

Russian seminary leader seeks churches to adopt students_11204

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Russian seminary leader seeks churches to adopt students

By Marv Knox

Editor

ABILENE-A Russian Baptist leader has come to Texas, looking to complete the formula for effective ministry in his homeland.

Alexander Kozynko's equation has plenty of numbers:

He's president of the 10-year-old Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

- ◆ Creation of the school fulfilled an 88-year dream for Russian Baptists. "The first prayer for this school was said in 1905, at the first Baptist World Alliance meeting in London," he reported.
- ◆ The seminary offers three academic programs, the two-year master of divinity and three-year bachelor of theology degrees, plus a certificate for youth leadership.
- ◆ The first seminary class consisted of 17 students. Now, the enrollment

has grown to 57 students, and 29 of them will graduate next spring.

- ◆ The need for trained ministers is enormous. Russia spans 11 time zones. The country is home to 147 million people, but only 1,400 Baptist churches. That's a ratio of only one Baptist congregation for every 105,000 people.

"Our goal is to train many more students for the ministry—not only for the Russian Baptist churches," Kozynko said. "We train many ministers from Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and some from Kazakhstan.

"For Eastern Europe, our seminary is pretty important. Some of the smaller (Baptist) unions don't have a seminary. They have Bible institutes. Some of their students can be trained at this seminary."

- ◆ The seminary's location limited enrollment for most of its first decade. Housed in the Russian Baptist headquarters building, the seminary couldn't accept more than 25 students. Consequently, only 72 students graduated in nine years.
- ◆ Now, a newly renovated building provides room for about 200 students, enabling the seminary to increase enrollment and produce many more pastors and teachers who will spread the gospel across Russia and Eastern Europe.
- ◆ Unfortunately, one number still is missing. It's \$3,000—the annual cost of tuition, books, and room and board for each student.

That figure is beyond the grasp of many Russian and Eastern European ministers and the churches that want to help them get an education, Kozynko reported.

"We require the students to pay tuition," he said. "But the churches who

are recommending them, they really are not able to provide scholarships. ... We still look forward to increasing the number of students if we can get enough churches to provide financial and prayer support."

That's why Kozynko has been visiting the United States-seeking churches that will commit to "adopt a student for three or five years and also support them as they begin ministry," he explained.

"I am really glad to extend our contacts to several places in the United States-Indiana, Illinois and Texas," he said, adding with a chuckle, "I have been told the real Baptists are in Texas."

Kozynko's proposition-adopt a Moscow Seminary student and help launch a lifetime ministry-provides churches with a chance to impact Russia and Eastern Europe with the gospel, said Ronnie Prevost, professor of church ministry at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology and a member of the Moscow Seminary board of trustees.

"It's going to prove to be the mother seminary of Baptist work for the foreseeable and long-range future of Russia," Prevost said of the school.

The impact of that reality is more far-ranging than Baptists familiar with U.S. schools might imagine, he added. "Not only is the seminary producing ministers-pastors and youth ministers-for the churches, but graduates are going out and starting Bible schools, Bible colleges and seminaries in their home regions."

For example, Kozynko told about a graduate who went back home to Minsk, Belarus, to become a pastor, but he also started a Belarusian Baptist seminary.

"They are expected to start schools that will be doing the training of ministers," Prevost said.

"It's almost an accelerated paradigm of what we've seen as Baptists in the United States. ... The ideal for any country is for the ministers to be trained within the context of their culture. They know their people best."

When the young ministers land in their fields of service, they find unimaginable need but also incredible openness, Kozynko said.

"In this way, we can affect society in a positive way," he said. "Drug use and alcohol are destroying our society. ... They are empty in their souls.

"But the Slavic people—Russians as well as Ukrainians and others—are open to the good news. ... Many people are after the truth in their lives."

For more information about Moscow Seminary and the scholarship program, see the school's website at www.mbs.ru/fornlang.ver/en/index.html.