



## Vladivostok Mission Trip

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## Vladivostok, Russia Mission Trip Report

Gregg Marutzky and Charlie Sawyer

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### **Philippians 1:1-11**

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.*

Brothers and Sisters,

Charlie Sawyer and Gregg Marutzky got back from Vladivostok, Russia on December 11 after ten days visiting Vladivostok, Spassk-Dalniy, and Moscow, Russia. We had a tremendous visit with the brothers and sisters that reinforced our love and support for the Eurasian churches.

We arrived on Thursday afternoon and took the rest of the day to rest and recover from the long trip. Vladivostok is a mere 16 time zones from Omaha and Kansas City where we began.

We went over to especially support the families in the churches with instruction and counsel in marriage and parenting. On Friday we met with the Vladivostok church board and had an incredible lunch discussing the administration of the church. It was obvious they had great hearts and were serving with zeal and faith. A couple of the brothers on the board had been on staff but due to a decrease in support were no longer working for the church.

The rest of the day we met with couples for personal attention for their marriages. We felt so loved and honored in Russia by the brothers and sisters. They are hungry to learn and every couple sought input in their relationship and displayed great openness. Many of the life situations for the couples are difficult due to having to live with extended family in small two or three room flats. Some of the extended families are not Christians which makes things difficult on the marriages and on parenting.

We ended the day with a fantastic dinner with the church leaders Sergey and Martina. They have a beautiful daughter named Eve, who is active in gymnastics and a creative writer. Eve wrote a story and poem for us while we visited. It is a great blessing to the church that Sergey speaks and reads English. We brought about 25 Christian books to Sergey to read along with some Tabasco and A-1 sauce as he requested. Martina and Sergey will be moving to Moscow in the spring.

On Friday night Vladivostok received 18 inches of snow, so getting around the city was very difficult. Many Christians were not able to dig out their cars to attend some of the sessions. A couple of times during our trip we were stranded in traffic jams for lengthy periods of time due to accidents or stuck cars blocking the narrow streets. But a winter trip to Russia would not have been complete without the record setting snowstorm. We praise God for the dear brothers (Paul, Volva, Vladimir, and Sergey) who gave us rides to and from the hotel. They had 4-wheel drive vehicles that had been imported from Japan which is just across the sea from Vladivostok.

On Saturday we held both a Parenting Workshop and a Marriage Workshop. Gregg taught the Marriage class and Charlie taught the Parenting session but we both spent considerable time in both workshops answering questions together. It seemed like the question and answer portion of all our programs were the most helpful. Sergey translated for us which became grueling as the week went on. He did a fantastic job after we realized the limitations of his English vocabulary. We would rephrase our thoughts as we spoke until he could translate in Russian. We filled the rest of the day getting with couples for personal attention and then closed the day with a great pizza party with family group leaders at Sergey's apartment.

On Sunday Charlie led an inspiring Leaders Meeting and Gregg preached. The message was from Joshua 1 and Acts 2 on claiming Vladivostok for Christ based on God's promise to Joshua and gaining a vision for the church from Peter's sermon on Pentecost. We fellowshiped until the lights were shut off in the hall. It was a great Lord's Day! Both us fell in the snow outside the meeting hall, Gregg on the way in and Charlie on the way back to the hotel. God has a way of keeping us all humble.

Monday was an adventure to Spassk-Dalniy which took 6 hours on rough roads. But the visit to the church of 50 brothers and sisters led by Dema and Tonya was moving. The congregation has about 35 women and 15 men which provides a challenge. Dema is on staff and Tonya cares for their two children in an old farm house built over 100 years ago. Their modest home was humbling as we witnessed this young couple living a very sacrificial life to minister in this small city. We emptied our wallets of our "emergency money" and gave it to Dema after witnessing his humility. The church requested we teach a lesson on Spiritual Growth. Gregg used Philippians 3 as the text to illustrate Paul's desire to mature by "Knowing Christ." We had an incredible breakfast with Tonya and Dema as she prepared Russian pancakes and a breakfast

pizza for us. It was very inspiring to witness Dema's ministry. Charlie gave Dema a red Kansas Jayhawk sweatshirt and Gregg gave him a Husker football jersey. We gave several of the couples on the trip sweatshirts for the men and make-up for the women.

Charlie gave a fantastic lesson on "Maturity" back in Vladivostok Tuesday night for the congregation from Hebrews 10. We again answered questions from the audience until the lights were turned off. It was an emotional good-bye as we left for home the next morning. It was amazing how bonded we were with the brothers and sisters after just a week together. The church has a tremendous respect for Charlie due to his previous visit three years ago. Charlie remembered so many names and even recalled prior conversations with the disciples. We talked on the way over that the plan was to give and give while we were there and not rest until we got home. Pouring yourself out to the Christians was not difficult due to how much more they seemed to give to us.

Overall, we are so grateful to have been able to go on this trip to Russia. The churches are so encouraged when they see disciples who are older in the faith and have life-experiences that they can learn from and imitate. The pure-heartedness of the Russian brothers and sisters called us back to our first love. Their challenging circumstances provide perspective for us living in the first-world to be very grateful for our lives. We were reminded of how important mission trips are to the support of foreign congregations. The churches are very grateful for our funds but also want our hearts and teaching.

In the message this Sunday Gregg showed the church in Omaha a small framed picture of a drawing that Vikka, Dema and Tonya's daughter, had given him in Spassk-Dalnyi. He was so humbled by the gift. Here was a little girl who played with paper cut-out dolls because they had to live so modestly, giving him a framed picture she had drawn. We are sure it was her most-prized possession. Gregg felt overwhelmed with a gift he did not deserve. During this Christmas season we should appreciate the greatest gift ever given, Jesus Christ, another gift we did not deserve but one that makes us eternally grateful. Gregg put Vikka's gift in his office to remind him of her, God's gifts, Eurasian Missions, and what life is always to be about, serving others.

Sincerely,

Gregg Marutzky, Evangelist- Omaha Church of Christ  
Charlie Sawyer, Elder- Kansas City Church of Christ

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

*Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*