

Special Report

December 2006

Samara Report



Mega City Campaign
in Samara



Even in the mega cities of Russia one can find very basic living conditions. Life for this woman has not changed in decades. She lives in downtown Samara - next to modern office buildings and a Mac Donalds restaurant.



Samara is a major hub and provincial capital in Central Russia. The unofficial population of the city is 1.500.000. Under the Soviet Union the city was closed and special permits were needed to enter the city.

Mission message via TV reaches 3.5 million viewers in Russia's Samara Province

The Central Russian mega city of Samara has been the target of perhaps the most intensive evangelistic campaign ever carried out in the city. Samara is known as the city of the Volga River Merchants founded in 1586. The city was closed to the outside world in the Soviet Union because of its space, rocket, and military industry. Today the city has a population of 1.5 million people. Churches in the city thanks to the campaign reached 3.5 millions TV viewers, 300,000 homes by direct mail, thousands called the 24/7 mission hotline. Among those who made commitments to Christ were students, pensioners, housewives, government employees, factory workers, and the unemployed. The following is a more detailed report on what took place:

Thousands of Calls

As the Aeroflot TU-154 aircraft approached the Samara International Airport I could see thousands of apartment buildings, private homes, communal housing, log houses,

structures that resembled no more than boarded shacks.

These buildings housed 1.5 million residents of the city of Samara: long time residents, migrants, Russians, Ukrainians, Mordvins,

Tatars, Central Asians. Every home either had a television or a radio set or both.

Initial contact with the church leaders of the city had ignited a vision proclaim the Gospel to every home and every person in Samara over a 30 day period.

That goal was achieved in November of 2006 through the mega city campaign in Samara.

The directors of TV Channel "RIO" stated that ratings had soared for their channel as the campaign programs aired not only in Samara but in Tolyatti (pop. 1.200.000) and Syzran (pop. 300.000) as well.

26 carefully chosen dynamic life stories and locally produced by IRR-

TV camera crews formed the backbone of the multimedia saturation campaign.

In addition, the TV programs were seen in hundreds of villages and townships between the three mentioned cities.

The total viewing audience was estimated to have peaked at 4 million.

The campaign was not limited to television. Other major media used included:

- 560 TV and Radio spots on the major channels - otherwise closed to programs of Christian content.

- Evangelistic radio programs including local stories of changed lives on two major Fm radio stations.

- 16 full size 6X3 meters billboards consisting of three portraits and slogans on dramatic life change:

"God destroyed the curse in our family - God freed me from heroine - Seeking riches almost destroyed me but God saved me!"

- 3 giant video screens 10x10

meters in centrally located spots in the city at three minute intervals

declared "God gives the power to change!"

- 300,000 campaign leaflets hand delivered to 300,000 homes by hundreds of church volunteers.

- 1.400 posters one meter high went up across the city.

- 50,000 tailor-made highly evangelistic "Power To Change"

campaign books were delivered to friends, neighbors, special events, campaign services.

- A 24/7 hotline received 5,000 calls during the campaign. Calls continue to come in even though visibility in the media has been scaled down.

The Church is the only hope

Within the last few years churches in Russia have seen their freedom to proclaim the Gospel significantly diminish. Russia has gravitated toward ultranationalism and orthodoxy.

The voice of the evangelizing church has been all but muted. Only a vapor of the freedoms enjoyed in 1990's is left. Generally the media is



In preparation for a mega city campaign participating churches are given comprehensive training in key areas of the month long outreach. In Samara 150 telephone counselors were trained to respond to calls and questions from every walk of life.



The seminars included a thorough briefing regarding the use of the key tool for church members during the campaign - the "handbook" called *POWER TO CHANGE*. It provides the first steps for the journey of faith starting with God's plan of salvation

"Churches are now following up thousands of addresses..."

not accessible by the church.

Yet the living church is the only hope for the moral woes and spiritual despair of the nation.

The mega city campaigns are a powerful response to challenge in Russia's large cities.

One morning in mid-campaign we called the office in Samara. I asked the manager on duty what all the loud buzz in the background was. His response: that loud "buzz" is the telephone counselors receiving calls. The phones have been ringing off the hook. People want to talk about life's problems and questions with the counselors.

People with alcohol and drug problems have called. A staggering seventy percent of the city's youth use drug of various types. As the campaign entered its final days already over 200 people had signed up for rehab through the churches.

Callers range from children to teens to adults to pensioners.

Each caller is counseled on the phone and then by campaign courier is sent a mission book with testimonies, the plan of salvation and a guide to the first steps in faith.

Calls Flood TV Station

The impact of the campaign

touched secular TV personnel. Staff assigned to duty for our live telecasts - cameramen, directors, producers, noticed things out of the ordinary take place. For example a sharp difference in response. Calls swamped the phone lines at the TV station.

They were heard to be asking one another: "What is this all about?!"

A Christian program was drawing unusually strong response from viewers.

Prosecutor Palmova

The following is a description two television programs.

Svetlana Palmova, formerly a

prosecutor, today she is legal consultant.

Svetlana told her story. Her heart lost all sensitivity as she worked as prosecutor. She said she noticed how she was slowly becoming a monster on the inside. The suffering of other people no longer bothered her. She was cynical and cold.

Then her mother was diagnosed with cancer. A friend invited her to a church service where she committed her life to Christ. Svetlana became concerned about where her mother was "getting religion".

As a prosecutor she decided to investigate the "suspicious sect".

As a result she too committed her life to the Lord, joined the same church and shared her testimony with IRR-TV on prime time television.

One of the many callers on the hotline was a criminal investigator for the police department. He was deeply moved by Svetlana's testimony and asked for the campaign book "Power To Change" to be delivered to his office.

Svetlana had been in his class as a law student in university.

So it was Svetlana who took the book to him personally and told him about the fairness and justness of

the Lord she served." That was the beginning of his path toward the Righteous God.

Doctors Amazed

TV viewers in Samara also witnessed a spectacle when top rehab specialists and a doctor from the city joined in an open discussion on live TV on whether an alcoholic and drug addict can be healed of his addiction.

Responding to the question as to what the cure rate was, the specialists said there was no known cure rate. Remission was the term used by secular doctors.

Patients are deleted from the patient lists only through death.

Immediately 20 people stood up in the TV audience. They testified to a total deliverance - a miracle! The doctors listened dumbfounded.

One of the 20 turned toward the doctor and asked: "Do you remember me? I was one of your patients for 20 years. I haven't touched alcohol in 7 years. I was removed from

state DUMA, Mr. Belyayev had run for Mayor in the preceding elections. He had represented the city of Samara at round table discussions with our campaign leaders at the launch of the campaign.

As a result, he expressed a desire to visit one of the special events hosted by one of the churches in the campaign.

That night the politician heard

"The program on deliverance from addictions had made a profound impact on my life.

One after another, I watched as they stood up to tell their story:

- I was on alcohol for 20 years but now I'm free and I'm married and have children!

- I was on heroine for 7 years but now I am free in Jesus!

- I was hooked for 5 years. I needed it every day! I'm free 5 years and now I serve others in a Christian rehab center.

The politician had told new friend, the pastor: "You have no idea how much influence your churches have in this city.

Our city officials speak loudly about their work with little or no results. You have a great ministry and it is not even mentioned publicly.

Police Colonel

Billboards can save lives.

A former colonel in the police force of Samara, presently director of a community center for the Ministry of Interior was driving alone, crushed by bad news. His 3 year old daughter had died recently. Finances were not adding up. Relationships were faltering.

In his anguish there was a drop in his blood pressure and fearing losing control of his vehicle he pulled off the road. There he drooped over the steering wheel and burst into tears.

Some time later he looked up through his tears and saw a billboard directed above his car.

He read the text in disbelief: "Seeking riches I was almost destroyed but God saved me!"

It was a direct hit to his soul. He called the hotline number and was directed to a pastor.

The pastor made arrangements to meet with the caller without delay.

Hours later the ex-police officer knelt and made his decision to receive Christ.



3 giant video screens 10x10 meters in centrally located spots in the city at three minute intervals declared "God gives the power to change!"

your list 2 years ago.

The doctor recognized the ex-patient.

Another person spoke up and said he had been under treatment for 7 years but was removed from the list over one year ago.

The surprise of the specialists was almost embarrassing.

MP Finds Christ

The mega city campaign touched the upper echelons of political power regionally.

A Member of Parliament in the

a message on a change in direction - repentance, and how God give power to experience change.

At the altar call one in the group of several people was the MP.

Later, the pastor had recounted how the politician had openly wept as he prayed for God to change his heart.

Since then the politician has extended manifold assistance to the churches involved in Mission Samara, as well as participated in one of the live telecasts.

Confessing later, the MP said:



Pastors meeting for a campaign briefing in Samara



Text: "Seeking riches almost destroyed me but God saved me!"



Billboard text: "God destroyed the curse in my family!"



Billboard text: "GOD freed me from heroine" Call...



Samara is a major industrial region in Central Russia.



Samara. Man's basic needs never change regardless of his surroundings. Only in God can man find lasting happiness...



The Church cannot succeed without the media today !



The churches of Samara have not had the tools with which to reach homes and hearts in the city, telling people that Jesus came for them.



The Gospel must be proclaimed by all means to waken the soul and to direct it to the living God. Above: a billboard in Samara.



The command center for the mega city campaign in Samara. The message was relayed via 603 TV and radio programs and spots, 16 billboards, 3 megascreens, 1400 posters, 50.000 books , 300.000 campaign leaflets.



Some of the IRR-TV production team members at an evening brainstorming and analysis session.

Currently, he is in continuous fellowship with the pastor.

From Occult to Jesus

A woman called the hotline. Her husband was the father of two households. She had depended on advice from a psychic who she had never met but had been calling steadily for two years.

Her friend then gave her the number to the campaign call center. After a lengthy conversation the woman requested a book.

She was followed up with a personal visit by a counselor and committed her life to the Lord. She is involved a in a small group in one of the churches.

We Need Tools

The specially produced television programs reached vast numbers and sectors in the city never previously reached by the churches. That phenomenal outreach was repeated night after night for 30 days.

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had the tools with which to reach homes and hearts in the city, telling people that Jesus Christ came for them.

When More Boats are Needed

At the farewell supper with the pastors of Samara's churches I witnessed one leader after another stand up to tell how they now have new cells consisting of a dozen people who have come as a result of the campaign.

There are 2,000 names and

addresses that the churches now need to speedily process, visit, follow up. That is more than a handful.

Additionally, Bishop Vasily Lishhevsky, with a church of 70 members appealed to the campaign pastoral committee for urgent help. They have accumulated 1,000 addresses arising from the outreach that needed to be visited without delay. He asked all participating churches to take as many addresses as practically possible.

What of the Orthodox Church

Pastors have vowed to continue to capitalize on the opportunity for heightened ministry that the campaign has afforded them.

In the midst of all the action we did not notice that the Orthodox Church of Samara had remained silent and not interfered in the outreach as expected by many.

It is now widely believed that after the high level of engagement and cooperation by the Orthodox Church in Voronezh that the church

in Samara had been briefed by some higher authority.

In Voronezh we had met the Metropolitan, a member of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. It had been a peculiar but most friendly meeting - especially in light of the all out attack by the Church in Archangelsk in Northern Russia.

Bomb Threat

The campaign was not totally free of harassment though.

A large youth concert organized

LADA autos await potential buyers at a car lot just outside the main factory compound.

City center in Tolyatti. The city has a population of 1.200.000. Most are employed by the massive LADA automotive complex.

The police colonel looked up to see this billboard which lead him to call the hotline number and make a commitment to Christ!

Samara Province is headquarters for the automotive industry of Russia. It also leads in record AIDS infections.



by one of the churches called "NO to Drugs!" was sabotaged.

Three days prior to the concert an anonymous call had been received demanding the concert to be called off.

There was tight police security complete with metal detection equipment at the concert. 700 youth showed up. Thirty minutes into the concert the city police received a bomb threat over the phone.

The police were forced to evacuate the concert hall and check for explosives.

Children in Prison

This Christmas IRR-TV will carry out special ministry to a boys' prison camp in the Samara region.

There are 300 boys in the camp - age 13-18. In addition there are another 200 awaiting transfer to the camp from several detention centers.

The supervising officer for the camp, Colonel Morayev, has said that as winter approaches the boys need winter shoes and winter clothes.

These boys have never heard the words "I love you" from a mother or father.

Along with 300 pairs of winter boots and sets of warm clothes our message to these, perhaps among the world's most forgotten



youngsters, is: "Somebody really does care! God loves you, and we are living proof of his love before your eyes. Yes, the gifts (clothes) are a sign.

But we are also here to tell you that you can experience the power to change and that God can give you a brand new start in life.

Hannu Haukka

New Law on Religion

Unexpectedly, in August of this year the Ministry of Justice of Russia introduced a proposal for a new law on religion that if passed and enacted would effectively ban all missions activity in Russia.

The law would affect both national churches and international organizations working inside Russia.

Regarding religious freedom in Russia, the clocks would be turned back 20 years.

For the moment, the law has not

been actively worked on.

However in September the leadership of the Orthodox Church in Samara convened a meeting of heads of all four traditional religions in Russia. Purpose? To discuss the proposed new law!

Protestant leaders were not invited to the meeting.

Only the Gospel can reconcile man with God and fellow man with fellow man.

For Russia as with other nations there is no hope of a future without reconciliation, without a genuine

love for one's neighbor, and a respect for his property.

Russia wants to be a superpower. She cannot be a superpower if her subjects are rebellious, violent, disobedient to the nation's laws, hateful of each other, dishonest, thieves, murders, and a people stripped of hope.

Turbulent times may soon be upon Russia. Sweeping change can disrupt the mega city campaigns in the not so distant future.

Now is the time to keep a tight grip on the plow and not let go.