

# KAZAKHSTAN REPORT

May 2, 2005

Dear family, brethren and friends,

Greetings from a warm Kazakhstan. It seems here that we may have all but by-passed spring and gone straight to summer. Temperatures have been touching the 90's Fahrenheit (32C) on a couple of days, and the mid-term forecast is for hotter weather. And April has only just ended! But we're not complaining too much around here after the coldest winter in 50+ years.

Our president here has recently passed a law, sponsored by Kazakhstan's secret police "KGB" that may have repercussions for us preaching the gospel. This new law is an amendment to the already existing "law on religions" but has been amended to ban and punish "the activity of unregistered religious organisations." Fines amount to 100 times the minimum wage for "leading" religious activities or for proselytizing or preaching and a fine up to 50 times the minimum wage for being part of an unregistered religious assembly (and this fine can be repeated for each occasion an infringement is made). It has been pointed out by many in parliament that this new law will be both unconstitutional and a deliberate defiance of international human rights commitments, but as yet it is untested. Please pray for us, that we may be able to use this present situation profitably to bring God the glory and the good news to the people of Almaty and Kazakhstan.

## The Lord's Church

April's spring weather certainly brought along some growth with it. We are rejoicing with the conversion to Christ of Kanat and Nurserik during the past month. It is always a real joy to witness the rebirth of water and the Spirit and more so when numbers are small. Both men have been a great encouragement to all both by their commitment and by their attitude of humility. Hopefully they will grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord to the point that they will be able to teach others about the gospel of His love. Please keep them both in your prayers.

Our other arrival came in the form of Jasmin Auesova, Alma's baby. Initially, when Alma was released from the hospital, things were very difficult and it would have been hard for a stranger to make out if her family was celebrating the birth of a newborn or the death of a family member. But things have settled down a little now, thanks mainly to Kheyash and Konisbai, who went to visit Alma and her parents about a week or so later, and manage to talk to Alma's father in a compassionate and understanding way so that he has finally reconciled himself to his new grandchild. But there will still be huge obstacles ahead for mother and daughter in dealing with the stigma of an unmarried mother in Kazakhstan.

Gulmira has asked for Christians to pray for her as she ventures to buy an apartment in which to live with her two children, Gaziz and Shirin. She has arranged a mortgage through an "intermediary" and is hoping to finalize everything by May 20th. But I believe that this will only be the beginning of troubles for her, as it is a sizable sum by Kazakh standards, and she has no fixed income or employment to meet these sizable repayments. If I understand things correctly, her "intermediary" will effectively be the one buying the flat, and leasing to Gulmira for the duration of the mortgage, until the debt is completely paid. She will then receive the deeds to the property. But if she reneges at any stage, legally and practically, she will forfeit everything! It all seems very reckless. And please, do not think that this is an appeal for Christians to help bank-roll her new venture, I am just trying to make you all aware of the impending troubles.

On a much more positive note, Gaziz has been haranguing me to preach! We have sat down together and talked on a few occasions over the past number of weeks and he prepared well for the task. So, yesterday morning he presented his first sermon. It was a joy to watch and listen as he gave his first lesson to an audience. It bodes well for the future of the congregation and the work here in southern Kazakhstan.

Charles and Kay Gant should be back in town later this evening after spending a month in Ukraine, staying with Matt Duggin for a week or so before he took off. They have been teaching and encourage the Christians in Mariupol on the Azov coast; Charlie filling in while Matt is away and Kay taking the opportunity to teach women's classes. We are all looking forward to their return.

During the month of April our attendances for each Lord's Day assembly and mid-week Bible study were 14 and 10 respectively. Bible Studies and Contacts  
Our classes continue as before.

We will be finishing the book of Hebrews this coming Thursday and will hopefully begin studying Ephesians shortly.

And we continue to make the journey to Chillik to visit and study with Jumabai and his daughter, Gulshiri. On the last two occasions we have been joined by a young neighbor of theirs Shakainur, who has been enthusiastic about our studies. Although Jumabai is the only Christian there, the others also have a zeal for the Lord (Rom.10:2). We are still studying in the gospel of John with them. Konisbai has come with me and has acted as interpreter for me for the classes, translating into Kazakh for those present.

## Personal and Family

The Lord willing, Ramash and I will be traveling to Ireland with the children this coming Saturday (May 7th) and will return to Almaty on June 8th. We are hoping to use the visit to organize passports for the babies and to begin the process of obtaining an Irish passport for Ramash, as well as obtaining one or two necessary documents in order for me to acquire a Kazakh resident's permit (that list is 23 items long!).

We want to thank those of you who have contacted us with offers of financial help for our trip. For the moment, we do not want to place any more of a burden of good and conscientious brethren than we are already making by our working here. But it is pleasant to know that brothers and sisters in Christ are so eager to share with us. Thank you all for your continuing prayers to the Father on our behalf.

May God bless you all,

Michael and Ramash Connolly