

Why Should Russia's Orphans Suffer?

Sidestepping political sparring to advance the gospel

In the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," a regular passerby cuts the alms of two kopecks he usually gives to Nokhem to one kopeck, explaining that he's had a bad week. The beggar's rejoinder: "If you had a bad week, why should I suffer?" Orphans in Russia might well be saying the same thing about a recent diplomatic spat between the Russian and American governments. Why should they bear the brunt of a round of tit-for-tat mutual legislative restrictions?

But they are.

On December 28, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed into law a ban on adoptions of Russian children by American citizens, apparently blocking the departure from Russia of hundreds of orphans expecting that they would soon go home with new parents. Earlier in December, the U.S. Congress had passed a bill which banned people from Russia accused of violating human rights from traveling to the U.S. and from owning real estate or other financial assets here. President Putin chose to retaliate by using orphans as pawns.

About 650,000 Russian children live in foster care or orphanages. But Russian law requires that only those who cannot be adopted domestically—usually for health reasons—may be made available for foreign adoption. So that leaves about 120,000 children in Russian orphanages—many sick or disabled—who are eligible for adoption but unlikely to ever find permanent homes. And beyond this huge pool of acknowledged orphans lies another 1-million-plus street children!

Some 60,000 Russian children have been adopted by American families in the past two decades, many motivated by Christian compassion. College Church members and missionaries who have done so include Stan and Faith De La Cour (2), Kent and Kristin Hughes (1), Todd and Sue Kelly (3), Dale and Susan Kemp (2), and Terry and Vonnie Van Someren (1).

Of the 60,000 orphans adopted by Americans, 19 have died due to parental abuse or negligence. In one 2010 case that led to a tsunami of outrage in Russia, a seven-year-old Russian boy was put on a plane from the U.S. back to Moscow after being adopted with a "to whom it may concern" note pinned to his clothes saying he was too much trouble to look after. (What is not publicized in the Russian press is the number of children in Russia—an estimated 1,900 in 2008—who die from abuse at the hands of their own parents or caregivers.)

It appears that nearly all of the up to 1,000 Russian orphans who might have found a home in America during 2013 will remain in orphanages in Russia. That is a grim prospect. Statistics reveal that only 10 percent of orphanage graduates will be

successful after departure. An additional 10 percent commit suicide, and as many as 80 percent become alcoholics and drug addicts. A majority become criminals, while thousands of Russian girls turn to prostitution. But on January 10, the Kremlin press secretary announced one silver lining: the 46 Russian children whose adoptions have already been approved by a court will not be affected by the ban but allowed to join their adoptive families in the U.S.

Anita Deyneka, the College Church missionary who is at the epicenter of the Christian response to these developments, posted these comments on huffingtonpost.com on January 7:

"As an adoptive mother, I've been anxiously watching the news of Russia's ban on American adoptions of Russian children. We've heard pleas from the devastated families who had already started the adoption process and don't know if their children can come home. While knowing that adoptions can be complicated and challenging, we've seen a surge in recollection of the joys of adopting children from Russia, particularly the heart of many Americans for disabled children. There has been much concern about what will happen to orphans with disabilities, since they have little chance of being adopted by Russian families. Such adoptions are common by Americans.

"Outrage at the injustice of a political move that has so clearly punished an entire population of orphaned children is an understandable and typical response. It is easy to become discouraged.

"How encouraging to know the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church has just called for more adoption by Russians inside their own country. Not widely known is that there is already a widespread, expanding movement among Russian Christians to adopt their own orphans. Russia Without Orphans is helping find caring homes for thousands of Russian orphans in their own country. . . . In addition, Christians in Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia and other former Soviet Union countries are fanning the flames of movements for orphans to be adopted inside their own countries.

"Despite the Putin ban on American adoptions of Russian orphans, there is still much that Americans can do to help the orphans in Russia by joining hands with people there who are caring and acting."

Anita Deyneka's long involvement with the Russian people mirrors the wrenching shifts they've experienced. Let's retrace her steps to see what has made her a pivotal figure at this moment of truth for Russian evangelicals.

Anita grew up on a farm at the foothills of Washington state's Cascade mountain range, near the small town of Leavenworth. She majored in English at Seattle Pacific

College and, before teaching high school English in a town near her home, spent three months teaching in Taiwan with that country's Overseas Radio and Television organization.

During those years, Russia was closed to missionaries. It began with the Bolshevik Communist revolution that led to the collapse of Imperialist Russia in 1917 and the founding of the Soviet Union in 1922. Under Joseph Stalin, as *Operation World* reports, "Deaths in the Gulag (prison camps) between 1920 and 1990 are reckoned at 20 million. . . . Up to 200,000 Christian leaders were martyred. Of the 100,000 church-owned buildings in 1920 (mainly Orthodox), almost none, by 1940, were in use by Christians; they had been seized or destroyed. Structures and ministries were emasculated or manipulated, leadership was cowed into compliance and compromise. Christians and their children were discriminated against and millions were consigned to years of imprisonment, exile or psychiatric 'treatment.' "

Peter Deyneka Jr., whose father, a Russian immigrant, had founded the Slavic Gospel Association, visited Anita's tiny church, where she was now Sunday school superintendent, to present the SGA ministry. His father's assistant, Peter had been briefly loaned to TEAM's radio station HLKX in Korea to help it beam Russian-language broadcasts into Siberia. Peter and Anita's shared interest in media blossomed into romance, and they were married in 1968. Presto; she was now a missionary!

During the administrations of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, SGA focused on providing short-wave broadcasts (in cooperation with 11 missionary stations, such as HCJB and TWR), and in publishing and clandestinely delivering Bibles and Christian literature to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. At its zenith, the SGA had a staff of 115 shoe-horned into four buildings on Wheaton's Washington Street across from our current Commons building. Books about the persecution of Christians in the USSR that Anita wrote, plus Peter's broadcast comments, resulted in their being denied visas from 1976 until 1989.

Through their contacts in the Soviet Union, the Deynekas learned of the overwhelming number and needs of orphans in the USSR. But almost no contacts with orphanages—even by national Christians—were then possible, and there was no ministry outreach to orphans. In 1987, Mark and Lilianna Marson, who had lived in orphanages in Colombia, joined their family. (The Marson and Lilliana Salas families remain part of the College Church congregation.)

The Soviet Union dramatically imploded, beginning during the years Mikhail Gorbachev presided, and climaxing with Boris Yeltsin's election to the Russian presidency in 1991. Fifteen states of the former federation, including those in Central Asia, were suddenly wide open to evangelism, church planting, re-establishing a Christian infrastructure, many partnering networks, theological

education and Bible translation and distribution. Churches grew. Evangelicals, once a hunted minority, experienced religious freedom after the collapse of Communism.

Mission- and church-based agencies poured in. It is estimated that the influx into Russia alone included as many as 500 organizations and 5,000 missionaries. Peter Jr., with his grasp of the Russian language and culture, was ideally suited to help coordinate this enthusiastic but chaotic development. He and Anita founded Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries (RM). They became College Church missionaries and moved their family to Moscow in 1991. Peter quickly became an indispensable channel between the freshly arrived agencies and the Russian evangelical churches. After working out of apartments, in 1994 they obtained their own office space.

Meanwhile Anita, with Mark and Lily, began to visit an orphanage for infants to five-year-olds, directly behind their Moscow apartment. Anita writes, "Who could forget the babies trembling with happiness at being held? Or the cluster of preschool orphans who started calling them 'momma' and poppa'?"

Increasingly, the Deynekas shuttled back and forth between Moscow and Wheaton, Then after a six-month battle with lymphoma, Peter died at the end of the year 2000. A year later, after a successor also withdrew because of illness, the RM board asked Anita to become the mission's president. Eight years later, Anita turned the presidency of Russian Ministries over to Russian national Sergey Rakhuba, one of five young men Peter brought to the U.S. for theological training back in 1990.

In recent years, as international adoptions from Russia and other former Soviet Union countries began to decline, and Russian and Ukrainian governments began urging their own citizens to adopt to counter their low birth- and high abortion rates, Anita, still a missionary and RM staff member, has devoted increasing attention to challenging Russian Christians to begin adopting Russian orphans. Adopting children hasn't been an established part of Russian culture. But now many churches, especially newer churches with younger members, are engaging with many needs of society—ministry to the poor, to widows and orphans, to those in prison, to those with HIV/AIDS, and to drug addicts. Ministries such as these, carried out by young leaders trained through Russian Ministries' School Without Walls are winning evangelicals a better name with the government and opening doors for collaboration with the Orthodox Church.

Anita's efforts resulted in a new RM initiative: formation of the Home for Every Orphan Partnership, an informal network which, exceeding all expectations, has placed 1,500 orphans in caring, Christian homes in Russia and Ukraine over the past two years. Many Russian and Ukrainian and three American Christian organizations make up the partnership. The lead American organization is Doorways to Hope, of which our own Sasha Parker is a board member. But Ukraine has taken the lead, enrolling 92 groups under its Ukraine Without Orphans umbrella. Its audacious goal

is to place every adoptable orphan in Ukraine in a Christian home within five years. The movement is spreading to nearby Belarus and Latvia. At a recent strategy conference in Singapore, the Ukrainians led a breakout session on adoption programs, raising interest in locations as diverse as Africa, India, and Indonesia.

A Russian Christian leader in the partnership said this about the mixed response of the Russian population to the adoption ban: "The majority of thinking people in Russia are against the ban The ministers of foreign affairs and education [and two other ministers] opposed it while it was being considered. Russian celebrities wrote the president open letters asking him not to sign the ban. Nothing helped. [But] every day on TV here in Russia, programs are showing orphans being robbed or mistreated by the administration and caregivers at the state orphanages."

Russia Without Orphans, a Home for Every Orphan partner, recently addressed the Russian State Parliament with a petition to permit disabled children to continue to be adopted by Americans—despite the new law—at least for several years while Russia develops national adoption for these children and better conditions for them in orphanages.

And on the afternoon of January 12, the Russian authorities allowed a protest march to be conducted on Moscow's Boulevard Ring during a strictly limited two-and-a-half-hour time frame. Despite freezing temperatures there were 9,500 marchers acknowledged by the police (at least 20,000 according to supporter estimates) carrying placards emblazoned with the word *Shame!* and demanding that the adoption ban be revoked. No arrests were made.

Is open mission ministry in Russia gradually being squeezed out? After all, freedom of religion, the equality of all religions before the law, and the separation of church and state are written into the Russian constitution. Much freedom remains. But the environment is tangibly less welcoming. Since 2000, under President Vladimir Putin, restrictions have steadily increased. And Orthodoxy's 1,000-year history as part of the culture of Russia gives that church enormous political influence. This, plus the excesses and insensitivities of some Western ministries in the 1990s and the new vigor of Russian nationalism, have led to the passage of laws that discriminate against other faiths.

Evangelical leaders report that the complex and ambiguous 1997 federal religion law, with its requirements for registering congregations and organizations, is being arbitrarily applied, along with building codes, in ways that make it difficult for their churches to function. Laws requiring educational licenses to conduct instruction are being misused to stop Bible teaching on the academic and even the informal level. These laws are also slowly squeezing out foreign agencies and workers, through legal challenges and visa regulations.

The difficulty of maintaining a long-term presence as a Christian worker has pushed other College Church missionaries to join Anita in adjusting and searching for fresh approaches:

- Our former missionaries Matt Miller and Sam Hanchett taught in seminaries, in Moscow and Ukraine, respectively, but have since shifted to other ministries.
- Greg Nichols (Greater Europe Mission) also taught in Ukraine, but then he and Debby moved to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he taught for ten years at the International Baptist Theological Seminary. The vast majority of its students came from the Russian speaking world. But now that educational facilities have become more readily available within the Slavic world, this school will be restructured and shifted to Amsterdam.
- Charley and Cheryl Warner (Barnabas International), help coordinate both theological education and national mission formation in the former Soviet Union. They have moved in and out of these lands from a base in Vienna, Austria, and expect to continue doing so from the U.S.
- Chad and Leanna Wiebe (SEND International) work with missions mobilization in Kiev, Ukraine. While Leanna is a native Ukrainian, they previously served with a Bible school in Russia's Siberian region.
- Jim and Ann Leonovich (Missionary Service International) move in and out of the former Soviet Union, helping national missionaries and church planters with radio, music production, and media ministries. They are reaching youths from non-Christian backgrounds with worship forms that are both truly Slavic and biblical.
- Mark and Marilyn Papierski, through Russian Ministries' School without Walls, are helping Christians who were denied education during the Soviet era become qualified professionals. They are also equipping them to bring Christian influence to bear in their various fields.

And Western Christians can continue to support their national brothers and sisters and have a strategic impact through short-term visits to teach, train, and help set up locally run ministries. For instance,

- Both Wil and Lorraine Triggs and Kent Cochrum have led STAMP teams conducting summer camps in Russia. This may well be repeated in coming years.
- You may join the Pray for Every Orphan network by going to prayforeveryorphan.org and receiving monthly prayer updates.
- Our own senior pastor is briefly visiting Kiev, Ukraine, in early February to speak at a Ukraine Without Orphans-sponsored "summit" of some 600 pastors and their wives from former Soviet Union countries. Its theme is "Defending the Fatherless and Changing the Nation." The title of Pastor Josh Moody's message, based on Galatians 4:1-7, is "Adoption: Gospel not Religion."