

KAZAKHSTAN REPORT

December 10, 2005

Dear brethren and friends,

The Lord's Church

In September's report I described the baptism of Kulsharia, Gulmira's older sister. She had been studying with us almost since the start of our bi-monthly Bible studies with Jumabai in the village of Chilik. As you may be aware, life in Rural Kazakhstan is difficult to endure when there is no fixed income apart from a small retirement pension and Kulsharia decided during the summer to relocate herself and her 2 sons to Almaty to look for work. Life has been even more difficult, I believe, since she made that move. The cost of living is comparably 10 times higher in the city than in the village! And she had been moving between temporary jobs and dwellings all summer. Brethren had been helping her too.

As I have previously written, Kulsharia had been the first member of that family to become interested in Christ (in 1997) and of course over the years she has built up a number of contacts amongst these religious groups, especially with members of 'New Life' (") charismatic Mega-church. They run a 'Bible college' that enrolls about 200-400 students each year. And when September came around this year, Kulsharia took off to get herself a Bible education for the next academic year! We were all a little surprised to be told of her decision, until we heard that 'New Life' pay their students to attend a stipend of about \$50 a month. Now this may not sound like a lot to you, but she is able to use that, attend 'college' in the mornings and find work in the afternoons and evenings.

[An aside: If they really do believe they have miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, why not just lay hands on all their students and impart 'the word of knowledge' (1Cor.12:8). And as an added bonus they could pay their students the full nine months stipend up-front and release them to go into all the world with this new knowledge. College enrolment begins 9am September 1st, and graduation ends 9.15am September 1st (No'!)]

Since then, it seems that Kulsharia has been deliberately avoiding us. We have constant contact with a lot of her brothers and sisters, and she seems not to want to be there when we are. Maybe she's busy. Or then again, maybe her conscience will not allow her. Please pray for her.

Alma has again succumbed to the pressures of the world and returned to her former life, forsaking the Lord. It seems that she has learned nothing from her sins and unplanned pregnancy and the shame she brought upon her family; everyone in her family has had to adjust to it, while she is off again living her life of selfishness. Her business is succeeding, she has money, her parents look after their grand daughter and she has returned to the pig-swirl. No doubt, when times are rough again (probably in early spring next year) she will seek us out again.

In October, the Moskvina family ' Slava, Elena and children Tanya and Pavel ' arrived from Nizhny Novgorod for an extended stay in Almaty. Slava wants to become a gospel preacher and so Charles invited him and his family to come and live and study here, where I am to teach him 'all things'. We'll see. I've organized classes daily in our home (Monday to Friday) on the topics of Preaching, New Testament Greek, Old Testament History, New Testament and The Work of an Evangelist. They plan to be here for about 6 months before returning to Russia to work there. Where 'there' is, seems not to have been decided yet, but there is certainly plenty of work for a man who wishes to bring the good news to any part of that vast country.

Shortly after the Moskvins' arrival here Kay, then Charles left for a stay in the States. Charles has returned to us, and Kay, Lord willing will be back by the end of next week.

Since my last report our Lord's Day attendances have averaged 17 souls, and 14 for our mid-week Bible studies (which continue in the letter to the Philippians). During November I was asked to preach on Child Discipline and The Kind Of Family That God Loves both of which topics the women in the congregation wanted to learn more about. I really enjoyed the preparation for these two lessons (Job42:5), and they were appreciated by most of the women in the assembly (though not all (!)).

Also, it was good to see both Gulya and Lyazat at worship recently. Gulya fell away from the Lord last year when He failed to furnish a US visa for her, and remained angry with Him and us for most of that time. But recently she has made contact again with Charles and has admitted that she did not conduct herself in the calmest manner during that time. Hopefully there will be more opportunities soon to talk with her about her spiritual condition and some citizen issues of a different nature. Lyazat was one of the 'disappeared' those two ladies who were dipped in May (while we were in Ireland). Kheyash has had some contact with her during the intervening months, but she was as surprised as everyone else when Lyazat came to worship. When asked 'why today' she simply answered, 'oh, I just wanted to.'

Bible Studies and Contacts

Our classes at the village have come to a stop. I am glad not to be driving the 2 hours there and then teaching a class before driving the two hours home, especially now that winter has arrived in southern Kazakhstan. I am also happy that our studies with Jumabai have increased. How can this be? Well, Jumabai has decided to move to the city for a rest, and so our classes in the gospel of John have now become a weekly event. In the beginning, these weekly classes were attended by some of the other Christians who thought that Monday evenings in Gulmira's home was a general study-time for all who wished to attend (Why they did not feel compelled to make the day-long trip to the village, I do not know!) But this misconception was placing a huge burden on Gulmira financially and time wise as Kazakhs feel bound to show (and accept) hospitality to strangers and visitors. Hopefully these other Christians will be wise enough to understand that different countries have different traditions and that as a Christian, rather than expect everyone to accommodate 'my way of thinking', that I need to 'become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some' (1Cor.9:22) and to Kazakhs I need to become a Kazakh! I have asked those others if they were willing either to hold this weekly class in their home, or to begin a new class in their home with just them in attendance. I am still waiting for an answer.

Recently, this class with Jumabai has been transferred from Gulmira's home to that of another daughter, Gulnara. (You may have noticed that Jumabai has a large family, I'm not sure if he has 11 or 12 adult children. Jumabai may not be to all that certain or the number either! J) She too has been a believer for a number of years and although formerly a member of a Charismatic church, she now frequents a Korean Methodist church. We have talked with her over the past couple of weeks and she has come along to one mid-week study. She seems to understand some of the differences between denominationalism

and New Testament Christianity. We have left some literature with her and I remain hopeful for a joyful outcome.

One interesting development since Slava's arrival has been Saulye's (our Kazakh interpreter) communication with him and his family. It may be that she feels she cannot be as open as she would like with either Charles or me 'as foreigners, or maybe her denominational attitude of the infallibility of 'the pastor' (as she refers to us) and therefore the inapproachability toward us or the prohibition on questioning our 'divine anointed authority'. But she readily and often phones and talks with Slava about spiritual and biblical issues. Hopefully the Lord can use him to show her the need to be saved 'His way.

The Lord willing, Martin Broadwell from Atlanta GA should be with us some time toward the end of January next. We hope to put his great experience to work for the two weeks that he will be here. The first week we intend to hold public meetings each evening to preach the gospel and we will be organizing the logistic for that soon. And during the second week we'll organise house meetings to edify the Christians. Please pray for both of these meetings.

Personal and Family

It is difficult to believe that our small family is growing up and it is happening so fast. Esfir will be 1 next week already. And her playful character is becoming more and more apparent as each day passes, while Ruth is much more affectionate and gentle than her younger sister. I can see one possible reason why the Holy Spirit states an elder should have believing children (plural). Coping with different personalities within the same physical family will better equip a man to cope with different personalities within the same spiritual family. But just being a 'dad' is its own reward.

And the Lord has been extremely gracious with us regarding our rebuilding work. Our workmen managed to place the final block on the boundary wall, and twenty minutes later the first snow began to fall. We have managed to place a new roof on the house (only thanks to Charlie's immense skills) and our house is ready for the coming winter. All that's left is the repayments!

I have not yet applied for my pink card 'permanent resident's permit' as both time and money have been too short to pursue the legal and bureaucratic paper-chase. So for the moment, I will need to renew my visa and regroup my thinking to begin the process again. My present visa expires next Saturday.

Brethren, Ramash and I really do appreciate your support. Your financial sacrifices on our behalf make it possible for us to be here, and your prayerful support, emails and letters, make it possible for us to continue. We give thanks daily to the God of all grace for brothers and sisters who love us and care so much for us. Thank you.

Michael and Ramash Connolly

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