

# Thousands Respond to the Gospel in Russian City of Ufa!

May 2004

***UFA the second of 10 Russian mega cities targeted for first ever “Power to Change” campaigns launched big time in mid March. Never before had the city of 1.2 million residents beheld the message of God’s life-changing power so visibly on giant 6x6 meter outdoor TV screens, billboards, public transportation, radio, television, and other media.***

***Thousands of people have already responded by calling the call-in center for personal counseling and to receive their copy of the tailor made UFA version of a 100 page highly evangelistic book called “Experience the Power To Change”.***

The city’s 3,000 born again believers from all of the city’s 13 participating churches are already overwhelmed in trying to provide spiritual help to more than 3,500 people seeking spiritual help. This is a new challenge for the churches of UFA. While the challenge is huge, it is indisputably the best one a church could ever wish for.

## **Sunday Night Harvest**

On the second Sunday of the 6-week campaign significant numbers of people had already responded. Sunday evening at pastor Vladimir’s church was unforgettable.

Pastor Silchuk spoke on Isaiah 53. “You can experience change because of one person, that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. Six hundred people had come out to this special event. When



*From day one Mission Ufa was highly visible to the people in the city. Huge 13m x 13m (40ft x 40ft) mega TV screens display the message “you can experience the power to change, call this number”. Thousands have already called in and received counselling and prayer and are now in touch with the local church.*



*Sunday evening services are part of Mission Ufa. This one was held at Pastor Vladimir Siltshuk's church and it was packed full. The sweet spirit in the service was evident during opening praise and worship.*



*Pastor Siltshuk's message that evening was from Isaiah 53: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...and by his wounds we are healed."*



*At the end of the service during the altar call over 30 people marched up on stage to make their public confession and acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Among these was an official from the Ministry of Justice.*

the invitation was given about 30 people stepped forward to the podium to make a public decision for JESUS CHRIST. Among them was a Russian Ministry of Justice official.

This same official had been responsible for registration of all religious organizations in the predominately Russian province. In what amounted to open persecution of the Church the official had fiercely resisted the registration of several churches in the provincial capital UFA. Now this same person had stepped forward to publicly make a commitment to Jesus.

As this report goes to press three more Ministry of Justice officials have received Jesus as Lord!

One MP had sent a friend to the same evening service. The official's only son had been diagnosed with leukemia. The official made a personal decision for Christ as well.

### **Islamic Offensive**

There are several Islamic enclaves in Russia, war-torn Chechnya in Southern Russia, Tatarstan in Central Russia, and Bashkiria bordering Tatarstan on its eastern side.

Ufa is the capital of Bashkiria and is 50 % muslim. Amidst stiff opposition from the Islamic community the popular UFA-TV channel had decided to air the IRR/TV produced programs

consisting of changed lives in UFA. Earlier, another channel, Bashkir State TV had refused to air the programs and then publicly attacked the campaign as heretic, labeling it a "dangerous sect" warning people to avoid the campaign.

The warning served as additional advertising. When UFA-TV aired the programs including on Sunday at 3 p.m. over 1 million people in the city watched the life-changing testimonies of well-known, influential people. The telecasts were a miracle. Never before had the churches in UFA been granted the possibility to air programs. The pastors had voiced unbelief in getting any programming on the air.

### **Do Yourself No Harm!**

As our call-in center telephone number appeared on TV-screens the telephones lit up. Counselors engaged in leading people to the Lord. Viewers wanted to experience the power to change. The message had hit home!

In two separate incidents young men called the center in despair announcing their intent to commit suicide. Both had talked to a trained counselor and prayed the prayer of salvation. Both had proceeded to the center and talked over their life's dilemma with a counselor on duty. Both men are

now a part of a caring cell group and growing in faith.

The Sunday TV program also ministered to the vice chancellor of the University in the city. She said she was moved by Professor Ed Becker's life story. Little did we know that that program would prove instrumental in a visit to the University the next day.

The campaign team on a rare visit to the university spoke to hundreds of graduating students. In a rage one of the professors present, a fanatical Muslim, barged into the vice chancellor's office to complain of a dangerous sect stirring up the student body in the auditorium.

Later, in the vice chancellor's office instead of an interrogation we were greeted with warm words of appreciation for the visit and the message we delivered to the student body. "I saw your program and enjoyed it very much," said the vice chancellor. A little later the Islamic fundamentalist professor was called in by the Chancellor for a severe rebuke regarding her conduct.

### **7,000 Calls**

The campaign continues to bear precious fruit. The telephones at the counseling center have been ringing for

weeks. More than 7,000 calls have been received. They have called from as far away as Orenburg, 400 miles to the south. People want to know the One who has the power to change their lives.

The pastors in UFA are jubilant. They have never experienced a similar impact in any outreach before.

On Tuesday mornings the pastors meet for prayer. One after another they share testimonies about the many newborn Christians coming into their churches as a result of the current campaign.

This concerted effort has also changed many deeply rooted attitudes in church members. Members of different churches never dreamt they could work together in such unity side by side for the spiritual welfare of the city.

### **Blessed Crumbs**

The budget for Mission UFA was just enough to cover the needs for the largest city of province of Bashkiria, still a heartfelt request came from the second largest city of Bashkiria – Sterlitamak. The Pastors asked for even the "crumbs" that might fall from the campaign "table" in Ufa.

***"We have only one problem at this time, we have a shortage of counselors...Everybody has their hands full and we are only three weeks into the campaign!"***



Professor Robertson, IRR/TV team member at Mission Ufa and specialized in HIV and AIDs, held a lecture at the University of Bashkiriya. In addition about 600 new teachers received the booklet *Power To Change*.



Many live radio and TV programs are aired during the campaign. Here Dr. Backer from Canada speaks live on radio. His message: *Business and education cannot replace God in your life.*



The campaign's telephone counselling center is operated by local church members that Campus Crusade for Christ Canada has helped train. The call center has received thousands of calls at this time. Thousands have come to know Christ.

In a step of faith the leadership team went for it. Sterlitamak received what we could spare. It was not much more than “crumbs”. God blessed the effort.

A leading Pastor from Sterlitamak was at the pastor’s prayer meeting and had wonderful news. The church had 250 members. Now two hundred more people were in touch with the church and in the follow-up process. Fifty of those had already joined their house churches.

“We have only one problem at this time,” said the Pastor, “we have a shortage of counselors. Everybody has their hands

*full and we are only three weeks into the campaign!”*

We were reminded of how the fish nets of the disciples started to break because of the size of their catch of fish.

What happened in Sterlitamak was miraculous. The Lord multiplied our efforts. Television opened up. The popular NTV channel in that city, seen in all of Southern Bashkiriya, gave the Churches the opportunity to air 30 programs.

### The Battle For Airtime

The campaign has not gone without adversity. When the lives and eternal destinies of people are at stake then the “enemy” becomes restless. Resistance from Islamic fundamentalists was stiff at times.

UFA TV, the city’s number two channel was very supportive of the campaign at the start. After an Islamic extremist, a VP at Bashkiriya TV, put pressure on UFA TV officials not to support the campaign UFA TV declined the programming. The same was true for radio. One channel closed and another opened up. And the Gospel continued to sound.~

*The huge billboards used for the campaign are in highly visible spots. The athelete, a local celebrity, is saying: "The strong need God too. Call this number..."*



1.2 million people live in the city of Ufa. We are reaching them by using all possible means of effective media including television, radio, mega TV screens downtown, billboards and the newspaper. Half the population is of the Muslim faith.



Humanitarian aid is a great need in Ufa. IRR/TV bought 1000 blanket packets destined for orphanages and children's homes. Some of the children's prisons also received the packets. Marvin and Katharine Kehler check out the blankets during their recent visit to Ufa as the Power To Change campaign was in full swing.

### The Street Children

As part of the campaign IRR/TV bought 1,000 flannel bed linen packages that were distributed to all orphanages and "children's homes" in the city of Ufa. In orphanage number 10 there were 45 children—seven had no parents. The parents of the rest of the children were either drug addicts or alcoholics.

appeared on the streets of Ufa. If mothers and fathers in Ufa do not experience the power to change the lives of thousands of children will continue to shatter. Only the grace of God can repair the damage inflicted on these little ones. This was all the more reason for the campaign to have come to the city!

Orphanage # 10 was full to capacity. Yet daily more children

### Passion Of Christ In Russia

The "Power To Change" campaign message was also presented at a special event designed for City Council officials. For the first time in the history of the city the churches in UFA were able to reach out to members of the political leadership of the city.

The Spirit of the Lord moved and several attendees made decisions for Christ there at the event. It was a miraculous result. Fifty percent of the people at the meeting were Muslim. Conveniently Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ" was showing in Moscow and soon would start in UFA. The film was also being shown in theatres in Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. That news sparked a lively question and answer period.



### Bus ride to Jesus!

Public transportation is also an effective vehicle for the campaign. Ads on buses and trams direct people to call the hotline to receive help and the campaign book. For a special price the churches were offered advertising space on one whole tram painted with campaign colors and text for a period of six months. The sides of the tram were decorated with "Power to Change" ads. Lives have been changed. Here's two examples:

The employee at public transport responsible for the colorful ads visited the counseling center and dedicated his life to the Lord. When the counselor prayed for the man he wondered aloud, "What is this warm current I feel flowing through me?" He continued on his way rejoicing. Presently he visits a home cell group in the city.

In another incident a young Bashkir man from the countryside came into town, boarded one of the city buses. His life was awash with problems. As he sat in his seat he read the Power to Change ad before his eyes in the bus. The message struck home. He got off at the next stop and called the phone number on the ad.

Tearfully, he shared his heartache and problems on the phone. He indicated that suicide would be his next step. After

a brief word the counselor suggested praying with him. "No, not so fast, you don't understand," he said, "I am a Bashkir—a Muslim."

"Don't worry, I understand," said the counselor, "I am an ex-muslim myself. Come to the counseling center and we can pray about your problems." The man came, opened his heart and made a decision for Christ. He is now in the loving care of a home church and receiving spiritual nourishment.

The stories continue to abound. Planted seeds do grow. And growing seeds bear fruit. As we pray and give we are a part of God's harvest in the great city of UFA. The harvest will continue for months and years to come.

The next city already waits. Pastors from the northern Ural mountain city of PERM and the Central Russian city of KAZAN sent delegations hand carrying invitations to bring the POWER TO CHANGE to their respective cities. My response to this challenge is "Yes, we will certainly go if you send us".

Hannu Haukka



Ufa city painted one street car with the Power To Change colors and placed our ads on both sides of the trolley for a period of six months. It is practically impossible to not notice this trolley as it travels throughout the city each day proclaiming that Jesus gives the power to change.