



WINTER 2019

# READ Ministries

Taking Truth to Tough Places

Resources for Evangelism And Discipleship in Ukraine and other parts of the Former Soviet Union

## Moving Forward... TOGETHER

### THREE COUNTRIES, ELEVEN FLIGHTS, 15 DAYS

By Sharon Sheppard

The schedule for Steve Eckert's first foray into Eurasia as READ's newly hired Executive Director was not for the faint-hearted. The total immersion into traveling from one time zone to another, meeting new people of varied ethnicities and languages at every stop, and adapting to each group's differing needs and expectations left little time for boredom.

The whirlwind of ministering in three countries in rapid succession--Moldova, Kazakhstan, Belarus--kept the Eckert/Arvan team on the move. But Steve says, "God does more than we can ask or think, and the welcome was gracious wherever we went. Conversations were heartfelt, and any doubts or fears I may have had were quickly put aside."

**MOLDOVA:** Bill and Steve and many of our READ partners participated in a General Assembly of representatives of the Euro Asian Accreditation Association (EAAA), an educational organization of theological schools concentrated in Eastern Europe and in some of the Baltic states. The conference was hosted by leaders of the University of Divine Grace (UDG), the flagship Christian University in Moldova. READ then hosted a seminar on Saturday for 50 committed pastors and leaders from the greater Moldova region, presenting each of the attendees with a new library of 20 theological books. READ distributed more than a thousand books there, half in the Russian language and half in Romanian. *continued on page 2*



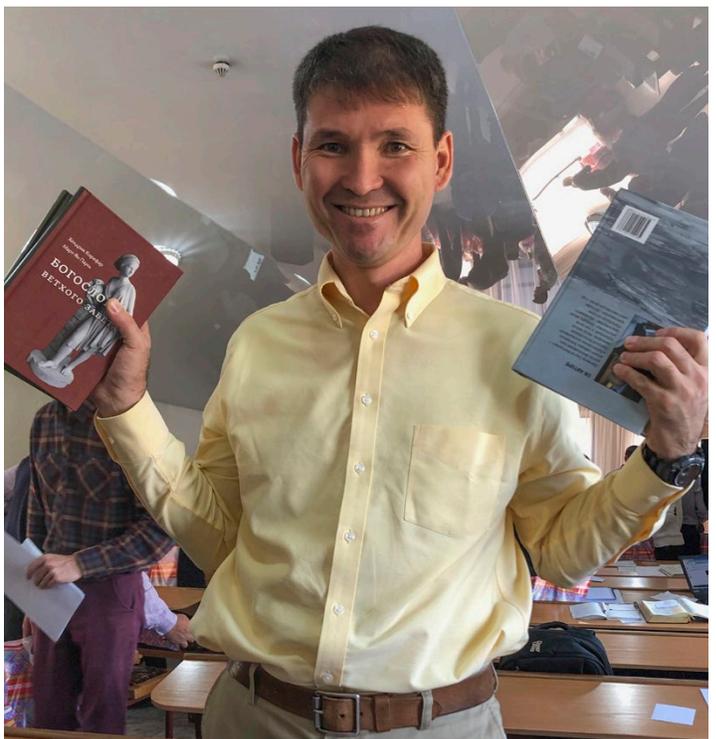
**KAZAKHSTAN:** READ helped sponsor and resource a two-day conference at Almaty Bible Institute (ABI) for 60+ pastors and leaders from several Central Asian countries. Theological lectures on the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism were featured. Bill Arvan spoke twice, and READ presented each attendee with a new library of theology books.

Steve says the conferences at UDG and ABI were both were extremely helpful. "I met incredible ministry partners and a host of younger men I hope will be future READ partners. Some young, sharp leaders run these seminaries, so READ is investing in generations to come.

**BELARUS:** The Eckert/Arvan team spent two days at Minsk Theological Seminary. Steve says, "I saw Bill at his best there at the opening day of training for church librarians." The new students were eager, but were obviously apprehensive. They were all women, and ranged in age from early twenties to mid-fifties. Bill was able to loosen them up with humor by telling them he was a most unlikely person to have gotten involved in starting a program for library training. "When I was a kid," Bill said, "I got sent to the library as punishment. Then when I got into my teenage years, I hung out at the library, not to read, but to meet girls." Librarian training is a unique niche for READ. Steve says, "I appreciated their holistic view of ministry where women are affirmed and empowered in their role as ministers within the church. It is so healthy in every way."

**STEVE'S KEY ENCOUNTER:** Probably the most memorable scenario took place as they were finishing up their lunch in the cafeteria of Almaty Bible Institute after most of the others had cleared out. As he lingered, Steve visited with a pastor of a small underground church in a very restricted Central Asian country. His small congregation pools their meager resources to care for children no one else wants. Finances are tight, but they love and care for these children by feeding about 50 of them three meals a day. Kairat, a young man in his mid-thirties, originally from this pastor's country, was eager to try out his English by translating for Steve as this courageous pastor shared about his situation. Because this country is so restricted,

**“ AS I PRAYED WITH THIS DEAR BROTHER IN CHRIST, MY TRANSLATOR BEGAN TO WEEP. LARGE TEARS STREAMED DOWN KAIRAT'S FACE AS HE CONTINUED TO TRANSLATE MY WORDS INTO RUSSIAN”**



this pastor was sad because he could only chance bringing one book across the border from his stack of 20 new books READ had just given him. The danger of severe persecution is very real, so when it comes to bringing Christian materials into his country, caution is extremely important. Steve asked if he could pray for him. "As I was praying," he says, "I asked God to help this pastor's church find favor with the powers that be so they would be protected from persecution. I prayed that he would be able to find the resources and freedom to continue helping these children at risk. And as I prayed with this dear brother in Christ, my translator began to weep. Large tears streamed down Kairat's face as he continued to translate my words into Russian.

"The power of the presence of the Holy Spirit was so very evident to me that afternoon. I sensed a holy moment had taken place - a moment I will never forget. We all felt overwhelmed with sadness and also great hope for this pastor. There were hugs, and I felt a deep bond in Christ as a part of His Kingdom on earth."

**BILL'S KEY TAKEAWAY:** Bill has rave reviews for Steve's accomplishments on this, his first trip as READ's new Executive Director. Their time together during these 15 days in October was a real encouragement to Bill personally. "It was thrilling for me to see how Steve's personality and age—not too young and not too old—a definite asset in Eurasian ministry contexts—made it easy for him to connect with the people. And his 30 years of church ministry experience lent credibility that gained respect for him with READ's current partners." Citing Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he says, "I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative," Bill says, "I feel about Steve as Paul felt about Titus. I am so very grateful for his partnership in this ministry."

As a result of this trip the two of them took together, and the networking that took place at some key events in Moldova and Kazakhstan, invitations are coming to READ from neighboring countries. Bill says, "We are now working in eight countries, and it is tempting to view opening doors to new ministry opportunities through the lens of "giants instead of the grapes," as most of the Hebrew spies did when they went to check out the land of Canaan. Our giant, the balance sheet's bottom line, may seem like an overwhelming obstacle. But succumbing to fear will defeat the faith required to respond to these new requests. Only keeping our eyes on the Lord and His promises and His sufficiency will fuel the needed faith, without which READ cannot please God as we seek to respond to these growing opportunities."



# Some Thoughts for You to Consider and Pray About

By Bill Arvan

READ's ministry plans are shaped in large part by the providential meetings we have with national church leaders and the pleas we get from them for ministry tools and training for their churches and pastors. Just as the Apostle Paul and his missionary team concluded that God was calling them and directing their evangelistic ministry's next steps through the man from Macedonia, we often find the Lord directing our next ministry initiatives as we meet church pastors and teachers and hear their requests to "Come over and help us with Bible-based books and training."

In October, Steve Eckert and I were in Almaty, Kazakhstan, attending and speaking at conference for church leaders from Central Asia and southern Russia. Talgat, a church leader and educator from a city in southern Kazakhstan, spoke English very well and did an amazing job as my translator. Near the end of our time together, Talgat shared with me the need for Christian books in the Kazakh language, not just Russian tools which he can use in his ministry, but many others can't. Here are the key points he shared with me via an email I received from him in early November:

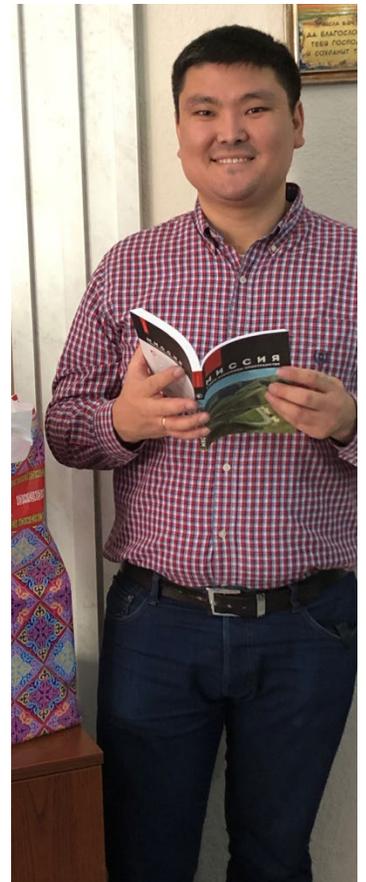
- » *There are very few books in the Kazakh language*
- » *False teachers are providing their materials in Kazakh (books, articles, and videos)*
- » *We do not have tools to refute the false teachers and their apologetic against Christianity*
- » *A new generation of Kazakhs are growing up who do not know Russian*
- » *There are 40,000 Kazakh-speaking believers in Kazakhstan, out of a population of 11,000,000*
- » *Only about 1,000 indigenous, Kazakh people attend Russian-speaking Baptist churches*
- » *Since 2009, 30% of the Russian-speaking members of Baptist churches have left Kazakhstan*
- » *Persecutions will return, and we need to strengthen the faith of believers now*
- » *Many other ministries feel that serving the Kazakh-speaking people is not worth their attention*

The need for Christian materials in Kazakh is just one of seventeen requests READ has received from ministries working in Central Asia, Siberia, Moldova, and Ukraine. READ has never in its history had such an abundance of new requests for tools and training. These new requests are in addition to the existing ministry initiatives READ is already committed to funding in 2020.

To say "yes" to these new opportunities, READ will need an additional \$75,000. Please pray for READ's leadership as we craft our 2020 budget and consider how to respond to these new opportunities. Please consider a year-end gift to help READ finish well in 2019 and start strong in 2020.

Talgat concluded his recent email to me with these gracious words:

*"I understand that you have not promised us anything for certain, but these are some thoughts for you to consider and pray about. Thank you for those books. I am using them already and they are helpful. Blessings, Talgat"*





# Gifts to Others this Christmas Season

**This time of year as it is with many ministries, people consider how use their year-end giving in a way that will be a blessing to others.** READ has been presented with new funding requests that are asking for resources dedicated to evangelism and discipleship from countries all across the former Soviet Union; areas like Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people who are hungry for theological materials in their own language. However, these requests come at a time when READ is faced with a significant financial challenge.

But, God is faithful. Christmas is a season when we take time to reflect on and celebrate the gift that God made available to each of us; salvation through Jesus Christ. READ is celebrating a monetary gift that came in from a group of dedicated supporters who have stepped up and challenged us to raise \$50,000 before year-end. If we are successful, this group of gift givers will graciously match these donations with another \$50,000!

We wholeheartedly accept this Christmas challenge! If you've ever wanted to double your investment in God's Kingdom work, now is your chance. Between November 1st and December 31st, this group of gift givers will match donations up to \$50,000. The end goal is to raise \$100,000 to help us meet our current commitments and respond to new requests for help in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Please say "yes" today enabling us to respond to requests like Talgat's and others who are eagerly searching for sound theological materials in their own language to bring truth to their people.

We pray that as you pause to celebrate the Giver of all good gifts, you will prayerfully consider your investment in gifting our READ partners this Christmas.

## Thank You!

(Online giving is available on our website at [www.readministries.org](http://www.readministries.org).)



# Dear READ Friends,

I have been with READ for almost two months as your Executive Director. It has been a wonderful start as we gathered with almost 250 of you at our READ dinner celebrations this fall and I just returned from a 15-day trip to three countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. I am grateful for this new opportunity to lead a growing and effective ministry like READ. God is good.

At our dinner celebrations, I shared a theme as I begin my ministry with READ. It's a tag-line I heard from a Minneapolis tax firm which says, "Being BIG on relationships is the only BIG that matters." To be clear, this theme is and always has been God's idea. God is all about the BIG of relationships. It is lived out in the salvation thread that runs through the entire Bible that started with Adam and Eve and will be realized someday when we experience the eternal reality of the BIGNESS of our relationship with the Triune God.

READ ministries needs to move forward together in BIG God-sized relationships that make an eternal difference by "Taking Truth to Tough Places." Our movement includes learning from those who bring leadership and wisdom from many years of faithful service, and drawing in a younger generation with new ideas, new resources, and new ways to communicate the timeless work of the Gospel...for generations to come.

Generous ministry partners have led us faithfully over these past seventeen years and we look forward to what God will do as we seek to add a new generation of partners and supporters. You are a part of this next step of "moving forward-together." I hope you will be encouraged to consider how you can personally become involved as a ministry partner with the READ family.

I am honored that I have been chosen to lead READ in the days and years to come. I humbly ask that you will give me grace and space to learn and to lead this ministry forward along with our committed board and staff and the faithful and generous READ supporters like YOU.



Steve Eckert  
*Executive Director*



## Gifts Given in Memory of

**Alan Moir**

*Earl and Marge Anderson*

**Bill MacKinney**

*Karin MacKinney*

**Clara Pareigat**

*Gerhardt and Joyce Pareigat*

**Enid Olson**

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## Gifts Given in Honor of

**Bill Arvan**

*John and Diane Munson*

*Gordon and Bonnie Stock*

*Gerald and Marilyn*

*Kiedrowski*

**Tom and Mikki Krueger**

*Paul and Gretchen Sanders*

*“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” John 9:4 (NIV)*





Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15



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Check out our website at  
[www.readministries.org](http://www.readministries.org)  
for details about READ Ministries and  
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