapism, the Church became a conductor of the will of the Moscow Grand Dukes among the Russian people. Becoming a management tool in the hands of the ruler, the Church received official approval to persecute dissidents. She took advantage of this and dealt with the rebels. Judaizers were burned alive. After total victory over the dissidents, church leaders announced that the Russian Church began a Millennial Kingdom (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014).

#### The Concept of “Moscow—the Third Rome” Today

The concept of “Moscow—the Third Rome,” is still alive even today. It is the basis of many phenomena of contemporary Russian politics. In the book of an Orthodox philosopher Arkady Maler, *Spiritual Mission of the Third Rome*, written in 2005, this idea was expressed quite clearly:

Our space is the territory of our freedom, and it is compressed to the greatest extent possible. The Third Rome is curled up into the borders of the Russian Federation, Russia, devoid of its own birthplace, Kievan Rus, the territory of Russian childhood, full of joy and her first nightmares. Ukraine is the cradle of Russia, the place of her birth and baptism, her childhood, her early exploits. Ukraine is Tavria, it is the Black Sea, it is output to the Straits, it is the way of raising the Cross on the Saint Sophia. It is our past and, of course, our future. To return Ukraine is our first geopolitical task, it is our Holy Grail, which we had and which we were deprived of. (Maler, 2005, p.192)

The Russian Church for the last few centuries has planted into the minds of Russian people that Holy Russia is God’s chosen nation. It follows that the Russian



Orthodox Church is the only correct church and that emphasis continues today. Therefore, for many Russians a change of belief is regarded as a betrayal of their identity. An honest and open revelation of the religious history of Russia could awaken loyal Russians to a new perspective of what it means to be a Russian Christian. “In fact, the Russian people are God seeking people” (Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2014).

### **God’s Methods of the Information Transfer**

From ancient times God chose the most memorable methods of information transfer to the people. For non-Israelites it was dreams, like Pharaoh’s dream about fat and gaunt cows (Gen 41:1-7); or the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar about the statue of mixed metals (Dan 2:1-44). For God’s prophets, it was visions and revelations, like a vision of the four beasts for Daniel (Dan 7:1-27), or of the dry bones and “wheel in the wheel” for Ezekiel (Ezek 37:1-10; 1:4-28). In the New Testament, it was a vision about acceptance of Gentiles for the apostle Peter (Acts 10:9-16) and a vision of a New Jerusalem for the apostle John (Rev 21:1-4). All these visions and revelations were very visible and vibrant and attracted the attention of people.

The Jewish system of worship was built as a dramatic spectacle; spiritual things were represented by natural symbols. The altar, the golden lampstand and the table, the priestly garments, the bronze basin—everything had a symbolical meaning. In addition, to seal the message of salvation in human memory, God used all the senses of man. The model of the Temple’s worship in the Old Testament was designed in such a way that all the senses of human body (vision, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) were involved in the worship (Kimball, 2003). The worshiper saw the altar, a sacrifice, blood, fire, and smoke ascending to the sky. He heard the singing of Levites and the voice of the Priest reading

the Torah and pronouncing the words of blessing. He smelled the sweet scent of incense and an acrid smoke of a burned sacrifice. When he confessed sins, he touched the soft wool of the sacrificial animal, and at Passover he tasted a roasted lamb and bitter herbs. The New Testament worship, for example the Lord's Supper, involved the same number of human senses. So, during the Temple worship, the worshiper was not a spectator but a participant in an event.

When Jesus started His mission on the Earth, He used the same tools. In His teaching He drew verbal pictures, visual and understandable. And all His lessons were built on this principle. "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Matt 13:34 NIV). "In His parable teachings He linked divine truth with common things and incidents, as may be found in the experiences of the shepherd, the builder, the tiller of the soil, the traveler, and the homemaker" (White, 1941, p. 7).

One of the key words of His teaching was "look." "Look at the birds" (Matt 6:26); "look at the lilies" (Matt 6:28); "look at the ravens" (Luke 12:24); "look at the fig tree" (Luke 21:29); "look at the fields" (John 4:35); "look at My hands; look at My feet" (Luke 24:39). Jesus knew how deeply the message would be engraved in the memory by a simple illustration. This example shows how important a visual element is in the process of learning and memorizing.

The Book of Revelation was written as an outstanding screenplay. A modern cinematographer can find there an abundance of scenes, long shots and close ups, 3D panoramas, and cross cuts. The Holy One among golden candlesticks; heavenly riders on differently colored horses; the faithful Witness, standing at the door and knocking; three

shouting angels rushing over the Earth; a sinister beauty riding on a scarlet beast; a great white-robed choir singing on the crystal sea; a divine city coming down from heaven. Among these images are woven battle scenes and natural disasters. And it all alternates and moves in live rhythm, creating a feeling of the heartbeat of an agonizing planet. This is why the Book of Revelation appears not as storage of visualized images, but a thrilling action.

Although the Book of Revelation is interpreted differently by different denominations, and numbers of people do not even understand what it refers to, still its images are familiar and memorized by many. And today many new readers of the Book of Revelation are attracted by these mysterious images.

God always conveys His message using the most contemporary methods of communication. To leave His law for the people of Israel, God used the Hebrew writing, invented recently before that. For letting the world know the good news about the Savior, the Gospels were written in Greek, the international language of that time. The spread of the message of salvation by grace through faith used the printing press that Gutenberg introduced in Europe before the Reformation. Today such a progressive tool can rightly be called TV/video information. All of these methods of communication have something in common--they are visual. Therefore, in order to convey the message to the modern person who receives basic information through sight, one must use the same techniques. That is why we have decided to use the visual media and the Internet as this spiritual informational bridge for our fellow citizens. The idea of the project is to tell the video story of the emergence and historical spread of Protestant Churches in Russia and the territories of the former Soviet Union.

## Preparation of Members of the Church to Maintain a Visual Transmission

To carry out this idea, we need not only financial and technical resources, but also people who are ready to participate in this project. That is, those who take the trouble and responsibility to present the heroes of faith of past centuries, as well as their enemies. And if we are talking about this in the case of the ministry, it implies a possibility that only a small part of them will have professional skills. In other words, we will have to deal with non-professional actors.

Often people are not aware of their creative abilities if they were not involved in any creative project before. For such a person, it is necessary not only to get professional training, but also friendly support. This is no different for any minister of God.

The Bible repeatedly mentions that for the transmission of His message, God used ordinary, but dedicated people. Often, He had to convince these people that the mission given by Him was possible. This happened with Moses who repeatedly refused God's assignment (Exod 4:13). This happened with Isaiah, who pleaded that his lips were unclean (Isa 6:5). Joshua, in the beginning of his career as the leader of God's chosen nation, had to be repeatedly encouraged to be strong and courageous (Josh 1:6.7.9). Probably it was similar with Timothy, whose mentor, the Apostle Paul, reminded him that youthfulness need not be an obstacle to pastoral ministry (1 Tim 4:12). There were also occasions when God had to inspire seasoned prophets like Elijah, who ran from the revenge of Jezebel; and Jonah, who refused to prophesy in Nineveh and ran from God (White, 1943).

The mentor should encourage those with whom he works. People are often unaware of their abilities. And so, our task is to help them to dig out their buried talent. When this happens, a person undertakes work with a doubled enthusiasm.

### **The Target Audience for our Film**

Our target audience for whom we created this documentary was youth and young adults of Greater Sacramento—potential members of our church. However, when we decided to present our movie for the public through the Internet, we understood that the audience could be much bigger. As we expected, in 18 months more than 500,000 Russian-speaking viewers around the world saw our film on TV and the Internet. The film was also translated into English and Polish, which further expanded our audience.

### **Conclusion**

There is a link between the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Reformation, and the Church in Russia. Unfortunately, many Russians, even those studying the Bible and generally knowing church history, are unaware of that link. That lack of knowledge or deliberate ignorance directly relates to why Russians in the United States are not as open to Christianity that is not the Russian Orthodox Church.

Understanding the Great Commission of Jesus Christ presents a challenge in reaching the community and Slavic immigrants in particular. Our church is using all methods of outreach to achieve this goal. Discipleship is one of the most effective of them. However, modern culture dictates a new way of information transfer. Therefore, we started talking to people using the language of visual technology. This methodology greatly expanded the extent of our message.

Actually, this method is consistent with God’s plan announced by Jesus: “When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NLT). This passage summarizes the theological basis for this project.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of literature published on the topic of this project. I have searched for sources about the major waves and causes of Russian immigration to the United States; problems of recent Russian immigrants; the role of the Russian Orthodox church in the process of the reform movements in Russia, and issues related to the role of the Church in the adaptation and integration of Russian immigrants into American society.

#### **Russian Colonization of America**

Russians first came to the United States in the 18th century. Russian Tsar Peter I the Great issued a decree in 1725 to find the “unknown land in the east.” That land was discovered by the expedition of Bering–Chirikov in 1741–1743. The commercial discovery of that expedition was the sea otter, one skin of which was estimated to be 50 times more expensive than sable fur, and 100 times more expensive than the fur of a red fox (Zagoskin, 2008). This was the stimulus for the development of these territories by Russian hunters and merchants (Gibson, 1999). In 1799, by decree of Russian Emperor Paul I, the Russian–American Trading Company was established, marking the beginning of Russian colonization in America.

In 1944, historian Theodore Selwyn Farrelly of Columbia University wrote the article “A Lost Colony of Novgorod in Alaska” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* about the first Russians in America. According to Farrelly, these Russians were

from Novgorod. They founded a colony in Alaska in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Ivan IV the Terrible (Farrelly, 1994). This settlement was 170 years earlier than the Bering's expedition.

Russians came to Northern California in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in search of land suitable for growing grain that was needed by the colonists. In 1812, they founded Fort Ross, 70 miles north of San Francisco. However, when the Russian government sold Alaska to the United States in 1867 for 7.2 million dollars in gold, the majority was transported by the Russian-American Company to Russian Siberia. Nonetheless, Russian influence persisted in Alaska in the form of the Orthodox Church, which succeeded in converting as many as 12,000 of the native Inuit and Aleut people. The Russian Orthodox Church continued to send missionaries and money to Alaska until 1917, "mainly as an inspirational success story in the face of great odds and didactic example to Christians in Russia" (Vinkovetsky, 2011, p. 42). Only the Bolshevik Revolution broke those ties with Alaska.

### **Waves of Russian Immigration**

There is some disagreement as to how many waves of Russian immigration to the USA occurred (Magocsi, 1998; Zatsepina, 2011). One writer, Paul Robert Magocsi, professor of history and political science at the University of Toronto, maintains that the first massive wave of Russian immigration to America took place between the years of 1880–1914. According to Magocsi more than 3.2 million people from the Russian Empire came to the United States. Only 65,000 were ethnic Russians; others came from Byelorussia, Ukraine, and other places. Many (1.6 million) were Jews who left "because they feared pogroms—attacks on Jewish property—that occurred sporadically in the Russian Empire from the 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century"



(Magocsi, 1998). While many Jews from the Russian Empire did not identify themselves as Russians, another group of immigrants adopted a Russian identity in the United States. They were people from lands of the modern Ukraine, Belarus, Eastern Slovakia, and Southeastern Poland. A significant number were Rusyns who lived in the Austro-Hungarian territory and were members of the Greek Catholic Church. More than 100,000 of them joined the Orthodox Church, where they and their descendants still identify themselves as Americans of Russian background (Magocsi, 1998). By the end of 1912, according to estimates of the Orthodox mission, there were more than 210,000 Russian Orthodox believers in the United States.

The second wave of Russian immigration took place between 1920 and 1939. This wave was related to the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War that followed. Over two million persons fled Russia between the years 1920–1922. They were aristocrats, peasants, intellectuals, professionals, artists, Orthodox clergy, soldiers and officers of the anti-Bolshevik armies. All of them had one thing in common: a deep hatred for the new Communist regime in their homeland. "Because they were opposed to the communist Reds, these refugees came to be known as the Whites" (Magocsi, 1998, p. 17). A great number of these White Russians came through Manchuria and China as refugees to the United States. One of the factors uniting them was religion inasmuch as the Bolsheviks advocated atheism. Therefore, those who denied communistic ideology and considered themselves true Russians identified themselves as Orthodox believers.

The third wave of Russian immigration came about as a result of World War II. When the Nazis occupied the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of Russians were captured or deported to work in Germany. Soviet authorities considered them as traitors,

so when they returned home, they were sent to Siberian prisoner camps. However, after the war many of them ended up in the camps for displaced persons in Germany and Austria, and finally were able to immigrate to the United States. These immigrants were not connected directly with the Russian Orthodox Church or any other religion.

The fourth wave of Russian immigration started after 1973 when the Soviet government ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In a few years, free and legal emigration from the Soviet Union was possible due to Gorbachev's Perestroika, following the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991. From the mid-1980s through 2008, more than one million legal immigrants were admitted to the United States from countries of the former Soviet Union. The peak of departures from Russia during this fourth wave of immigration occurred in periods of economic crisis in 1991, 1993, and 1998 (Balandina, 2011). An important feature of this migration to North America was the high intellectual level of those Russians who left their country ("brain drain") (Pruss, 2006. Ryazantsev, 2011). According to the United States Census Bureau in 2014, Russian was the main language spoken in 890,120 U.S. resident homes. And, more than five million U.S. residents understood and spoke Russian on a daily basis.

Some researchers have divided this fourth wave of Russian emigration into two parts: Soviet (1970s–1980s) and post-Soviet (1990s–present) (Zatsepina & Ruchkin, 2011). Despite the fact that many people in this last wave of emigration were persecuted for their religious beliefs, the vast majority emigrated for secular reasons. Among them were Jews, mostly secular, whom the Soviet authorities subjected to harassment and restrictions. Many went to Israel, but a significant number came to the United States.

## **Problems of Recent Russian Immigrants**

Immigration from Soviet Russia was mainly voluntary, which differed from previous waves of immigration that were either forced or coerced. During the time of the Russian Empire, the law prohibited Russians from changing citizenship. Stays abroad were limited to five years. If someone violated that law, they were deprived of citizenship and property. If they repented afterwards and then returned home, “they were sent into lifelong exile in the outskirts of the empire” (Ioncev, Lebedeva, Nazarov, & Okoroko, 2001, p. 47). The Soviet government restricted travels abroad. To emigrate became practically impossible. Exceptions included persons forcibly expelled from the country by authorities. An example of these exceptions were the “Philosophers’ ships” in the 1920s, on which Bolshevik leaders expelled objectionable intelligentsia. Among the undesirable intellectuals were well-known religious philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Lossky, Semyon Frank, Lev Krasavin, Ivan Ilyin, and others. One of these exiles, writer Mikhail Osorgin, recalled the words of Leon Trotsky, Lenin's assistant, “We sent these people because there was not a reason to shoot them, but was impossible to tolerate them” (Osorgin, 1955, p. 73). Another example of this was the expulsion of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1974, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature 1970. However, these were exceptions. Those who were disliked or who disagreed with the regime were usually simply sent to concentration camps or shot.

Although during the last post-Soviet wave of Russian immigration, people were not deported, they were still under stress because each of them had to start life anew. Factors having the greatest psychological and spiritual impact on Russian immigrants in America were nostalgia, a sense of loss and longing for the motherland, change of social

status, language barriers, break of family ties, uselessness in American society, and difficulty with social and professional fulfillment (Balandina, 2011).

### **Common Symptoms for the Immigrants**

In her dissertation “Russian Immigration in North America in the 20th Century,” Olga Balandina showed the relationship between the revolution and civil war in Russia and the fall of spiritual and moral values among Russian immigrants in North America. Destruction of common daily routines and familiar social life, along with the turmoil of the revolution and civil war, negatively impacted the attitude and mindset of the immigrants. A number of them lost their moral and spiritual bearings. Broken connections with their accustomed life, their culture, and the new realities of life in exile left a negative imprint (Balandina, 2011).

Similar symptoms were observed among immigrants of the post-Soviet wave. Nikolai Sluchevsky, President of the Memorial Stolypin Center of State Development and Reforms, compared the situation in post-Soviet Russia with the situation in post-war Germany. Sluchevsky cited Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, who gave an interview in 1949. Jung identified one of the main problems Germans experienced after their defeat in World War II was the feeling of psychological inferiority, demonizing suggestibility, and immature personality. Sluchevsky postulated that the same symptoms were typical for residents of the former Soviet Union after the collapse of the USSR (Voice of America, 2012).

One of the reasons that impacts negatively modern immigrants, is the attitude of those left in Russia. Since the time of Peter the Great, emigration from Russia is most often interpreted by the mass consciousness as betrayal or cheating. And this is despite

the fact that many of those who left Russia have received recognition in their new homeland, becoming the winners of scientific awards, champions in various sports, and successful in arts and business. Instead of pride in the successes of the compatriots, they receive condemnation. Even officials quite often share this condemnation (Pruss, 2006). Therefore, it seems that there are two separate Russian nations—one in Russia and the other overseas.

Olga Zatsepina and Alexander Ruchkin reviewed a network of social, cultural, and educational institutions created by Russian immigrants in the United States. These organizations were formed during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to help compatriots adapt legally, socially, culturally, professionally, and politically to their new environment while also preserving national traditions and customs. In Zatsepina and Ruchkin's opinion, these organizations are evidence that while being outside the country of origin, Russians can remain compatriots (Zatsepina & Ruchkin, 2011). However, Natalya Solzhenitsyn, widow of the Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and director of the “Solzhenitsyn Fund,” warns of an imminent problem. In her opinion, the main problem with Russian immigration is the reluctance of the diaspora to preserve the Russian language and Russian culture (Voice of America, 2012).

### **Unifying Aspirations of the Orthodox Church**

Alexander Ruchkin, director of the “Grint” Center for Education and Culture, was convinced that the Russian Orthodox Church could significantly help with the issue of maintaining the Russian language and culture. He said, “Orthodox organizations and associations within the framework of cultural centers are a stronghold of preservation of a cultural heritage of Russian immigration” (Voice of America, 2012). According to him

the Russian Orthodox Church has traditionally played an important role in the life of Russian America, relieving burdens of social adaptation of immigrants to the new conditions, enabling the recalling of the distant homeland, opening new horizons of spiritual development and social service.

However, the idea, that at first seems to be true, gradually acquires a more and more sinister sound. “The Russian diaspora has brought the power of the spiritual foundation of Russians–Orthodox Christianity” (Krivoruchenko, 2012). “The greatest role of the Russian Orthodox Church is a momentum of teaching, not only concerning immigration but in the lives of compatriots across the entire world” (Krivoruchenko, 2012). There are even more radical statements that partially explain the political processes taking place in the modern world. “We have come to an absolute meaning. The meaning of life is in Russia. The meaning of Russia is in Orthodoxy. The meaning of Orthodoxy is in the Holy Trinity” (Maler 2005, p. 191). Further, the author writes that in order to accomplish the mission of Orthodoxy it “must meet three absolute conditions: inchurching of an intellectual culture; Orthodox-assuming imperial expansion, at least the return of the lost Russian territories, especially Ukraine; and new inchurching of the Russian state, the return of its byzantine symphonic meaning” (Maler 2005, p. 193). It becomes obvious that Orthodoxy is aimed at power and people are subconsciously instilled with idea that if one is a Russian, then one must be Orthodox.

Contemporary Russian sociologists and political analysts believe that the force that unites Russians in Russia and overseas is the Orthodox Church (Krivoruchenko, 2012). The Russian Orthodox Church is trying to intensify its impact on Russian-speaking immigrant organizations by linking all that is Russian with Orthodoxy.

However, the fact that one of the main causes of the first wave of emigration from Russia was the Orthodox Church policy toward Russians, as I will explain further, seems to be ignored in silence.

### **The Great Split as a Pre-cause of Emigration From Russia**

Since the time of Patriarch Nikon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, leadership of the Orthodox Church manifested a strong desire to control both the Russian spiritual and political life. The title of Great Sovereign (“Velikiy Gosudar”), which Nikon achieved for himself, was a title previously reserved just for the country’s Tsar. As stated by Andrei Zubov, professor of history at the MGIMO University, this was a time of the political rise of the Moscow Kingdom and Ukraine’s accession to Russia. Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich made plans to establish a single universal Orthodox Kingdom in place of Byzantium, fallen under the Turks (Zubov & Sokolovsky, 2015). Alexei Mikhailovich was fully supported by the Patriarch Nikon, whose plans coincided with the plans of the Tsar. To achieve their mutual goal, Nikon carried out church reform. However, Nikon’s church reform, initially designed to unify church ceremonies throughout the Orthodox world, instead resulted in the strong resistance of some clergy and a significant number of Russian believers. Dissenters were brutally suppressed by the official Orthodox Church, with the support of the power of the state (Ivanov & Sokolovsky, 2015).

Some dissenters were burned in wood cabins. In the documentary that we are producing Gleb Yakunin, Russian priest and dissident, said in the interview for our movie, “Whole families with children, the elderly, and women were forced into log cabins and burned. It was madness! This showed that in our Russian Orthodoxy was nothing Christian, even a drop of Christian mercy. There was no spiritual life. We were

worse than pagans. Although today we are not much different from that time. Even now if only we could, we would have burned many dissidents” (Yakunin & Sokolovsky, 2015).

Inquisitors tracked down dissenters, cut out their tongues, and crammed them into underground prisons. Even those who, under torture or due to fear, renounced their “heresy,” were incarcerated in monastic prisons with lifelong sentences. Monasteries became prisons, and abbots and monks became jailers (Prugavin, 1905). Persecution was so intense that dissenters began burning themselves. They voluntarily perished in the fire with their entire families. “This speaks about the greatest and deepest spiritual crisis within the Orthodox Church” (Yakunin & Sokolovsky, 2015). More than 20,000 people were killed in this gharry, self-immolation, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2015). Many of the dissenters, fleeing from persecution, went farther to the East, over the Ural Mountains, to Siberia. Later many of them and their descendants were among the first colonists in North America, engaging in fur trade and developing Alaska.

### **The Split Initiated the Spiritual Search for God**

This sad story did have a bright side. The split brought about increased interest in the study of available Scriptures among believers, especially among dissenters or Old Believers. As a result of these studies, new spiritual movements appeared. "Movements of the Protestant character originated in the Orthodox culture. For us, it is very important because it shows how the inside of the Orthodox culture has born a variety of spiritual currents" (Dmitriev & Sokolovsky, 2015).

Nikolai Kostomarov, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian historian, wrote, “the split has stirred the sleeping human brain of Russian man” (Kostomarov, 1994, p. 136). “After the split in



Russia, mass movements appeared, especially among peasants,” said Mikhail Ivanov, professor of Moscow Theological Seminary. “These were Hristovery (Christ Believers), Spiritual Christians in Dukhobor initially, and later in the Molokan version, which in turn became the forerunners of the evangelical movement” (Ivanov & Sokolovsky, 2015).

Alexander Prugavin, Russian historian and author in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote *The Split and Sectarianism in the Russian People’s Life*. In this work, Prugavin (1905) stated: “By the word ‘split’ we mean not only that the Old Believers split, but also all those sects that our Orthodox spiritual writers usually called ‘heresy.’ Among the ‘heresies’ spiritual writers include, firstly, the various mystical sects like Khlysty (Whips), Skoptsy (Eunuchs), and so on. And, secondly, the rationalist sect, like Molokans, Doukhobors, Shtundists, etc.” (Prugavin, 1905, pp. 8, 9).

Protestant thought in Russia evolved through various spiritual stages. In the beginning, it was a simple disagreement with the abolition of the old church ceremonies (Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2014). After this, disagreement with the rights grew into understanding of an unbiblical foundation of these rites (Sinichkin & Sokolovsky, 2014). The search for a true biblical foundation brought researchers to the conviction that relations with God should be direct, not through the priest or any other church representative, and that there is no need to keep church rights or rituals (Sinichkin & Sokolovsky, 2014). All these stages of peoples search for God are shown in our documentary that is entitled “The Slavic Nation’s search for God.”

### **Attitude of Orthodox Clergy to the Bible**

The spiritual search for God passed through many challenging phases. One cause

of the challenges was the unavailability of Scriptures for the common people. Even during the time of Strigolniki and Judaizers in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the destruction of their manuscripts was an integral part of the fight against these Russian reformers who were considered to be heretics. Oleg Zhigankov, the author of *Slavic Christianity*, wrote about Gennady, Archbishop of Novgorod, who headed this fight in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. When Dominican Benjamin, a monk from the Vatican, came to the area, Gennady proudly showed literature he intended to destroy which he had confiscated from Judaizers. The monk asked the Archbishop if he knew what he was going to burn. Gennady replied that this was literature of the heretics and he was not going to read it. The stunned monk replied to the Archbishop, the great fighter for the purity of the faith, “But these are the Old Testament books of the Bible, recognized by the whole Christian world!” As a result, in 1499, compiling literature confiscated from Judaizers, some single Slavic manuscripts, several books translated by Cyril and Methodius, as well as some books translated from the Vulgate, Archbishop Gennady created the first complete Bible in the Slavic language (Zhigankov, 1996). Today it is known as the Codex Gennadius, the earliest surviving text of the whole Bible in old Church Slavonic (Noss, 2007). Surprisingly, the Russian Grand Inquisitor, who ruined many lives, unwittingly became the founder of the first full Slavonic Bible (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014). However, the Bible remained a book for church use only.

## Skaryna's Bible

The next major steps in disseminating Scripture among the Slavic people was made by Francis Skaryna, who had doctorates in philosophy and medicine. In 1517, he founded in Prague a printing house and printed "The Psalter" – the Bible book of Psalms on Cyrillic font. Over the years 1517-1519 Skaryna translated and published 23 books of the Bible and titled them "Bibliya Ruska," the Russian Bible. This Bible was printed in the old-Belarusian language and was understandable because it was written in the language of the people. It was relatively affordable, because it was not handwritten, but printed. Even some priests in their parishes began to preach in the national language. Due to the fact that the Skaryna's Bible was accessible and understandable to the people, it played a significant role of preparation in the adoption of Protestantism in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Protestant ideas of social equality, respect of civil rights, and education for everyone changed the Grand Duchy. The Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became the first written constitution in Europe. A bicameral parliamentary system of government was established. The Reformation put the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first row of the enlightened states of Europe of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Orlov, 2002). It should be noted that in the Kingdom of Poland, which was in dynastic union with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the incomplete Bible was translated into Polish even earlier. It was published in 1455 at the behest of Queen Sophia, the wife of Polish King Wladyslaw II Jagiello (Nida, 1972). When she became the Queen of Poland, Lithuanian Princess Sophia of Halshany adopted Catholicism. However, under the influence of the Hussites, particularly Jerome of Prague, she was instrumental in providing the Polish people with a Bible in their own language (Orlov & Gerasimovich, 2003).

### **Fyodorov's Bible**

One of the fathers of Eastern Slavonic printing was Ivan Fyodorov. Anatoly Bahtiarov wrote about him in 1890 *History of Books in Russia*. In 1564, Ivan Fyodorov and Peter Mstislavets printed a book in Moscow titled, *Apostle*, which was the biblical book, *Acts of the Apostles*. Unfortunately, Fyodorov was forced to flee from Moscow, as Francis Skaryna had previously been forced to flee when he visited Russia. Both of the sacred books, brought to Moscow by Skaryna and printed by Fyodorov, were burned by the Orthodox clergy (Maldis & Sokolovsky, 2015). Therefore, the lasting work of Fyodorov's life, the *Ostroh Bible*, was printed in 1581 in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where there was more openness to spreading the Word of God (Noss, 2007).

### **Peter and the Elizabeth's Bible**

In Russia, church leaders tried every possible way to prevent the spread of the Bible among the laity. After returning from Europe, Tsar Peter I decided to publish the New Testament in Russian. It should be noted that the Church Slavonic was not a language that ordinary people understand. In 1703, he ordered his wife's tutor, German pastor Johann Ernst Gluck, to create this translation. Previously Pastor Gluck had translated the Bible into Latvian (Nida, 1972). While working in Moscow, Gluck finished the Russian translation. But in 1705, he died, and after his death, the translation disappeared. Some historians believe this translation was stolen and destroyed by those who were afraid that having Scriptures in a language understandable by the common people would provoke the beginning of the Reformation in Russia (Oparin, 2007). Nonetheless, Tsar Peter determined to make the Bible publicly available, and on November 14, 1712, he issued a decree to check and fix translation inaccuracies in the

existing Slavic Bible. The clergy of the Orthodox Church protested this decision, saying that the same decision of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich and Patriarch Nikon resulted in a split in 1666. But Tsar Peter was firm in his decision, so the clergy with great reluctance started that job. This work lasted more than a decade, coming to a stop with the death of Tsar Peter. During subsequent reigns of political leaders, the issue of finishing the review of the Slavic Bible would be addressed. The matter was raised during the reign of Catherine I, and during the reign of Anna Ivanovna. But, it was not until 1751, during the reign of Empress Elizabeth, that the finally revised Slavonic Bible was published. That is why it was called the Elizabethan Bible (Tsurkan, 2001). It became the standard version of the Slavonic Bible and the Orthodox Church still uses this Bible during church services (Noss, 2007, p. 103).

### **Russian Bible Society**

The Russian Bible Society was founded in 1813, with the goal of translating, printing and distributing the Bible among the nations of the Russian Empire. It was decided to sell them at a low cost and to give them to the poor for free. One of the initiators of that program was Emperor Alexander I, who supported the work of the Bible Society. In 1824, Metropolitan Seraphim asked the Emperor to ban the Russian Bible Society, because “it shakes the Orthodox Church” (Oparin, 2007, p. 89). In 1825, Emperor Alexander died suddenly while traveling. His successor, Nicholas I, was not supportive of the Bible Society and terminated their activities in 1826. By this time, the printing house of the Russian Bible Society had printed books of Sacred Scriptures in 26 different languages for inhabitants of the Russian Empire. Most of the books were

distributed, but a few thousand remaining Russian Pentateuch were burned in the ovens of a brick factory (Rizhskiy, 1978).

### **Loss Caused by the Lack of the Bible**

The Orthodox Church was not interested in spreading the Bible and one of the reasons was her lack of interest in universal literacy. Since the Middle Ages, literacy training among Russian peasants was limited to memorization and reading of the Horologion (Book of Hours) and Psalter, the texts of which were used in the church service. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable number of peasants did not read Russian, but could read the Horologion and Psalter in Church Slavonic (Kravetskiy, 2014). As a major landowner that needed workers to till its lands, the Orthodox Church, unlike Protestant movements, has never advocated social equality and the abolition of serfdom as proclaimed by the Bible. The availability of the Bible and the literacy of the people could break the centuries-old system of ecclesiastical serfs (Stetsyuk & Sokolovsky, 2014). However, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Emancipation reform abolished serfdom throughout the Russian Empire and thus active educational work among the peasantry began. Amazingly, this event coincides with the publication of the Russian Bible in a language understood by all.

Today the Orthodox clergy tries to disown, or at least keep silent, about these facts from the past. In addition, the growing Protestant movement has changed Orthodoxy, as the Reformation changed the Catholic Church in Western Christianity. First and foremost, the educational system reflected this change, which the Orthodox Church, as the Catholics, also had to adopt to survive in the struggle with Protestantism (Lashuk & Sokolovsky, 2014).

## **The Role of the Church in the Integration of Russian Immigrants Into American Society**

The theme of my project is an expansion of the church that consists entirely of immigrants. In order to develop this theme, I have included books about the role of the church in the integration of Russian immigrants into American society.

Protestants, who focus on the Bible as their foundation, have played a significant role in the lives of immigrants. In their book, *Lost in America*, Tom Clegg and Warren Bird state that everyone has three fundamental needs: transcendence (need for connection with the Creator), significance (need to make something meaningful), and community (need for relationships with others) (Clegg, 2001, pp. 43-45). Immigrants feel these needs keenly because they deal with a new culture, language, and circumstances. Their integration into a new society is usually difficult and that difficulty may persist for many years and even generations. The church can provide an environment that can significantly reduce this period of transition. For example, some churches provide language courses for immigrants. Or, churches may help immigrants understand the social and cultural characteristics of the new homeland. Immigrants face challenges of finding work and some churches help them with resume writing or job interviews. “Consequently, these congregations present opportunities for people to share job leads, obtain job referrals from co-congregants, or learn how to work through bureaucratic red tape” (Connor, 2014, location 1052). Such a church becomes a blessing for immigrants. Blessing is more than just a passive wish for someone’s good. Blessing requires action. Blessing means sharing—sharing food, sharing friends, sharing your life with others (Halter & Smay, 2008). Actually, it is what God requires from the Church: to be socially active. His final

judgment will be based not on our right or wrong understanding of the Holy Scriptures, but on our deeds of kindness and love showing God's grace (Rev 20:12; 22:12).

In their book *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels write that we have to become witnesses of God's grace before we start talking about it (Mittelberg, Strobel, & Hybels, 1995). However, at the same time the church cannot remain "on the diaper-changing and homework-helping" stage of care (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2007, p. 55). With the maturing of dependents, the church has to change its way of help, supporting not only in physical needs, but showing the spiritual foundation of this support and teaching how to support others.

Thus, the first step of integration into a new life and a new church is the physical help for the immigrants' urgent needs. In this case, they will be more open to the Christian worldview as the foundation for their lives. This is the way that strangers-immigrants become friends and later can be transformed into disciples.

### **The Need for Church Unity**

The attractiveness of the church for newcomers depends largely on its cohesion. The unity of the church is the result of systematic spiritual education, which includes spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, service, confession, worship, and so on (Foster, 1998). Without the practice of these "classical" disciplines, I maintain the church ceases to be a church. Such practices do not guarantee spiritual growth; only the Holy Spirit can do that. As each member grows in Christ they will be able to live in transformed relationships with each other.

Another equally important part of the education we are talking about is an active communication between church members during the week. We must admit that to gather



people who are busy with everyday work and who highly value their time is extremely challenging. Therefore, to make weekly meetings happen, there has to be a tool that will involve a person naturally. Such a tool Ted Haggard presents in his Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These are small groups selected according to the interests of the participants. It is easier to keep people involved if they bind together with one passion (Haggard, 2002). Such a group is a great tool for involving a newcomer (read “immigrant”) into a new Christian community. If such a person feels his/her importance for some collective achievement, than the movement through the stranger-friend-disciple sequence will likely go well. According to Clegg and Bird this movement is the fulfillment of the need for community, significance, and transcendence (Clegg & Bird, 2001).

On other hand, if the church is divided, it is unlikely that members will live by common interests and will successfully perform social service. And it is even more unlikely that the newcomer will return to the church after the first disappointment. Therefore, raising the spirit of unity is essential in the church’s everyday life.

### **About This Project**

In our case, such a unifying moment for the members of our church was the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. This project not only united them, but also for many became a missionary service for their countrymen. However, the preparations for this project began much earlier, even before the establishment of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center.

My ministry, which resulted in this project, was a response to the call of God. In their book *Experiencing God*, Henry and Richard Blackaby and Claude King write,

“When God speaks, revealing what He is about to do, that revelation is your invitation to adjust your life to Him” (Blackaby, Blackaby, & King, 2008, p. 226). I responded to that call without knowing all the implications. I assumed that this would be a ministry in the church, but did not know what kind of church it would be. I had no idea what challenges I would meet along the route. As a result, I was involved not only in pastoral ministry, but also in film production. In the process of making the documentary about the Russian reform movements, I had to research, read, and study a large number of historical materials. I also met with high-ranking people. I interviewed them and some of these interviews became a part of this project. I was entrusted to shoot a ten-serial film of the history of Russian Protestantism, which had never been done before. All this happened as a response to God's call. So, for me these words are very close and clear,

As you spend time in a love relationship with God, you'll come to know His voice. When He speaks, you must adjust yourself to the truth revealed and obey God. When you obey, you will experience Him working in and through you to accomplish His work. (Blackaby et al., 2008, pp. 171-172)

## CHAPTER 4

### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

#### **Introduction**

*“Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless.”* (Ps 127:1 NLT)

*“I pulled you in from all over the world, called you in from every dark corner of the earth, telling you, ‘You’re my servant, serving on my side. I’ve picked you...I’m with you.’”* (Isa 41:9 Message)

Every church plant should be God’s deed. However, He uses human beings to minister in His divine accomplishment through praying, dreaming, brainstorming, researching, planning, collecting, building and serving. In this chapter I will present a methodology and practical steps of implementation for expanding the Russian-speaking Sabbath-keeping nondenominational church in Sacramento, California, by creating a documentary of the Russian reform movements.

This chapter is divided into four major sections. The first section will analyze the Russian-speaking population in Sacramento, California, and Russian churches in the Sacramento area. The second will present strategies and methodology for establishing a new Russian nondenominational Sabbath-keeping church in this area. The third section will describe the expansion of the established Russian church by creating a documentary. And in the fourth section I will give a description of practical steps for implementing these strategies and methodology.

## **Analyses of the Russian Community and Russian-Speaking Churches in Sacramento, California**

Russian immigration to the United States has a long history, beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Over the last 20-25 years, immigration of a Russian-speaking population to the United States, particularly to California, has increased dramatically, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the last wave of immigration from Russia started to rise earlier in 1987 when the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, announced that all victims of religious persecution were given permission to leave the USSR and immigrate to other countries (Hardwick, 1993). Members of persecuted groups such as Jews, Baptists and Pentecostals arrived in the U.S. and Canada and were admitted to those countries as refugees. The main destination for non-Jewish Russian speaking immigrants became not the usual cities of choice such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, but the Central Valley city of Sacramento and its surrounding areas (Hardwick, 1993).

### **Peculiarity of the Last Wave of Russian Immigration**

The last (fourth) wave started in 1974, after the ratification of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the Soviet government. This wave continued during the democratization period of the Soviet Union and throughout the collapse of that country and is still taking place at the present time. According to the United States Census, there were approximately 75,000 Russian-speaking people residing in the Sacramento area in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2001). Today, according to the 2010 U.S. Census over 250,000 Russian-speaking people live in the Sacramento and surrounding areas. Every 30<sup>th</sup> Californian speaks Russian (Russian American Media, 2016).

## **Analysis of Russian-Speaking Churches in Sacramento Area**

Because of a wave of religious refugees that began in the late 1980s, Sacramento now has one of the largest Russian-speaking populations in North America. These refugees came primarily from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and other former Soviet republics and settled mostly in Sacramento's northern and western suburbs. Despite the fact that these people came from different independent states and different language groups, all of them communicate with each other in Russian.

These immigrants are different from their Russian-speaking counterparts in New York's Brighton Beach, San Francisco's Richmond district or West Hollywood, all established Russian-immigrant enclaves that are mostly Jewish or Russian Orthodox. The Sacramento community is overwhelmingly evangelical—Baptists and Pentecostals. (Tempest, 2006, p. 1)

## **Role of Russian Churches in a Stand for Religious Rights in California**

Early into the new millennium, Russian churches took an active position against issues of same-sex marriage and turned out en masse for state Capitol protest rallies. "The main issues in the Russian community here," said Vitaly Prokopchuk, a Sacramento County sheriff's deputy, "are gay issues, abortion issues and family-definition issues. To these people, these issues are very cut-and-dry in the Bible" (cited in Tempest, 2006, p. 1). Susan W. Hardwick, a professor at University of Oregon, who is an expert on the Russian immigrant community, said,

Sacramento is the No. 1 gathering place for non-Jewish, non-Russian Orthodox, fundamentalist Russian and Ukrainian immigrants. Similar but smaller communities have established themselves in Portland and Seattle, where they also are beginning to flex their political muscle. But nowhere approaches Sacramento, which has a 24-hour Russian-language cable television station, two radio stations and several newspapers,

all of which push a conservative message marked by strident opposition to homosexuality. (Cited in Tempest, 2006, p. 1)

### **“The Voice in the Wilderness”**

Leaders of the religious right celebrate the Russian efforts as a revival. “My hope and my prayer,” said Mark Matta, a former legislative aide who heads the Christian Public Awareness Ministries, “is that they will become a voice in the wilderness for the rest of the country” (as cited in Tempest, 2006, p. 2). Many credit the Slavic Christian immigrant community with filling a void left by the traditional American church and providing reinforcements in the ongoing culture wars over what should define family, acceptable sexual relationships, and marriage. “Russian Christians bring a fresh faith and uncorrupted family values to this country. They are a shining model for the rest of us in terms of faith, family, work ethic, patriotism and community,” said Randy Thomasson, president of the Campaign for Children and Families (as cited in Tempest, 2006, p. 2).

### **Downside of the Strife**

Unfortunately, every coin has an opposite side. Increased emphasis on social behavior by the leaders and members of Slavic churches has created a more radical attitude within churches against those who were not so strong in their Christian beliefs or practices, or who had their own standpoint on issues, apart from those officially expressed by churches. Large numbers of people quit attending church services. They were not opposed to God or Christianity, but to the way Christian churches act. They were looking for increased freedom of thought and behavior in their church family. Actually, they were looking, sometimes subconsciously, for a new church family.

Currently, in the Greater Sacramento Area there are 470 Christian churches, including 84 Russian churches. The majority of Russian churches belong to Baptist and

Pentecostal denominations. However, there are a significant number of nondenominational churches as well. Among these 84 Russian churches, only one is a Seventh-day Adventist church. So, there is a great need for another church that will proclaim Jesus' Second Coming.

### **Strategies and Methodology of Establishing of a New Russian-Speaking Sabbath- Keeping Church in Sacramento**

Hundreds of books exist on the subject of how to start a church plant. A majority of these were written by pastors who, step-by-step, walked through that process and who finally produced these books as a summary of reasons for the success of their ministry. However, there was no single situation that could replicate another. Every church planting is unique, even if some similarities exist.

#### **Call**

There is a point in everyone's life when the person comes to a crossroad of a lifelong journey. For me it happened when I was in the middle of my fifties. I have been a minister for most of my life, and I understand the importance of a call. I remembered the first call that I got as a young man and God's blessings when I answered, "Yes." So, staying on this crossroad I asked God for new guidance. Together with my dear spouse, Lidia, we spent fifty days in earnest prayers, and God answered. We received that answer at almost the same time as our son-in-law, Boris Kovach. "You have to go to the West Coast and to keep ministering to My people—your compatriots." It was a challenge for us: a new place, new conditions of ministry. But the Lord reminded us of His promise: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20 NIV). By His grace we went.

### Team

One of the first steps in establishing a new church, enforced by the vast majority of authors, is to build a core group or ministry team. The first writing of the apostle Paul, who was one of the most well-known and successful church planters of the first century, contains the statement that the One who is in charge of the process is God himself, “But God made our bodies with many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it” (1 Cor 12:18 NLT). A contemporary writer states,

We believe that [1 Cor. 12:18] is absolutely true today. The group of people you’re working with isn’t the result of a random coincidence. They are the part of God’s story for your life. It’s why investing time in building a healthy, functional, effective, empowering team is essential, not optional. (Trent, 2004, p. 5)

We started our planning with the core group. It was a time of earnest prayers and intensive brainstorming. We came to the conclusion that initially our core group would be made up of four people: my son-in-law Boris Kovach, his wife Solvita, my wife Lidia, and me. At that time Boris already had seven years’ experience as a youth pastor in Florida. I had been in the ministry for several decades and my wife Lidia was always my first helper. More than thirty years ago we began our family journey as church planters and since that time have served the Lord in different churches in different countries on different continents. Since our daughter, Solvita, grew up in a pastor’s family, she was acquainted with the difficulties and hardships of a minister’s life. Beside that we were convinced that “the family model” was used by Jesus Christ as an example, who had among his disciple at least three pairs of brothers. We prayerfully considered starting a



new congregation that was open and welcoming to unbelievers and attractive to youth and young adults.

### Location

We knew that the future church had to be located in an area with a high rate of Russian-speaking residents and with good access to public transportation, because many Russians, especially older people, do not drive cars. At the same time, we wanted it to be some distance from other Russian churches.

Our demographic and cultural research of the region helped determine where this new church should be established. Our attention was drawn to a new development in northwestern Sacramento called Natomas. It is the last area of Sacramento that has not been fully developed, but it has seen major residential development in the 1990s and 2000s. Major growth of Natomas has been mostly due to Power Balance Pavilion, home court to the Sacramento Kings and now disbanded Sacramento Knights and Monarchs. This helps explain the age of an average resident of Natomas, which is 33— younger than the average in California, which is little over thirty-five. Natomas is the most diverse community of Greater Sacramento. The area comprises 22 different nationalities, and the rate of Russian-speaking residents is high.

Natomas also has good access to public transportation and is located close to downtown Sacramento as well as to the Sacramento International Airport. Despite the high rate of Russian-speaking residents in Natomas, there was only one Russian church, a charismatic church called Melchizedek.

## The Name of the Church

In the very beginning of my career as a pastor, in fact it was earlier, when I was a youth leader of a local church, I found out that the name Ecclesiastes is attractive to secular youth. Based on that knowledge, in the mid 1980s my friends and I organized a music group called “Ecclesiastes.” Our goal was to reach, through contemporary Christian music, the unreached. We wrote original songs calling the youth to come to God. Our group became known and we had concerts across the Soviet Union—we even toured Europe and North America. Our songs became popular among Russian-speaking Christians around the world. Based on that experience, we decided that our church and ministry would be called Ecclesiastes Worship Center. The reason we decided to call our future church a Worship Center was the hope that this name would not become a stumbling block for Jews, who would come to a worship center, but not to a church.

## Vision and Mission Statement

Our core group discussed the vision of our church. We decided that our church would be open for everyone regardless of his or her spiritual background. Our target group would be unchurched youth and young adults. To facilitate their conversion and revival, every church member must be involved in their lives, to help them, to lead them to Christ. So, we chose our mission statement: “Discipleship 24/7!”

## Worship Style

Because we chose the youth and young adults as our target audience, together with a team we decided to have a contemporary worship, the style most accepted by Christians of that age. Our worship would include an opening section with greetings and

prayer; praises led by a praise team; a creative section with special music, poems, drama, or video; prayers; a sermon; and benediction. Although praise songs would be contemporary, each song had to contain not only meaningful words, but also an expressive and memorable melody. We decided to have Bible studies in separate classes prior to the worship service.

### Open Events for Everyone

With the goal of reaching people who usually do not attend church, we decided to provide “open events” for the public. We planned concerts for the community, special events for children, and café-type meetings for youth and young adults. These meetings for youth we would call Art-Café Parkovka that translates as “Parking Place.” The idea behind that title was simple: parking is a place where cars and drivers can rest in their journey, where people meet, and strangers sometimes become friends. We also tried to declare that our Parkovka is a safe place for everyone, unlike some parking areas where youth are tempted to try drugs. For every such meeting, we decided to prepare some “hot” dramatized topic for discussion, to invite guest singers and musicians, to play games, and to have some spiritual part of the program. For these meetings, our sanctuary would be transformed into an actual café with round tables, bar, lights, and etc., where people could order non-alcoholic drinks and snacks. In light of the type activities we planned, it was important to find a proper building that would be easy to transform for such an event.

### Discipleship Classes

We expected that some who would join the Ecclesiastes Worship Center were from different religious backgrounds, and that some had never belonged to any church

organization. In order to consolidate them, we planned to provide discipleship classes. As a methodical literature, we chose Mark Mittelberg's, Lee Strobel's, and Bill Hybels' book *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Mittelberg, 1995). These classes should build a foundation for our cell groups and prayer team.

### Small Groups

Based on my previous ministry experience, I decided to pay attention to establishing groups in our new worship center. We reviewed several models and decided which to use. One of the models I found in the book *Think "Small!"* written by Ricardo V. Bain, in which he explains in detail how to build solid youth small groups (Bain, 2012). Another was Ted Haggard's *Dog Training, Fly Fishing and Sharing Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, with multiple examples of the small groups built on principles of shared interests (Haggard, 2002). For the leaders of future small groups, I chose the book of M. Scott Boren and Don Tillman *Cell Group Leader Training—Leadership Foundation for Groups that Work* (Boren & Tillman, 2002).

### Planning the Media Ministry

In addition to personal work we also planned to include contemporary media in our worship. In the beginning, we were simply convinced that it had to be done. Although we did not realize exactly what we were going to produce, we were convinced that we should include sermons. However, during the church establishing process, we realized (and this happened much later) that many people attending our church had already-established religious views. Some had a history of denominational membership reaching back many generations. Others who grew up in an atheistic society had come to know God just recently. But most people from both groups were astonished by the biblical

truths that were unveiled before them. Among such revelations were Sabbath as the memorial of God’s creation; a healthy diet to preserve the human body—the sacred sanctuary—in purity before God; the truth about God’s judgment and eternal reward/retribution; the facts about the condition of the dead; etc. They were utterly bewildered about why most Christian churches interpret these truths in their own way or do not consider them important at all. In one way or another, those attending began to question the churches they had attended previously.

### **Expanding the Established Church by Creating a Documentary**

In order to help those who come to church we decided to fill this information gap by creating a documentary about the most important biblical truths that have been ignored or distorted by many denominations. Furthermore, by posting this documentary on the Internet, we would be able to introduce these truths to every home.

### **Documentary About the Russian Reform Movements**

Before starting our project, we reviewed existing documentaries on these topics. The best was by Jeff Wood “The Seventh Day—Revelations from the Lost Pages of History” with Hal Holbrook. It is a fascinating five-part series about the Sabbath, the day of worship established by God and the substitution of Sunday during Christian history. This documentary mentions the reformation movement by the Novgorod—Moscow believers in medieval Russia. These early reformers of the church were nicknamed Judaizers because they observed the Ten Commandments (the Jewish law, as the Orthodox clergy called them) including and honoring Sabbath as the day of rest and worship.

The majority of our contemporaries had not heard anything about this movement. They assumed that throughout the centuries there had been no other religious movement in Russia than Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the Russian Orthodox Church itself had made every effort to instill this belief in the Russian people. Specific terminology—The Canonical Territory—had been invented to reflect historical rights of Orthodoxy in the spiritual lives of Russians. Such terminology made clear that no other religion has any rights to proselytize in a given territory. Protestant religions were represented as a religious/spiritual intervention of the Western Culture upon the Russian territory. We had a strong desire to share the truth in a movie about how reform movements in Russia predated and prepared Russia for a Christian Reformation.

#### Achieving the Impossible

At first this goal seemed impossible to achieve. Certain skills and proper equipment were necessary to implement such a project. As for the skills, I had graduated from university as a theatre director, and during my training I had taken classes in movie production. It was harder to find proper equipment. Our young church had neither enough resources to purchase such equipment nor specialists who knew how to professionally use it. We were forced to look for somebody who could help us fulfill this project. And God presented us with this possibility. He sent us people who have been impressed with the same idea of creating a movie about reform movements in Russia.

God sent us such a person, Alexander Shevchenko, Director of the “Ugol” Studio. Alexander’s idea was even larger in scale—to create a series of documentary features about the emergence of Protestant churches in the territory of Orthodox Russia. According to his plan, this series would consist of 10 one-hour long movies and include

the historical period beginning with the Christianizing of Russia in 988 AD and continuing to this day. Having heard of our dreams, he proposed cooperation and offered me a position of screenwriter and movie director for these documentaries. This collaboration has opened for us a new format of missionary work that includes a broader audience.

### Work on the Script

Before the documentary script was developed, we needed to do research. While studying copies of chronicles, books on the history of ancient Russia, and dissertations written on the subject, I came to the unexpected, for me, realization that a reform movement in Russia began long before Martin Luther nailed his theses to the doors of the Wittenberg's church in 1517. Just as in Europe, the first religious protests in Russia were associated with church corruption. As in Europe, the first to declare their protest were the clergy of the traditional church. In Europe, religious leaders protested against the Catholic Church; in Russia, religious leaders protested against the Orthodox Church.

### Strigolniki—the First Reformers in Russia

In my research, I found out that after an almost 400-year period of Tatar-Mongol invasion, the Orthodox Church had become corrupt. In regard to religion, the Mongols were very liberal because there was a collection of laws called Yasa, compiled by Genghis Khan, which was sustained by all his successors. Yasa did not allow the taking of tribute from monasteries or the taxation of church workers. And this law was strictly enforced. In addition, the Khans often endowed monasteries with lands in which the nomads held no interest, and thus monasteries became large landowners. Russian historian Nikolay Karamzin writes in his *History of the Russian State*,

One of the consequences of the Tatar domination was the elevation of our clergy and multiplication of monks and church estates. Policies of the Khans, which oppressed the people and princes, protected the church and its ministers and revered the metropolitans and bishops. (Karamzin, 2005, p. 517)

This historian recorded that crowds of people went to the monasteries. Even princes and noblemen, called boyars, exchanged their clothing for the mantle of a monk. Church ownership, free from any taxes and control, prospered. The church gradually became a commercial enterprise, and church offices were sold for money. The local people were not ready to accept priests, often illiterate, who had paid bribes to obtain office.

Indignation grew because the demand for priestly office was great, and the ecclesiastical administration conferred recognition upon new priests only for a fee. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century this led to the appearance or resurgence of the early protestant movement, “Strigolniki.” This movement formed the first congregations protesting the Orthodox Church; the members preached in the city squares and by the crossroads. “There was street preaching, evangelism, and teaching, which included moral requirements such as what a shepherd should look like and what a Christian should be like” (Karetnikova & Sokolovsky, 2014).

The official church severely punished these protestors, drowning them in the Volkhov River. In 1375, the Sofia and Novgorod chronicles recorded that Strigolniki Nikita, Karp and others drowned after they were thrown from the bridge. Later, the annals of 1425 stated, “so many were drowned that the Volkhov could not carry its own water” (Karetnikova & Sokolovsky, 2014).

#### Judaizers

Regardless of the severe persecution, the Strigolniki movement became a forerunner for another Russian spiritual movement known as Judaizers. The movement of the Judaizers, or the Novgorod-Moscow movement of believers as they called



themselves, was a kind of continuation, or even a culmination, of all the previous spiritual grassroots movements that had occurred on Russian land. At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this movement actually enveloped the whole country and all walks of life, ranging from simple people to princes. It touched even the royal family. Leaders of that time who determined the political and economic policies of the country shared the ideals and beliefs of the Judaizers' movement. Indeed, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church himself, the Metropolitan Zosima, identified with the Novgorod-Moscow movement of believers (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014). "There's no doubt that the first people who were carriers of Protestant ideas were ministers of the Orthodox Church," wrote church historian Vladimir Franchuk. "And this so-called heresy of the Judaizers was an original search by Russian and other Slavic peoples to find the truth of God which is in the Gospel" (Franchuk, 2014).

The Novgorod—Moscow movement of believers was really progressive for its time in terms of religion, politics, and even architecture. Particularly in that time a peace agreement was reached with the Mongols, and after 400 years of dependence on the Horde, Moscow Russia ceased to pay tribute to the Tatars. In many ways, this was due to the effort of Fyodor Kuritsyn, the head of the Diplomacy Department and the leader of the Judaizers. Another achievement attributed to that movement was an architecture that expressed Russian style. Few people know that this style originated as a kind of symbiosis between Italian engineers and architects and Russian Protestants. Especially valuable was spiritual heritage of the believers. The systematic Christian theology in Russia emerged among the Novgorod—Moscow believers as they attempted to show that a relationship with God comes first, before any church rites and rituals. And all of the

believers were united by the observance of the Ten Commandments and the Seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest. This was the movement that was most ahead of its time (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014).

Some 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars pointed out that the Novgorod-Moscow movement of believers had an antitrinitarian character. However, Dr. Oleg Zhigankov in his dissertation, *The Issue of Antitrinitarianism in the Fifteenth Century Novgorod-Moscow Movement: Analysis and Evaluation* refutes this assertion (Zhigankov, 2000).

Unfortunately, as a result of the dynastic crisis of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and a fierce struggle for the throne, that movement was destroyed. However, these became only the first steps of the reform movements that influenced Russia in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and eventually led to the emergence of the Evangelical movement.

#### Challenges of the Video Production

During study of the sources, it became clear that the history of the reform movements in Russia, though not as well-known as Reformation in Western Europe, nevertheless is vivid, and more importantly, has left a deep mark that can be traced in the history of the Russian people. Many well-known political and social conventions that took place in Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries came as a result of these reform movements. There are powers today that try to hide these traces/marks by saying that there have never been any Protestants in Russia, only sporadic groups of ignorant heretics. However, the truth about the evolution of religious beliefs that started in Russia from the fourteenth century among the Orthodox priesthood and resulted in the Evangelical movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sinichkin & Sokolovsky, 2014) can help Russian immigrants to have a new look at Protestant Churches in America. Thus, we

considered it important to tell the story of the reform movements in Russia using modern means of communication.

### Technical Preparation for the Film Production

In order to make this movie vivid and remarkable, we had to reconstruct historical surroundings, which in turn involved casting and then training the actors. Originally, we had planned to work with non-professional actors. These would be creative and talented members of our church. Since the scope of developing the movie became much bigger than we had expected, however, we decided to hold a casting call. I must say that absolutely everybody who came to the casting call and wished to participate in our movie got this opportunity. No one was rejected.

In order to reconstruct the historical era, it was also necessary to find appropriate shooting locations. Because there were no such places in our area that could truly convey the atmosphere of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, we had to find ways to design theatrical sets and find artists who would build them.

We then had to find or make appropriate historical costumes for actors. This required enlisting professionals capable of making such costumes.

Another challenge was locating ancient weapons and household items. Antique collectors and members of historical clubs could help us in this task. Since it is impossible to imagine medieval Russia without horses and riders, we needed to recruit these. All of these required time and effort from the members of our church as well as from many others.

We faced quite a task when it came to the sound design of the movie. First, we needed a narrator with the appropriate voice. According to our plans, the narrator should

be the only person telling the story; therefore, the success of the documentary depended on his diction and tone of voice. We also attached great importance to the musical design of the movie. Since the movie was about Russia, music also had to be appropriate: it had to be Russian. We decided to use classical pieces written by Russian composers of the 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as sacred songs, folk music, and tunes of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Paintings illustrating the subject of our documentary should make our point clearer. Therefore, we planned to use these art works in our movie. The selection of art works would have had to be very careful and prudent, and must not infringe on copyrights. It was necessary either to use art from the public domain or to obtain rights from the copyright holders. These same requirements applied to photos and music used in the documentary.

#### Preparing for the Interviews for the Documentary

I planned to base the documentary not only on the narrator's telling the story about the historical events but also on the interviews with the well-known scholars, ministers, and politicians to add impact to the documentary. These people had to meet several requirements. First, they had to be knowledgeable in the areas of our research. For instance, if the interview were about religious freedom, then we would interview the Commissioners of Religious Affairs at the USSR Counsel of Ministers, those who specialized in the issue of surveillance and monitoring of religious institutions. Another option would be the current representatives of such authorities or the representatives of organizations overseeing human rights. When the conversation was about less famous historical events, then we would interview historians, philosophers, or publicists that

cover these events in their work. When the conversation was about religious ceremonies or church regulations, then clergy or religious scholars were to be interviewed.

Second, all interviewees had to be not only experts in their field, but also well-known individuals. It is natural for people to trust those who have credibility in such matters.

Third, they had to be Russians because evidence even from competent and well-known foreigners in Russian-speaking surroundings would be exposed to criticism and distrust, especially in Russia.

But most of all, these people had to be identified, and we had to find ways to reach them. This task could have become one of the most difficult, because we would have to use personal acquaintances and talk to friends and friends of friends. Also, some no doubt would have to be persuaded to let us interview them. This enormous amount of administrative work would require the active participation of the people in our church.

### Spiritual Component of the Documentary Production

The primary focus was the spiritual component of the movie. Our documentary had to become more than just a visual and memorable communication of information. According to our plans, creation of the documentary would become a spiritual experience for our church that would both unite it and contribute to its growth. The movie was originally planned as a missionary project. It is quite possible that creating such a video project is much easier with professionals. However, we had another objective. As it turned out later, this task was realized. For many, participation in the creation of the documentary became a spiritual experience, serving to revive their relationships with God. It was not only their time that people devoted graciously when participating in the

film shootings, but also their money that they sacrificed to buy airplane tickets and afford accommodation for those coming from other cities and countries. Many supported our production with their finances, provided transportation, prepared food, and offered overnight accommodation for the team. Creation of this documentary has united the people in our congregation as a missionary work.

### **Summary**

In summary, it should be noted that such a project could be realized only by the joint efforts of a group of concerned and actively involved people because this project required the cooperation of people with a variety of experiences.

First, we needed spiritual involvement, what we might refer to as the call of God. This call was important not only for the leader but also for each participant in the project: the conviction that we are doing business entrusted by God. Second, we needed a vision of the specific spiritual needs. In our case, it was the people who for one reason or another had left the Church, perhaps struggling with addictions and other challenges, but not giving up on God. For such people, we established our church. Third, we needed the involvement of these people in a common spiritual service to others, using their experience, talents, and creativity. And fourth, we needed to achieve our high and elusive goal by believing, praying, and actively using new opportunities. In our case, this achievement was missionary work through the video ministry: the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. These four components formed the basis of the success of our project.

## **Practical Steps to Implement Strategies and Methodology for the Expansion of the Church**

To this chapter, I attached Appendix A. Appendix A describes the practical steps we followed to implement the production of the documentary.

## CHAPTER 5

### NARRATIVE OF INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Period of Pre-Preparation**

The process of organizing a new church requires extensive preparation. This preparation includes personal dedication, research of the demographic situation, research of needs and possibilities, and analysis of collected data.

#### God's Call

From the time, I decided to become a pastor, I had a desire to serve those who are in need, especially young people who were lost. As a pastor in a well-established church in Denver, Colorado, I prayed for such an opportunity to minister and realize this goal. And God opened that door of opportunities in a very unexpected way: I had to resign from pastoring that church.

#### Time of Prayers and Meditation

In the beginning, it was very difficult for me to find the right direction concerning where to move. So, I put all my desires into God's hands, believing that He would provide and lead me further. My wife Lidia and I decided to pray asking for God's intervention in our situation. In fact, our entire extended family—two daughters, a son-in-law, parents, and siblings overseas—prayed together with us. After fifty days of prayer, I received an answer that became a growing conviction within me, echoing two words—San Francisco! I continued to pray, knowing that San Francisco is one of the most secular cities in the world. To be honest, I was afraid to go there.



At about the same time, my son-in-law Boris Kovach, who had been a worship pastor in Florida for seven years, received a strong impression that he and his family—our oldest daughter Solvita and two granddaughters, Sophie and Stella—should move to Sacramento, California, and start a new youth-oriented church for Russian immigrants. He asked me to join him and to become part of a pastoral team.

As I continued to pray asking whether this move was God's will, I received some concrete answers to my questions, filling my heart and mind with peace and joy. I do not know whether Sacramento is the final destination in my spiritual journey or whether He will lead me farther west, to San Francisco. But I know that He brought me to Sacramento for a special purpose.

#### Demographic Research and Analysis of Data

When Boris and I arrived in California, we started to collect information about the Russian population of Sacramento. We determined the number of Russian residents in different cities and communities of the Greater Sacramento area as well as the number of Russian/Slavic churches and their locations. We analyzed our data to determine the right place for our future church.

#### Analysis of Needs

One of the greatest problems that we observed during our research was the percentage of drug-addicted young people among Russian immigrants. Unfortunately, some young Christians were involved in this problem. Illegal use of narcotics was the number one reason the percentage of crimes was so high among Russian youth. Together with alcohol, it was also a primary reason for divorces in Christian families.

Another issue we found contributed to these problems was limited access to or even absence of entertainment for Christian youth.

### Analysis of Opportunities

The problems mentioned above, however, presented a great opportunity for mission and Christian services. We had a chance to build a church that would be open for fallen people. We could also create some exciting and healthy entertainment for Christian youth. Besides that, we discovered that there were several rehabilitation centers for drug/alcohol addicted in the area where our future church could help as volunteers.

### **First Steps**

In the organization of a church it is very important to make the first steps right. Selecting a leadership team, choosing a name for the church and focusing the vision largely determines its further development.

### The First Meeting

During our research, we met with two families, acquaintances of our friends, who were residents of Sacramento. Together with these families we prepared our first worship service and shared it in a private home. It was Sabbath morning, the first day of a new year, 2011.

### The Name of the New Church

As I had planned earlier, our core group was supposed to be our family: my wife Lidia, our son-in-law Boris, our daughter Solvita and I. However, we agreed that in the future, our core group would expand to include some active members of our new church. On the very next day after Sabbath, we held a meeting with those who wanted to help. Among the subjects of our discussion was the name of our church. I suggested that we

call our church the Ecclesiastes Worship Center and explained why. The team approved the name.

### Identifying a Vision and Creating a Mission Statement

In that same meeting, we started to discuss a vision for our church. I expressed a desire that our church would be open for everyone regardless of their spiritual background. So, we identified our target group as unchurched youth and young adults. The mission statement “Discipleship 24/7!” was accepted and approved. In addition, we resolved to have social events (like Art-Café Parkovka) open to the public.

### Worship and Social Services to the Community

After earnest prayers God provided a building in which we could worship. It was the newly built office-style Natomas Crosspoint Church that featured a sanctuary seating 200. A Northern Baptist congregation used it on Sundays, and they agreed to let us use it on Sabbaths. God provided for us not only a place for worship, but also friends and partners in ministry.

The first worship service in the church building was on Sabbath, January 8, 2011. On February 6, we had the first wedding in our church, and on June 11 the first baptism in which three people were immersed. It appeared that the Lord was moving very quickly to establish our new ministry.

With our new partners, the Baptist Church, we organized a series of special events for the homeless. Members prepared meals and provided accommodations at the church for them. During these events, several hundred homeless people were fed and lodged in the church building. The first such event was on April 18, 2011.

## Open Events for Everyone

As we had decided, our events were open to the public. One of our church members was a poet who was involved in the Association of Poets and Writers of Sacramento (LOTOS). Since they had no place in which to meet, we invited them to use the church building for their meetings every third Saturday night. A number of people who initially came only to listen to poems eventually became members of our church. Another benefit we received from LOTOS has been free access to Russian newspapers, radio and TV.

For youth and young adults, we organized café-type meetings. To fund mission projects, we organized concerts at which we collected money for people with different needs.

## First Challenges

Despite the church's initial growth, we also experienced loss. Some difficulties arose with the nondenominational character of the church. Elderly Russians look at nondenominational churches with some apprehension. They prefer to recognize each other as Baptists, Adventists, or Pentecostals. However, the younger generation is more open to accepting each other as Christians. For the young, the way one lives and what one believes are more important than one's particular denomination. Some of these young people would never come to an Adventist church; however, they will accept Adventist doctrines if these are the Bible doctrines and core beliefs of a nondenominational church. To many Adventists, a true believer is one who belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Even if a nondenominational church has the same core beliefs, they still look on such a church as being apostate.

## First Losses

In the Ecclesiastes Worship Center (EWC), this dichotomy created our first losses. In the beginning the majority of attendees were from an Adventist background. They came from a Slavic Adventist congregation in Sacramento. They hoped that this new church would be called an Adventist church, and that they would become an example for those “unbelievers” from the Baptist, Pentecostal, and other churches. When these people realized that EWC would be a church where everyone is equally welcomed and important, one by one they left the EWC.

In spite of the losses, the church continued to grow. People who were disenchanted in their previous religious experience found a home in the Ecclesiastes Worship Center. A number of these had been divorced and as a result were disfellowshipped from other Christian churches. Many had not attended any church for years. Some experienced alcohol and drug problems. And for some it was difficult to quit smoking. All found themselves welcomed and honored in our church. Eventually our church got a nickname among Christians of Sacramento: Bethesda, a place where people come for healing.

## Details About Formative Period of Ecclesiastes Worship Center

Additional details about this formative and foundational period of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center can be found in Appendix B.

## Several Stories of Newcomers

Almost every individual who joined our church has brought a painful story of their past. The stories of several of these people can be found in Appendix C.

## **Plans for Media Ministry**

As mentioned previously, almost every new church participant had a painful story in their past. All of them are forgiven sinners as they themselves testify. Some of them, by the power of God, have defeated their evil habits; some still continue to fight. But all of them have something in common: they want to tell others about the experiences they have gone through with God and the new things they have learned in our church. They share these experiences with each other, as well as with new friends, who come to the small groups. But I had a feeling that their dramatic stories could positively influence a wider circle of people with similar problems. A media ministry would be the tool for sharing such information. The leadership team had often thought about how to start a media ministry, but due to lack of funds we had to postpone this project until better times. Still, we have witnessed that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

### **Invitation to the Film Production**

Alexander Shevchenko, lead pastor of the House of Bread, one of the fastest growing Russian churches in Sacramento, came to the Ecclesiastes Worship Center to attend one of our charity concerts. Knowing that he was the head of an international media ministry, I asked if I could collaborate with him to produce a Christian musical that I had recently written. He liked the idea and we decided to meet again. At the next meeting, he offered me the opportunity to work with him, inviting me to become a screenwriter and director of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. In the beginning, I was not sure that this idea was in line with our plans for media ministry, because we had planned the video story about some specific Bible doctrines and testimonies about God's deliverance from hopeless situations. However, I was intrigued

with Mr. Shevchenko's offer, and I replied that I would like to pray and meditate before giving him my answer.

His idea was to create a series of documentary films about the history of the Protestant churches in Russia. According to his plan, this series would consist of ten one-hour movies and include the historical period beginning with the Christianizing of Russia in A.D. 988 up to the present day. While praying and reasoning I came to the conclusion that these films should include the development of theological ideas in Russia and, therefore, relate to the doctrines about which we had spoken with our leadership team. So, I accepted the Alexander Shevchenko's offer and began working on the script.

#### Moscow—The Third Rome

The script composition for the documentary required a comprehensive knowledge of historical content, which in turn required thorough research of various sources. The Chapter Three review of literature in this Doctor of Ministry Project identifies some of these. When studying the historical materials, I discovered significant information unfamiliar to the general public. Here are some of them.

Before the Christianization of Russia by Prince Vladimir, there were a significant number of Christian churches in Kiev. At the time of the Tatar-Mongol invasion, the Orthodox Church cooperated with the occupation. The first reform movement in Russia began long before Martin Luther nailed his theses to the doors of the Wittenberg's cathedral in 1517. There was a period when people in the Moscow government kept the Ten Commandments and honored Sabbath, the seventh day (Zhigankov & Sokolovsky, 2014). These people disagreed with the official Orthodox Church, which awaited the coming of Christ in 1492. As proof these reformers quoted the Bible that no one knows

the day or the hour of the Lord's coming, not even angels in heaven. I also learned that the Bible had been translated into Russian more than one hundred and seventy years before its actual publishing in 1876.

By including these facts into the narration, the unfamiliar story of the origin of Protestantism in the lands of the Eastern Slavs was becoming clearer. The central theme of the documentary series became Slavic people searching for God and returning to the apostolic principles of faith in the process.

Because the first film of this series had already been finished, I began working on the second film. This part included the historical period from Prince Daniel of Moscow (1263) until Ivan the Terrible (1584). The central part of this film was the story of the Strigolniki in the 14<sup>th</sup> century who, according to a number of historians (Beznosova & Sokolovsky, 2014; Sannikov & Sokolovsky, 2014), became the first Protestants in Russia. The film was also about the movement of Judaisers, the Sabbath-keepers, which spread in Russia in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period, the New-Byzantine religious-political concept "Moscow the Third Rome" appeared, which in many respects determined further development of the Russian state. Because of this, we named our film "Moscow—The Third Rome."

#### Interviews and Interviewees

Historical documents were only part of all the resources needed for the movie. It was necessary to find experts in each field to become another part of the documentary. It was quite a complicated task since the interviewees had to meet some requirements. First, they had to be experts in their area of competence. Second, they had to be known to a



wider audience. And third, they had to be Russians—meaning they came from the former Soviet Union.

God blessed us in this as well. The openings the crew and I received to meet and interview prominent people would be called “lucky” by some. We saw it as divine providence, and we pursued one open door after another. One of them was Patriarch Filaret, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. To interview such a senior religious figure would be a great opportunity. Through a friend from the Patriarch’s entourage we learned that the Patriarch would be coming to New York. However, arranging to meet with him took diplomacy and perseverance. Alexander Shevchenko, the producer of our movie, interviewed him.

Another prominent person was Oleksandr Turchynov who was acting President of Ukraine in that time. In 2013 I was invited to teach a master’s level class on worship and liturgy at Odessa Baptist Seminary. Since I taught in Ukraine, together with the creative team we decided to try to get an interview with the acting President. Alexander Shevchenko got in touch with Paul Ungureanu, the Deputy of the Parliament of Ukraine and member of the Baptist Church. As I arrived in Kiev Mr. Ungureanu took me into the President’s office where everything was ready to shoot. Although it was late at night, Mr. Turchynov kindly agreed to give an interview. His position that the merger of church and state benefits neither the one nor the other has become part of our documentary. However, for me the most memorable part of the interview was not included in our film. That was his story of how he, the leader of the Communist youth organization that fought against religion, became a Christian.

Alexey Osipov, professor at Moscow Orthodox Theological Academy, agreed to give an interview only when he was asked by a girl from our creative team who had been baptized as a child in the Orthodox Church. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, founding member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, was reached with the help of our friends—dissidents from Moscow.

Sergei Sannikov, the former rector of the Odessa Baptist Theological Seminary, helped us to find a number of applicable people for our interviews. Olga Golikova, is a pastor and an academician at the International Academy of Ecology and Life Protection Sciences. For merits in the field of preservation of life was granted the title of Countess by the living head of the House of Romanovs. Maksim Shevchenko, one of the leading Russian TV journalists and an expert on ethno-cultural and religious policies, admitted in his interview that when he became a Christian, he felt completely free. “I stopped being afraid of harassment by the authorities and KGB,” he said, “for I began to feel the power of the One under Whose protection I am.” Oleg Zhigankov, Adventist pastor and writer-historian, had been my teacher in Zaoksky Theological Seminary but was a professor at the Adventist University of the Philippines when I reached him. So, I sent him questions and he organized a recording of answers. Aleksey Sinichkin, archivist of the Baptist brotherhood, after Perestroika spent several years in the KGB archives researching declassified documents—evidences of faithfulness to God of people who were on the borderline between life and death. The task of Mikhail Odintsov, member of the Council for Religious Affairs of the USSR, was to ensure that the church would not grow and develop during the time of the communist regime.

These are only some of the people who gave us interviews. Every one of them was a prominent authority in the area of their competence. Their opinions and remarks gave our documentary credibility.

#### Assistance of Volunteers

The major preparation for the movie production had already been done by Alexander Shevchenko's "Ugol" Studio in Sacramento, California. But now we required enormous assistance from a league of volunteers, members of our church and other churches as well. Identifying and selecting paintings by renowned artists that corresponded to the historical period of the documentary was an immense amount of work. We also found and chose musical selections by Russian composers to use. We did a thorough copyright analysis on these works.

But the most laborious part of the movie-making process remained the shooting of historical reconstructions. We had to scout out suitable movie locations. Fortunately, Fort Ross, built by Russian settlers in 1812, is located near Sacramento. Today, it is a state park and museum. With the help of the Consul of the Russian Federation in San Francisco and honorary Consul in Sacramento, we obtained permission to film at Fort Ross. But this was not enough. We also had to build studio sets. Artist Viktor Verkhovod, who participated in our literature events hosted by LOTOS, built the scenery for the Mongolian yurt and the monastic cells where the Orthodox Church Inquisition tortured the freethinkers. Another artist, Vladimir Yatchuk, together with his friends, built the chambers of the Moscow Kremlin. Vadim Sledz, a member of a historical club, provided us with replicas of ancient weapons. Artist Alexander Korba made poleaxes and muskets for soldiers. Peter Metlenko built a huge bell and models of sabers. Alla Protsenko, Igor

Kozin and Oksana Shvets, and a crew of tailors sewed costumes. Eugene Margovich became a casting director. Oksana Poplavskaya served as a makeup artist, and Tamara Shtezel as a dresser. All these people were members of our church. They, along with others, also became the actors in our film. Almost one third of the members of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center acted in our film.

Dmitry Orgin, a professional speaker from St. Petersburg, became the voice of our film. He recorded all narrations for free and, when necessary, rewrote them several times. However, he was not the only one who participated in making the film for free. Everyone from the artists and clothing cutters to actors and administrative assistants donated their time and talents. People were united and inspired to participate by the mission of the film.

#### Expansion and Unification of the Church

As we had hoped, the movie-making process unified our church members. An important and positive aspect was that this documentary was the project of not merely our church. Common challenges united people, mainly youth, from different churches and denominations. The teamwork grew into friendship. Almost all participants of the filmmaking visited the Ecclesiastes Worship Center. Some became regular visitors, and some became members of our church.

Also, the doors of other churches have opened for us. One of the most encouraging factors is the number of people who have watched our film on the Internet. As of August 2016, more than one and a half a million have viewed the documentary. In addition, our film has been shown in several cinemas in Ukraine.

Our documentary “Moscow—The Third Rome” has been translated into English and Polish, significantly expanding the breadth of its distribution. A group of Protestants from Poland asked us to translate the documentary into Polish, as Poland has common historical roots with Russia: at one time Poland was part of the Russian Empire. Our church services and social events as well as some interviews on the radio and articles in newspapers have attracted people, and Ecclesiastes Worship Center was becoming known among Russian-speaking people of Sacramento. The opportunity to participate in making the documentary became another reason for the popularity of the church. In 2014 as a pastor I was awarded with the Special Recognition Certificate issued by the California State Assembly for involvement with the Russian-speaking community.

#### Continuation of Other Documentary Productions

After we finished the movie “Moscow—The Third Rome,” which premiered in February of 2014, we continued to work on the series “The Slavic Nations’ Search for God.” The next movie we titled “Split: The Tragedy of the Century.” This film tells about the terrible circumstances that resulted in a split in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In our film, we showed the real reasons for the split. One of those reasons was the consequences of the bloody reign of Ivan the Terrible when, for example, the people began to worship the Tsar as God. As a counterbalance to the terror of Muscovy, the golden age of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania began. Thanks to the ideas of the Reformation adopted in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the nation became one of the most advanced and enlightened states of Europe.

Since we planned to show the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the center of which was modern Belarus, we decided to hold part of the filming there, so we could shoot many scenes in authentic historical places.

For this filming session people came not only from different cities of Belarus, but from Ukraine, Russia and Germany as well. Those who participated in the shooting became a cohesive group and continue to meet with each other and chat on social networks. Many of them repeated what we heard earlier from the participants of the first filming: working on this “missionary film” strengthened their own relationship with God, which had not been very strong. Some members of our church went with the crew on this trip. Still, most of the filming took place in California, which further united the creative team of our church.

The premiere of our film took place on May 26, 2015. In August 2016, the movie received the first prize at the International Christian Film Festival in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. Now at the request of the audience, this film is being prepared for translation into English.

#### Current Shooting and Plans for Future

Currently, we continue to work on the fourth and fifth films in this series. The premiere of the fourth film is scheduled for the summer of 2017 and is planned to coincide with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in Europe. Christian TV stations TBN, SNL and Impact TV will show our finished documentary series during the quincentenary of the Reformation. Also, preparations are underway for translation of “Moscow—The Third Rome” into Finnish and Chinese.

## Summary

This project is unique primarily because nobody has created a documentary about the history of reform movements in Russia from the time of its Christianization to the present day. Separate films devoted to a particular period of time, relating to a particular area or dedicated to a certain denomination do exist. However, they do not represent the development of the reform processes in Russia in general. Therefore, our documentary represents a specific educational interest.

This project is unique also because our documentary was created by young enthusiasts—amateurs. The impetus for the creation of this film was not the intention to share little-known historical facts, but a desire to talk about our ancestors' search for God, about their mistakes and misconceptions, and how God responds to such pursuits.

An expected benefit of this project was the growth of our church members. Since our project was interdenominational, they became more open to believers of other churches, becoming friends with many of them.

In general, this chapter is about how we seek to lucidly and clearly tell the story about God's readiness to answer people in their search for God. From a call to ministry in Sacramento, through the establishment of the church and its service to the local community, to expansion of it by creation of the documentary about the Russian reform movements—all this is a story about God's presence with Slavic peoples. In this Slavs are not different from other races and nationalities. Man is created to seek God. And if he persists in this quest, God always finds him.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS, SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of my project was to organize and expand a Russian-speaking, Sabbath-keeping, nondenominational church in Sacramento, California, with the research subject of how the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements would affect the development of this new church.

#### **Results**

By the grace of God through his call and actions on many people, the Ecclesiastes Worship Center in Sacramento started and continues. As already described, there have been ups and downs. The purpose of this project was to expand the EWC through the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. Several measurements indicate the level of effectiveness achieved.

1. Our attendance increased over the first few years of organizing as a church and then declined. But creation of the documentary and the completion of it yielded an increase in our regular attendance (see Figure 1).



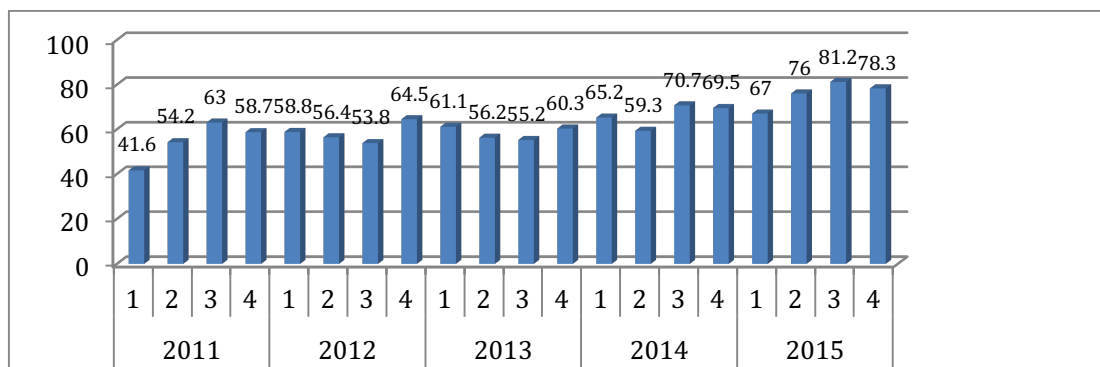


Figure 1. Quarterly report of EWC attendance for the first five years.

2. Nearly 200 new visitors have come to our church since the documentary was released in 2014.
3. In the production of our documentary more than 20 Russian churches were involved. The total number of people who participated in creation of this documentary series was over 400.
4. About 3,000 people attended two premieres of our documentary in Sacramento, CA. However, similar premieres of our documentary were held in Slavyansk and Zaporozhye, Ukraine; in Minsk, Belarus; in Ridder, Kazakhstan; and in Hanover, Germany.
5. After release in 2014 the movie *Moscow—The Third Rome*, we created another one: *Split: The Tragedy of the Century*. This film was released in 2015.
6. Currently we are working on films four and five from *The Slavic Nation's Search for God* series, which we plan to release in summer and fall of 2017.

7. Our films are presented on more than 100 sites on the Internet. The total number of hits is more than one and a half million. In Appendix E I have attached the names of some sites that host our documentary.

Here I presented results of expansion of EWC in terms of its connection with other churches, its influence on a wide circle of people, and growth of attendance.

However, taking into consideration the broad geographic spread of our documentary, the results could be even greater.

### **Summaries**

In Chapter 1 I presented a description of the ministry context of my project, the statement of the problem and statement of the task. I pointed out delimitations and described definitions of terms. At the end of the first chapter, I described the project process.

Chapter 2 contained a theological reflection of my project. There I showed that the initiation of my project was the great commission of Jesus Christ. I emphasized that unity among disciples was the main condition for receiving the Holy Spirit. This is also true for the participants of this project. I described God's bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament, linking this with Russian reform movements and modern history. I concluded this chapter with description of God's methods of information transfer and ways to use these methods in modern communication.

Chapter 3 was the literature review. That included observation of the literature about Russian colonization of America, waves of Russian immigration, modern problems of Russian immigrants and the historically religious foundation of emigration from Russia. I observed the history of the spread of the Bible in Russia, as well as the sources

about the role of the church in the integration of Russian immigrants into American society. In the chapter 3 conclusion, I reflected on my own ministry, which resulted in this project.

In Chapter 4, which was the description of the intervention, I presented analyses of the Russian community in Sacramento, California, as well as analyses of Russian-speaking churches in this area. Also, I presented strategies and methodology of establishing a new Russian church. With this foundation, I then laid out the plan for expanding the established church by creating a documentary about the Russian reform movements. At the end of this chapter, I attached Appendix A, which presented practical steps to implement strategies and methodology for this church growth.

Chapter 5 was a narrative of intervention implementation. In this chapter, I described the preparation of the project, the first steps of its implementation, challenges that accompanied these steps and ways our team handled these challenges. The chapter concludes with a description of the creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements. In Appendix B I attached more detailed story about formative period of Ecclesiastes Worship Center. In Appendix C I attached several stories of church newcomers who survived life-changing experiences.

The EWC expanded through the creation of the documentary. It increased the church's growth, attendance, and impact in the local community and through many places not even previously imagined because of Internet accessibility.

## **Conclusions**

The creation of a documentary about the Russian reform movements could be called the missionary work of our church. This work was done by members of our church

in cooperation with other churches and organizations. In our documentary, we raised important questions related to the pursuit of God by man. Using historical material little-known to a wider audience, we showed the human struggle for the right to believe freely and to communicate with God without intermediaries. This topic is particularly relevant today, when Russian immigrants have been subjected to pseudo-religious, nationalistic pressure from the Orthodox Church.

### The Restoration of Historical Truth

Our documentary was not intended to denigrate the Orthodox Church, but it did mention many Orthodox rituals that have no scriptural basis. It also showed that in the Orthodox environment there have always been people who sought the biblical God and His decrees. In their search for God, people always sooner or later faced the problem of observance of the Ten Commandments, including the fourth Commandment, which the majority of Christian churches ignore.

In her book *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White wrote that in the last days “the Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty” to God (White, 1911, p. 605). So, the Sabbath must be presented to the people as the “seal of God.” In our documentary, we reveal the history of Sabbath keeping by different generations of Russian Christians. In the film, *Moscow—The Third Rome*, such Sabbath-keepers are referred to as Judaizers. In the film, *Sects: The Attempts of the Orthodox Reformation*, on which we are working now, they are Molokans and the Stundists. God has always had people who keep His Commandments, and people today should know about this.

## Unification of the Church: Oneness in Christ

Creativity in the name of God animates and unites the church. The shooting of our film was another proof of that. Almost daily those who participated in the filming said that the joint work on the mission movie—that is what they called it—caused them to rethink their relationship with God. This was engendered by the content of the film about the resistance of Russian freethinkers, who preferred to be drowned or burned alive rather than to renounce their beliefs. For us, the film crew and the actors, the project was a real missionary work, which we did with prayer, and by helping and supporting each other. Any denominational difference was erased. On the set Adventists, Pentecostals, Baptists, Charismatics, Orthodox, and Messianic Jews were one family. Everyone did a great job for the glory of God.

One of the conclusions that I have arrived at is that we must be open to Christians from other churches and denominations. Through them God often sends help. Also, God can use His children to influence each other. When a believer is open before God and open to others, God does amazing things.

## The Church as a Workshop for Talent Development

Another element considered in this project is the influence of Christian art on the life of the church and interchurch relations. God has fashioned every human being as a creative person. And each one needs to develop the skills of that creativity. Such talent can be expressed in art, in medicine, in business, or in other types of activities. But it is crucial to develop and use these God-given abilities. The task of the church is not only to support the spiritual development of the individual, but also to assist the growth of creative gifts and provide outlets through which they can be used to glorify God.

Particularly, the creative talents of members made our church recognizable in the city. While many of the events members organized were not missionary in the traditional sense, they were in fact missionary endeavors.

### Creativity as a Tool of Church's Promotion

One of the conditions of church growth is the spread of information. Testimonies of the eyewitnesses involved in sponsored activities yields greater results than simply dry facts on the Church's website. We were helped in this by holding open social events. For example, the art-café Parkovka attracted Christian youth from other denominations as well as those who for one reason or another had no religious affiliation. Among them were many gifted young people who were happy to share their talents on the new stage opened for this. Because for every meeting we invited some musical group or singer who came with their fans, in a short time our Parkovka became very popular in the city. Several other churches have adopted this idea and have started to organize such events in their areas. And even though we are no longer the only church providing such Christian recreation for the youth in Sacramento, we are pleased that our example has influenced others.

Another example of church promotion through creative activities is the monthly meetings of poets and writers (LOTOS). The different format and focus of these meetings created an additional audience. These were older people, mostly well-educated, who appreciated poetry and art in general. Some of them were professionally involved in media production. Among them were writers and journalists, editors of newspapers and magazines, radio announcers, and hosts of TV programs. LOTOS started as a little workshop in private homes, grew into in a crowded, creative organization, so that our

church building became too small for it. And although a couple of months ago the members of LOTOS began to gather in another, more spacious place, in terms of advertising and communication in the creative circles of the city, that group has rendered us invaluable service.

### Pros and Cons of the Family Core-Group

Starting a church with a relatively large core group may be more effective than starting one with a small core group. A grandiose church opening often becomes the catalyst for its initial growth. However, in our case we researched the possibility of starting with a small family core group. The positive sides of this decision include the following:

1. The principle of the family core group is a biblical principle. We find it in the story of Noah's family whom God saved in the global catastrophe of the flood and directed to start a new civilization. It repeats with God's call to Abram to start God's people with a family called by the Lord and not yet created. Jesus used this principle when He created the first core group for His future church. According to the gospel, among His disciples were at least three pairs of brothers. These were the sons of Zebedee (James and John), the sons of John (Simon and Andrew), and the sons of Alpheus (Jude and James). The reason Jesus made this choice was simple: the brothers would stand up for each other. The same principle was used in the Soviet Army, where service for the male population of the country was mandatory. If brothers who were drafted into the army had a small age gap, the older one was given a delay until the youngest turned 18 so they could serve together.

2. *A group provides both cohesion and accessibility.* There is no need to call a series of business meetings when you can meet with your family every day to discuss problems and develop goals. Knowing the characters and abilities of each other makes sharing the roles and tasks in service much easier.
3. Trust in each other. Trust is acquired through socializing and experience in critical situations. It is an educational process that requires time. In a family where everyone knows each other, this time has already been provided.

Some problems arose, however, just because our core group was so small. These aspects include the following:

1. Insufficient number for the task. Usually the family group is too small for an immediate growth spurt of the church. The growth of the church requires a critical mass (McIntosh, 1999).
2. Homogeneity. The homogeneity of the family group can also be an obstacle to the church's growth. A more diverse core-group can attract a more diverse group of people.
3. Clan interests. Clan interests can appear in a family core-group, which can sometimes occur on a subconscious level, and this may prevent empowerment in the ministry of new people.
4. The uncertainty with continuity. Another critical area involves continuity. Very few such groups continue once the core family is no longer involved. This happens with small and also with mega churches.



We considered these issues before involving our family in the leadership. But the family has always been and remains the basis of support for our ministry. In our case, without support of the family, establishing the church would have been impossible.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the completed project, summaries, and conclusions, I have the following recommendations.

1. *Evangelistic efforts in our postmodern context call for new methods such as film creation.* Traditional evangelistic meetings in many areas have limited effectiveness. This is because the post-postmodern generation differs from the previous one by subjective acceptance of truth. For today's younger generation, there is no such thing as immutable truth that all must follow. Each individual chooses what one likes and what one thinks is right. Some are more willing to trust the Internet than the pastors of a church. Therefore, there is a need to present information in a way that is most effectively perceived and analyzed—through the Internet and social networks. In this case, the video format appeared to be the most effective. No wonder that the principle of the Ugol Studio, where our film was released, is the phrase: “People should know the facts; the conclusions they will make themselves.”
2. *Media ministry must be of high quality.* The creation of a media ministry is an excellent and very timely idea for any church. However, implementation of this idea requires equipment and specialists. In speaking of media ministry, we must demand high quality. Today Internet videos are so ubiquitous that the audience rarely pays attention to media with poor production quality. This applies to both

the selected materials and the caliber of shooting. To be sure, such quality comes at a high price, yet our experience has shown that if there is a true desire, the money can always be found, and specialists can be trained and developed.

3. *Care should be taken to reveal the true history of Christianity.* A study of church history reveals many little-known episodes and facts. While the video format can be a very effective way to bring this information to the public, diligence must be used to assure authenticity and accuracy.
4. *Multiple Christian faiths can yield more evangelistic results than single-denominational thrusts.* Multiconfessionality of the creative team is a great blessing for the project. The project not only brings together young Christians from various beliefs in their service to God, but also is a condition for the promotion of the final product. We found at the EWC that our own church grew in numbers and in spiritual development through the creation of this inter-faith documentary. We must not be afraid that someone will proselytize: It is only the Holy Spirit Who brings people to church. One must not limit the scope of God's influence by one's personal fears.
5. *Planting an immigrant church should include tapping into film production or other forms of art.* One of the problems for a number of immigrants is low self-esteem. Often a reason for this is a language barrier, low-wage employment or the lack of a job. Trying to express themselves, young immigrants sometimes make wrong decisions and commit illegal acts that can become a lifestyle that spirals downward. Participation in the documentary production, even on a voluntary basis, allows the immigrant to feel personal value. The specifics of the

genre, in which the narrator reads the voice-over and the actor does not say a word in the frame, allows even beginners to feel comfortable on the set. In such a situation a person's self-esteem rises, and in this sense the creation of the documentary is a tool for restoration of social equality, aiding in one's adaptation to a new environment.

6. *The church should have an environment that accepts the person as he or she is, and assists in the development of adaptation.* Christian sympathy and friendly assistance are the keys that open the human heart. Only the establishment of a close relationship can effect a change in the view of the newcomer and cause a desire to change one's previous way of life.
7. *The church must use all gifts and knowledge for God's glory.* Nothing in life is given frivolously. All that one has and is will be in demand in one's ministry. I could never have imagined that my youthful passion for theatre and cinema would be the subject of my service to the Lord. The main thing is that everything that one knows or is able to do should be directed to the glory of God.
8. *Make big plans.* Almost nothing is impossible for a group of people assembled by God. Unity in prayer and a desire to do something for the glory of God become a real creative and organizational force. Do not be afraid to put high goals before the church. In our case, it was a documentary production; however, the variety of types of projects is limited only by imagination. The Lord, in fact, initiates what the church does for His glory.

9. *Continue to shoot the subsequent series of the documentary.* Because the audience accepted the finished episode of our documentary with enthusiasm, work on the film should continue. The ten-episode documentary about the Russian reform movements can close the information gap in the history of religious reforms in Russia throughout the Christian Era.

To this chapter I attached Appendix D: Films of the Documentary Series *The Slavic Nation's Search for God*. In this appendix I have listed the names of our films that have been completed or currently are in production.

This project became a blessing for us. A local project turned into an international and intercontinental undertaking. As a result of this project a live and active Church expanded. Members of this Church are open to new methods of outreach and ministry to newcomers. By their involvement in the process of the documentary production they tell the story of how God is changing the world, responding to the prayers of those who seek Him. And more important—they are eager to tell others how God changed them. In this case, our project has not ended. It continues.

## APPENDIX A

### **Practical Steps to Implement Strategies and Methodology for the Expansion of the Church**

1. Church planting begins with the call. Time and circumstances of the call do not depend on us. God initiates this call. All we can do is respond to His call and choose direction. Heb 11:8; Rom 8:28-30;

2. The direction is chosen by praying. This includes meditation, analysis of the situation, and planning. For this purpose, God gave people wisdom and endowed people with the ability to think abstractly. However, because the call implies shifts in life situations, then it is necessary to understand where God calls you to move. 1 John 5:14-15; Jas 1:5-8;

3. The team or the core group, if possible, should be formed first. It is good if the team is comprised of close friends and/or relatives. But most importantly they must be devoted and driven by the same idea and filled with the Holy Spirit. To this core group of devoted ministers, the Lord will add those who are being saved. Acts 2:47;

4. The church plant should be focused on the needs of people and correspond to the cultural environment which it intends to serve. First, Jesus healed and fed the crowds, and only then did He preach to them. The Apostle Paul tried to reflect the cultural environment of those to whom he preached. Following these principles, the Gospel prevailed over the paganism and this good news of salvation changed the world. 1 Cor 9:19-22;

5. The focus of activity of the church must be very specific and must be evident in its name, as well as in the church's vision and mission statement. Church members should know the direction of the church and why it has chosen such a direction. Only by being united as one in their beliefs and plans will they be able to carry out the plans of the Lord. 1 Cor 14:8;

6. The church will grow when the talents and abilities of all of its members are used. Various programs, groups, and ministries are being designed for that. Every person is indispensable, and it is not by accident that God draws him/her specifically to this church. John 6:44; Eph 4:11-12;

7. Use of the latest technological achievements to communicate the Gospel is necessary to communicate vividly, differently than before, in a way that is memorable. Advanced technologies are included in God's plan for evangelizing our world. This must not be done by leaders alone; all the church must be involved in it.

## APPENDIX B

### **Details About the Formation of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center in Sacramento, California**

#### First Steps

In the organization of a church it is very important to make the first steps right. Selecting a leadership team, choosing a name for the church and focusing the vision largely determines its further development.

#### The First Meeting

During our research, we met with two families, acquaintances of our friends, who were residents of Sacramento. They said: “You’re God’s answer to our prayers! We had have been praying for a new church.” This affirmation was another indication that God had brought us here for ministry.

Together with these families we prepared our first worship service and shared it in a private home. It was Sabbath morning, the first day of a new year, 2011. Several people accepted our invitation and came to worship God with us on that day. It was a celebration, and we felt God’s presence!

At that meeting, we shared our experiences of how God had brought us to Sacramento, and we announced our plans for a church plant. People were excited, some of them expressing a desire to help us in ministry.

## The Name of the New Church

As I had planned earlier, our core group was supposed to be our family: my wife Lidia, our son-in-law Boris, our daughter Solvita and I. We were very excited about the new ministry that God had given to us. However, we also understood and agreed that in the future, our core group would expand to include some active members of our new church. On the very next day after Sabbath, we held a meeting with those who wanted to help. Among the subjects of our discussion was the name of our church. I suggested that we call our church the Ecclesiastes Worship Center and explained why. In fact, as family members, we had talked about that name earlier. Everyone agreed that the name Ecclesiastes Worship Center was catchy and captured the essence of our ministry, so that name was approved.

## Identifying a Vision and Creating a Mission Statement

In that same meeting, we started to discuss a vision for our church. As we had decided earlier with our core group, I expressed desire that our church would be open for everyone regardless of their spiritual background. So, we identified our target group as unchurched youth and young adults. To reach them for Christ would require all of us to be involved in their lives. The mission statement “Discipleship 24/7!” was accepted and approved. At the same meeting, we agreed on a contemporary style of worship, decided to provide discipleship classes and organized small groups for weekday meetings. In addition, we resolved to have social events (like Art-Café Parkovka) open to public.

## Choosing a Place for Worship

Since we had chosen Natomas as a location for our church, we needed to find a building for worship. We continued to pray, and God provided for us the best one! It was



the newly built office-style Natomas Crosspoint Church that featured a sanctuary seating 200. It belonged to a Northern Baptist congregation. (Three years later they merged together with a Laotian church and changed their name to Encounter Church of Natomas.) When we shared our experiences and God's answers with owner and Pastor John Stone, he said that this was an answer to his prayer too, for he had been hoping to have not only renters, but also partners in ministry. He gave us permission to use everything in the building for our needs. Again, God provided for us: not only a place for worship, but also friends and partners in ministry.

#### The First Worship Service

The first worship service in the church building was on January 8, 2011. It was only one week after our first worship service in a private home. We had twenty-nine attendees. The next Sabbath forty-four people gathered to worship in our church. On February 6, we had the first wedding in our church, and on June 11 the first baptism (three people). It appeared that the Lord was moving very quickly to establish our new ministry.

#### Building a Leadership Team

From the first meeting with our core group, we had prayed for people who would join the leadership team. We decided that we would invite couples for the leadership of this ministry. And because we already had two couples in our leadership team, we chose two other couples to join us.

#### First Social Services to the Community

Our great desire was to serve not only the spiritual needs of people, but their physical needs as well. Together with our new partners the Baptist church, we organized

a series of special events for the homeless. Members prepared meals and provided accommodations at the church for them. During these events, several hundred homeless people were fed and lodged in the church building. The first such event we had was April 18, 2011.

### Open Events for Everyone

As we had decided, our events were open to the public. One of our church's members was a poet who was involved in the Association of Poets and Writers of Sacramento (LOTOS). Despite this rather impressive name, this was a small group of talented people who had their workshops in private homes. We invited them to use the church building for their meetings every third Saturday night. During the first meeting (May 21, 2011) fifty-two people came, and over the next four months, membership grew to ninety. LOTOS was very popular. A number of people who initially came only to listen poems or to read their own eventually became members of our church. Another benefit we received from LOTOS was connection with the Russian media. Since we first opened our doors for poets, writers and journalists, we have received free access to Russian newspapers, radio and TV.

For youth and young adults, we organized café-type meetings. We called these meetings Art-Café Parkovka, which translates as "Parking Place." Our first Parkovka was in June 11, 2011. Fifty young people came to that meeting. The next Parkovka (July 9) saw seventy-five people; the third one (September 10), one hundred fifteen. For each meeting, we dramatized some current topic for discussion, invited guest singers and other musicians, played games, and addressed a spiritual component. For these meetings, our

sanctuary was transformed into a real café with round tables, bar, lights, etc., where people could order nonalcoholic drinks and snacks.

To fund mission projects, we organized several concerts. At the first one in June of 2011, we collected money for children affected by radiation in Belarus.

### Discipleship Classes and Small Groups

For those who were new to our church we organized discipleship classes. Using the models of Mark Mittelberg's, Lee Strobel's, and Bill Hybels' *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Mittelberg, 1995), and Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (Warren, 2002) we appointed leaders for small groups and for prayer teams.

### The Church's Initial Growth

In starting this new church, I planned a new strategy for sermons. Based on my previous experience, I knew that the most attractive form for listeners is a series of sermons. So, as the preaching pastor I prepared a series of sermons on life of Jesus Christ, trying to show Him in a new perspective. These sermons were illustrated with slides, videos and sometimes short dramas. Every sermon was recorded and shared for free. Soon I received an invitation to preach on the radio. Unfortunately, my time was limited and I had no chance to accomplish this media project.

Every Sabbath morning we had Bible classes at 10 a.m. We divided adults into two groups. One group, people with a Seventh-day Adventist background, studied our Sabbath School lessons. Another group, mostly people from other churches and synagogues, studied Torah. These studies of Torah attracted some Jews who became regular attendees. In addition to these adult classes, we had three children's classes, divided according to age.

## First Challenges

It would be impossible to establish a new church without at least some difficulties and losses. We became convinced of this fact through our own experience.

### Difficulties with the Nondenominational Character of the Church

In establishing Ecclesiastes Worship Center to be open to every person who wants to build up his/her own relationship with God, we had decided on a nondenominational, Sabbath-keeping, Bible church. As a foundation of faith, we used Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. We combined twenty-eight doctrines into eleven core beliefs. Everyone who desired to join the Ecclesiastes Worship Center received a copy of these core beliefs.

Elderly Russians, who in many cases are more conservative than Americans, look at nondenominational churches with some apprehension. They prefer to recognize each other as Baptists, Adventists, or Pentecostals. However, the younger generation is more open to such variety, accepting each other as Christians. For the young, the way you live and what you believe are more important than what denomination you belong to. Some of these young people would never come to an Adventist church; however, they will accept Bible (read: Adventist) doctrines if these are the doctrines or core beliefs of a nondenominational church.

Sadly, to many Adventists, a true believer is one who belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. And even if a nondenominational church has the same core beliefs, they look on such a church as being apostate.

## First Losses

In the Ecclesiastes Worship Center (EWC), this dichotomy created our first losses. In the beginning the majority of attendees were from an Adventist background.

They came from a Slavic Adventist congregation in Sacramento. They hoped that this new church would be called an Adventist church, and that they would become an example for those “unbelievers” from the Baptist, Pentecostal, and other churches. When these people realized that EWC would be a church where everyone is equally welcomed and important, one by one they left the Ecclesiastes Worship Center.

In spite of this, however, the church continued to grow. People who were disenchanted in their previous religious experience found a home in the Ecclesiastes Worship Center. A number these had been divorced and as a result were disfellowshipped from other Christian churches. Many had not attended any church for years. Some experienced alcohol and drug problems. And for some it was too difficult to quit smoking. All found themselves welcomed and honored in our church. Eventually our church got a nickname among Christians of Sacramento: Bethesda, a place where people come for healing.

#### Evaluation of Priorities

At this time we were forced to evaluate our priorities. On one hand was the desire to keep the church’s image pure. There were some people who worried about accepting those who had been considered anathema in other churches. “They have to be restored as members in their previous churches first, and only after that have they a right to become a member of our church,” they said. On the other hand, was the goal of being open to everyone who comes to EWC seeking to restore a relationship with God. “We should not worry about the image of the church in the eyes of others,” believed some.

## Correction of Direction

We finally concluded that if we want our church to truly become a refuge for the needy and suffering, we must be open to accepting people for who they are. God himself will change them.

### Broadening the Target Audience from Unchurched to Disenchanted

After some discussion and prayerful consideration, we decided to include in our target group the disenchanted also. Our decision was based on the Apostle Paul's statement that "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10). We agreed that we are sinners; however, sinners who are forgiven. Therefore, we cannot block the doors for those who willingly come to God for forgiveness. So, we broadened our target audience, adding the disenchanted to the unchurched.

Again, we lost some members, this time from our leadership team. However, God sent others to replace those who left. These new team members were people who had previously attended Baptist and Pentecostal churches, and a Messianic synagogue.

### New Concept of Ministry – the Word, Family, and Service

Proceeding from the current needs of our church, our leadership team developed a new concept of ministry for Ecclesiastes Worship Center. This concept was based on three Russian capital letters "С" – Слово (Slovo), Семья (Semya), Служение (Sluzhenie), which mean the Word, Family, and Service.

Word – God's written Word, the Bible, guides people to the Lord. Also, the Word is Jesus Christ himself, the LOGOS, who changes human lives. Since in our church we have people with different Christian backgrounds, Bible studies form the key element in the process of a unified and correct understanding of God's will, mission of the church,

and unification of faith. From my own experience, I have seen that the best method to reach that goal is to study the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I continued my series of sermons, “What Do We Know About Jesus?” In addition, we collectively explored the book of Revelation (including the prophecies of Daniel), and examined certain books of the Old and New Testaments in our small groups during the week. All these studies were structured to help people to find core beliefs in the Bible naturally. And because these were their own discoveries, they accepted them willingly.

Family – Today the majority of Satan’s attacks target the Biblical institution of the family. Knowing that, our leadership team chose the family, its protection and restoration, as a main priority of our ministry. Perhaps that choice was a reason the majority of our attendees are young families and single moms with kids.

Every Sabbath almost one-third of our attendees are children. For them we provide weekly children’s Sabbath School and frequent special events, such as concerts and dramas. These events are advertised through newspapers and radio. We invite children and teens from all over Sacramento to come and participate.

Some of these dramas are poems written by our church members who are members of the Association of Poets and Writers of Sacramento. Our church is actively involved in the cultural life of our city, and that association (LOTOS) has become one of our ministries.

On the first of June, 2013, a Protection and Children Priority Day, we presented the children’s drama, “Noah’s Ark.” Approximately forty children from all over Sacramento together with their parents came that night to EWC. The following November, we presented another children’s drama, “The Battle of Jericho,” with massive

walls in the center of our sanctuary, a model of the real Ark of the Covenant, and priests carrying rams' horns. It was a "real" battle in which every attendee was involved.

Hundreds of plastic balls were shot out of pneumatic cannons at Jericho. And when the city walls collapsed, all attendees, children and their parents, joined in the battle. At that presentation, we had sixty children and seventy parents. The next children's production was June 21, 2014. This drama, called "Jonah and the Pirates," was the story of Prophet Jonah's journey to Nineveh. On that evening, we had around one hundred children and seventy parents as our guests.

Because our church ministry targets the family and children, I was included in a group of pastors invited to prepare and lead a seminar for parents at Natomas High School, a rare opportunity in public schools.

Service – The mission of our church is based on words of our Savior: "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to recover sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18). It is difficult even to imagine how many people live today in these conditions. To support them is our privilege and duty.

To help achieve our goal of raising funds to aid the needy, our church organized a series of concerts, inviting well-known musicians and performers. Often the organizers of these concerts were people who themselves had previously come to us for help. Funds we raised have been directed to foundations here and abroad: to meet the needs of children affected by the Chernobyl accident in Belarus; to help orphanages in Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine; to participate in the collection of warm clothes for the villagers in Northern India and Nepal with the organization "ServeNow"; to "Two Wings," a group



that helps victims of human trafficking; and to support with basic necessities in several rehabilitation centers in California.

## APPENDIX C

### **Stories of Newcomers to the Ecclesiastes Worship Center**

#### Eugene

Two years ago, Eugene, a young gentleman in his late twenties, came to our church. Previously he had had serious problems with alcohol. Several times he went through rehabilitation in different rehab centers, and was a regular attendee of Alcoholics Anonymous. He was very genuine and sacrificial, actively involved in service for others. He confessed his sins before the congregation and acquainted us with his mother and sister who live in Florida.

Almost every morning I met with him for a short devotion and prayer. Several months later I got a call from his landlord for help. When I arrived at his home, I found him almost unconscious from the consumption of alcohol. I helped him up and put him to bed. The next morning, I received another call from his landlord: Eugene had disappeared. The owner now announced that the door of his house was closed for “that guy.” Having experienced similar situations in my previous ministry, I began looking for him on the streets. However, my search yielded no any results. Late at night, I got a call from the hospital where he had been taken by police officers. They asked me to pick him up. He was in bad condition, but was able to talk and understand what was going on. I found a place for him to live, a recently-opened rehabilitation center sponsored by some Pentecostal congregations.

God was merciful to him and changed his life. The administrator of the rehab center gave him permission to come to our church every Sabbath for worship and every Friday night for rehearsal and preparation of the sanctuary. His mom, who has not been a real Christian before, now calls us regularly and initiates prayers.

It was Eugene's dream to go on a mission trip. We found him such an opportunity in the fall of 2013. Together with a group from the charitable organization Serve Now, he went to India to serve street children in the slums of Kolkata (former Calcutta) and other cities. We believe that this experience will help him to understand how blessed he is and inspire him to share these blessings with others.

#### Kristina and Steve

Steve and Kristina met through recovery meetings for drug-addicted people. Kristina had been raised by her single mom. When her mother found Jesus in the Pentecostal church, she brought her daughter Kristina to the youth group. In the beginning, everything was great: new friends, interesting Bible classes. However, among the youth were some wolves in sheep's clothing. They introduced her to drugs, so while becoming a church attendee, she also became a drug addict.

Steve, a strong man and former marine who had served in the war zones of the Middle East, had become a heavy drug addict because of the tragic death of his twin brother. Drugs became a painkiller for his struggling soul. At the request of Kristina's mother, who became a member of our church, our entire congregation prayed for this couple for several years. And God created a miracle: I baptized the couple, and they became free from their addictions. The other good news was that they had a baby. Unfortunately, she again fell into her previous habits, and was unable to keep the child.

Currently she is once again in rehab. Together with her husband we are praying that God will free Kristina from that addiction.

#### Violetta

Violetta was born into a family of unbelievers. Having received a good education, she worked many years as a top manager for Moldavian TV. Unfortunately, she became seriously ill. Her progressing illness forced her to seek God and brought her first to the Orthodox Church, then to an Evangelical Church, and finally to a Synagogue. She found, however, that these congregations did not live and teach the truths she had read in the Bible. She told us, “Only when God brought me to Ecclesiastes Worship Center did I understand that this is a place I searched for all my life.” Today, because of her Jewish background and knowledge of Hebrew, Violetta is one of the teachers of our Bible research class.

#### Natalya

Natalya was born into the family of a Baptist minister. A complicated relationship with her husband, who was a church member and an alcoholic, broke apart her family, giving her a negative attitude toward the church. After repeatedly trying to find God in different denominations, she happened to come to one of our social events. And she continues to come every week, for she has found what she was searching for. Today she is actively involved in our church ministry.

#### Tamara

Tamara was born into a Baptist family and was very active in her church. However, a divorce damaged her spiritual life and pushed her away from the church. As a single mom, she continued to educate her two sons. Her second marriage ended tragically

when her husband, who was being treated for drug addiction, died from an overdose. But she found herself in our church, and today she is involved in our praise team and small groups.

#### Peter

Peter was divorced and has a second family. Before he came to our church, he had not attended any church for five years. Today he is involved in our children's ministries. He is the one who creates special events for children, like "Noah's Ark," "Battle of Jericho," and "Jonah and the Pirates."

#### Oksana

Oksana was born into the family of a Baptist minister. She married a young gentleman from her church. However, when her marriage broke up, she quit attending church. After a fifteen-year break, a friend invited her to one of our social events. She liked our church and became a member. After some time, she met a man and eventually they decided to bind their lives together. It was my privilege to conduct their wedding ceremony. Unfortunately, her husband was sentenced to prison for deals he had made several years ago. Currently in the prison, he shares his faith among other prisoners. Oksana remains actively involved in our church's ministry. Our entire church prays for her husband.

#### Anatoly and Loida

These people were members of different Pentecostal churches. Anatoly lost had his previous family due to the unfaithfulness of his wife. He became a member of our church. Loida was already a member of our church. Anatoly and Loida met at the

Ecclesiastes Worship Center and in due time were married there. Today they have two wonderful children: Bathsheba and David.

## APPENDIX D

### **Films of the Documentary Series, *The Slavic Nation's Search for God***

Film 1. *Christianizing of Russia*. Released in 2013

Film 2. *Moscow—the Third Rome*. Released in 2014

Film 3. *Split: The Tragedy of the Century*. Released in 2015

In August 2016, this movie received the First prize at the International Christian Film Festival in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic

Film 4. *Peter the Great. The Church Under the Scepter*. To be released in the Summer of 2017. Currently in production

Film 5. *Sects. The Attempts of the Orthodox Reformation*. To be released in the Fall of 2017. Currently in production

## APPENDIX E

### Sites That Host our Documentary

<http://hecrus.ru/bogoiskanie/index.html>

<http://dok-film.net/3325-bogoiskanie-slavyanskih-narodov-2013.html>

<http://howtoshka.ru/duhovnoe-razvitiye/193890-cerkovnyj-raskol-vnutri-pravoslavnoj-cerkvi-i-ego.html>

<http://akathistos.ru/watch/Rg--EatPQL8>

<http://bogvideo.com/movies/bogoiskanie-slavyanskih-narodov-2-moskva-tretiy-rim/>

<http://video.emmanuel.tv/watch/3846/>

<https://rutube.ru/video/e01f1e0c64109537d2a2dcd50ea0f4e/>

<http://kinorai.tv/2014/04/moskva-tretij-rim-vtoroj-film/>

[http://www.nsaportal.net/load/khristianskie\\_filmy\\_vse\\_serii/bogoiskanie\\_slavyanskikh\\_narodov/46](http://www.nsaportal.net/load/khristianskie_filmy_vse_serii/bogoiskanie_slavyanskikh_narodov/46)

<http://www.christ.ck.ua/?view=slav-5-14>

<http://pravoslavie.kinoup.biz/film/dokumentalnoe/659-bogoiskanie-slavyanskih-narodov.html>

<http://videohit.mobi/video/wHj8r49b6SUzTd5-ya9rvQCU/Pe9G3e-XUyo/>

<http://www.doclimit.com/kultura/moskva-tretiy-rim>

<http://baznica.info/video/bogoiskanie-slavyanskih-narodov/>

[http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian\\_news/22627-v-ssha-sostoitsya-premera-filma-bogoiskanie-slavyanskix-narodov-snyatogo-protestantami-k-1025-letiyu-kreshheniya-rusi.html](http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/22627-v-ssha-sostoitsya-premera-filma-bogoiskanie-slavyanskix-narodov-snyatogo-protestantami-k-1025-letiyu-kreshheniya-rusi.html)

<http://eglisebn.com/language/ru/raznoe/video-onlajn/dokumentalnye-filmy>

<http://bogoblog.ru/category/dokumentalniy-film/>



<http://beegfree.org/watch/97246030/169841381>[http://videoonlinehd.ru/smotretj\\_filjm\\_isoricheskiy\\_rimskiy/?id=z5H-kQZWXvk](http://videoonlinehd.ru/smotretj_filjm_isoricheskiy_rimskiy/?id=z5H-kQZWXvk)

<http://nmmclub.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=806055>

<http://sdradio.ru/index.php/dobroe-kino/item/9148-bogoiskanie-slavyanskikh-narodov-2-seriya-moskva-tretij-rim/9148-bogoiskanie-slavyanskikh-narodov-2-seriya-moskva-tretij-rim>

<https://buzina.org/golos-naroda/1666-raskol.html>

<https://chrontime.com/sobytiya/religii-i-verovaniya/velikiy-cerkovnyiy-raskol-1054-goda/27246>

Here are presented only some sites that host our documentary. The total of all sites is more than one hundred.

## APPENDIX F

### **The Condition of the Ecclesiastes Worship Center at the end of 2015**

Total number of members and regular attendees of the EWC is one hundred and thirteen. The age range can divide our Church into the following groups:

- a. From 1 to 12 years old – 18 people
- b. From 12 to 20 – 7 people
- c. From 20 to 40 – 31 people
- d. From 40 to 60 – 45 people
- e. From 60 to 90 – 12 people

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**Education:**

2017 D. Min. in Youth & Young Adult Ministry  
Andrews University, Seventh-day Adventist Theological  
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1991-2009 M. Min in Youth Ministry  
Zaoksky Theological Seminary, Zaoksky, Russia and  
Griggs University, Silver Spring, MD

1987-1990 Zaoksky Theological Seminary, Zaoksky, Russia

1984-1992 Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts  
Minsk, Belarus

1971-1973 Odessa Music College, Odessa, Ukraine

**Ordination:** May 4, 1991

**Experience:**

2011- Founding Pastor  
Ecclesiastes Worship Center, Sacramento, CA

2008-2010 Senior Pastor  
Denver South Seventh-day Adventist Church, Denver, CO

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	Denver South Seventh-day Adventist Church, Denver, CO
2003-2006	Pastor of Discipleship and Fellowship, The Edge Christian Worship Center, Brooklyn Park, MN
1997-2003	Senior Pastor Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Minsk, Belarus
1991-1997	President International Bible Society in Belarus
1988-1991	Vice President for Administration Belorussian Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church Pastor Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pinsk, Belarus
1983-1987	Pastor Seventh-day Adventist Church in Minsk, Belarus
1981-1983	Director of Youth Department Belarusian Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church
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1974-1977	Youth leader Seventh-day Adventist Church in Odessa, Ukraine
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