

Mega-City Campaign Reaches Kazakhstan

For seven straight weeks the largest city of Kazakhstan, Almaty, was the site of an historic evangelistic media campaign perhaps never before seen in the Central Asian city.

The message "God gives you the power to change" was told to 1.5 million residents of the city by television, radio, newspaper ads, billboards and mega-screen monitors in city center.

For 700 years the Kazakh people have been ruled by foreign invaders—first by pagan Mongols from the east followed by Islamist Tatars. Under Soviet rule atheism was accepted ideology. As of 1991 churches in Kazakhstan have experienced relative freedom to conduct affairs of the church including limited outreach. The IRR/TV led mega-city campaign conducted in February/March of 2006 in partnership with 30 churches in the city was definitely a first.

According to some the campaign should have been doomed to failure from start. The Islamic authorities would never allow for a Christian media campaign, so said the nay-sayers.

True, the Kazakh authority responsible for granting approval for outdoor advertising in the city failed to approve billboards and other outdoor ads because of their bold Christian message except for one—a banner that spanned the width of the main street in Almaty. The banner was up for three weeks.

Record Ratings on TV

Television and radio are regulated by a separate government agency in Kazakhstan. This agency in no way hindered the telecast of campaign programs.

Programs produced by IRR/TV were seen

on two commercial channels prime time every night for seven straight weeks.

Prior to the campaign television executives were wary of how programs with strong Christian content would affect ratings on their channels.

By week seven Channel 31 and TV-TAN reported a sharp rise in viewership to previously unseen levels attributing the rise to the campaign. TV executives were bewildered over the unexpected rise.

TV-TAN has a viewership of 2.5 million in Almaty and its surrounding townships. The viewership of Channel 31 is eleven million. The channel is seen throughout Kazakhstan in all major cities.

The campaign programs turned out to be the major attraction on the program schedule.

Night after night a call-in number appeared on TV screens in homes in Almaty and across the nation beckoning seeking viewers to call and receive consultation, prayer, and a free

copy of the special Almaty edition of the Power To Change book.

There were many calls. Over 4,100 calls were registered on a database made available to churches in the city.

The nature of the calls varied. One supervising counselor told of a call that came in at midnight.

It was from Jerek, a 43 year old war veteran from Afghanistan. He was a captain. He told the counselor that he would commit suicide.

His wife had run off and left him with four children. In order to end his life in style, he put on his best white linen clothes, shaved his beard and hair according to Islamic tradition.

For the haircut he went to his neighbor's house. The clothes caught the neighbor's attention.

"A man must die in dignity," the man explained his course of action for ending his life.

The neighbor persuaded the man to call the ministry hotline where someone was waiting for his call. He called.

Two counselors were dispatched to the man's house. After a lengthy discussion the war veteran opened his heart and knelt in prayer to receive the Lord as his personal Saviour.

That night the ex-soldier's life was saved from certain death.

A friend of the president

The mega city campaign also touched the political leadership of the country.

After watching one of the TV programs a family acquaintance of President Nursultan Nazarbayev called the number on the screen and requested a Power To Change campaign book.

Under the direction of the presidential family the acquaintance was responsible for cultural programs aimed at youth in the city.

A campaign staffer was dispatched to the address of the caller with the book.

"We have been debating what can be done for the youth of the city. Your TV program on

youth served as a source of inspiration for us," said the political assistant.

Further talks and consultation were agreed upon, reported Yuri Shumayev chairman for the mega-city pastoral committee.

In another event a judge in the city of Almaty received a copy of the campaign book from one of the counselors.

After asking a multitude of questions the judge had said: "Great work. This campaign should have been held in the city long ago. What took you so long?"

Surgeon Meets Great Physician

Another TV program told how the life of a cardiologist had been dramatically changed by faith in Jesus Christ.

A well known senior surgeon at the General Hospital of Almaty happened to see the program. The cardiologist's story had ministered to him. God had intervened in a mighty way to heal the marital relationship.



Kazakh Pastor Kanat prays for the unsaved people of his tribe on a mountain top above the city of Almaty. Thousands of Kazakhs found the way to the God of the Bible during the campaign. Over 10,000 Power To Change books were distributed.



For 7 weeks 2 million people in Almaty, including street children to political officials, heard the gospel message. 72 evangelistic TV programs were seen in all other large cities in Kazakhstan. Over 2 million copies of the daily newspapers displayed the campaign's evangelistic ads.



These billboards were a bit too much for the governing group who decided what kinds of billboards can be displayed. Text on billboard above: God renewed our love! Below: Jesus set me free.

"Now We Know That a Kazakh Can be Saved as Well..."

The surgeon called the number on the screen and asked for a visit to his home by a counselor.

In his despair, the surgeon had recounted his own story of desertion. That night the surgeon received the word spoken to him by IRR/TV trained counselor and met the Great Physician.

Nervous Politicians

Shafgat, the owner of the largest advertising agency in Almaty reported that he had been informed of special consultations that had taken place in several government ministries regarding the ongoing Power To Change campaign in Almaty.

IRR/TV supervising director Sergei Altuhov received a call from the Ministry of Culture. They were interested in the message and goals of the campaign.

Likewise, Pastor Yuri Shumayev had received calls from the KGB and Ministry of Justice.

Publisher Threatened

Potentially the most serious development

of the campaign was a summons delivered to Evgeny to appear in court. Evgeny was the local publisher who printed 40,000 copies of the campaign book and two hundred thousand campaign brochures.

Prior to his conversion Evgeny had been unjustly sentenced to conditional imprisonment for a financial misdealing.

Evgeny had decided to serve the Lord and the campaign with his printing facility.

In an Islamic society he took the risk of printing 40,000 clearly evangelistic books in both Kazakh and Russian.

As the campaign came to a close the local court had inexplicably summoned Evgeny to hear that his sentence would be modified to unconditional time in prison with full confiscation of personal property and his business.

I asked Evgeny what he thought of his predicament. "My freedom came from the Lord then. My freedom is in his hands even now," said Evgeny peacefully.

No Reform in Kazakhstan

Kazakh Pastor Kanat told us that his people, the Kazakhs, believe that a Kazakh can only be

a muslim by faith.

But as a result of the TV programs Kazakhs now know that it is possible to be a believer in Jesus Christ and still be a Kazakh. On prime time television born again Kazakhs shared their stories on how they found the way to the God of the Bible.

Out of 74 telecasts the story of the conversion of Professor Manarbek generated the most response.

How long will churches in Kazakhstan have the freedom to proclaim the Gospel? The country is once again witnessing the implementation of new restrictions on civil freedoms.

On July 8, 2005 the president, citing security reasons, signed a new law restricting religious activity in the country.

According to the law all domestic and foreign faith based organizations must register their intended activities before they are allowed to begin such activities. All audio and video material must be cleared by the government before they can be used.

New churches are almost impossible to register. In the capital city of Astana government officials are recommending not to allow

children to attend prayer meetings and maintain that prayer may even cause death.

"Those who have attended prayer meetings are subject to re-education. Those attending prayer meetings may end up becoming suicide bombers or zombies."

Harvest Amidst Opposition

The campaign faced opposition as well.

Outdoor ads did not go up as originally planned. Some daily newspapers were hesitant to run ads and stories of changed lives even though they agreed with the need for such testimonies. Despite the opposition God's hand was on the mission.

The campaign was successfully carried out, for the most part, according to plan. The Gospel message was sown in a way never before witnessed in Almaty.

The following is a summary of the scale of the campaign:

- 72 prime time TV broadcasts on secular channels reaching 13.5 million people. 2.5 million viewers in Almaty and surrounding townships. 11 million viewers throughout Kazakhstan.

- 137,000 brochures distributed by members of local churches

- 200,000 brochures/inserts in city newspapers

- 2.27 million copies of daily newspapers with campaign ads and life stories

- 40,000 Power To Change books, 30 thousand in Russian and 10 thousand in the Kazakh language.

- Call center with 10 lines 24/7. 300 counselors were trained to take calls

Champion Athlete Finds Jesus

We received a call from the former Javelin throwing champion of Russia. She was seriously ill. God led us to her through the campaign. This woman called and invited us to visit her. She surrendered her life to God and received immense joy and peace into her heart."

Fifteen Saved

"We received 50 addresses from the call center. They were people who called in for spiritual counseling." Kitskov continues, "Of these, 15 committed their lives to Jesus. 7 of them have already joined the church.

Four children have also joined. And 11 more children from our surrounding areas.

We are currently expanding our children's ministry. I gave a mission booklet to a young person named Dmitri.

He introduced me to his grandmother who wanted more information on spiritual matters and was saved as a result."

Grocery Store Revival

Kitskov enthusiastically reports: "Our sister Ljudmila responding to a call from a grocery store took along a couple of books.

She was surrounded by 5 sales clerks as she told them about God's plan of salvation. Two of the clerks accepted Jesus right then and there. Now they attend at our church.

This type of thing has happened a lot. It also interesting to note that attitudes toward evangelical churches have changed as a result of the campaign. But there are those who regard us with hatred well."

Pastor Sibilan Isajev's congregation has many Kazakh members.

"Because of the mission we are helping 30 Russians and we are now making adjustments



Pastor Ljubov: "A home church has been established, a direct result of the campaign."



Pastor Kanat: "The people of my tribe have a totally new understanding of faith in God, thanks to the campaign."



Pastor Vasiliev: "We have visit over 60 homes during the campaign to help the people with their needs."



"The Judge said: 'You are doing wonderful things. You should have held a campaign in Almaty a long time ago.'"



Pastor Gasimaleiva: "We are so happy to see all the different congregations come together around this great challenge."



Director of substance abuse clinic: "Seven people have come for rehabilitation and ten have come to our meetings."



Pastor Shumajev: "Churches have been able to reach groups of people we couldn't have through conventional methods of outreach."



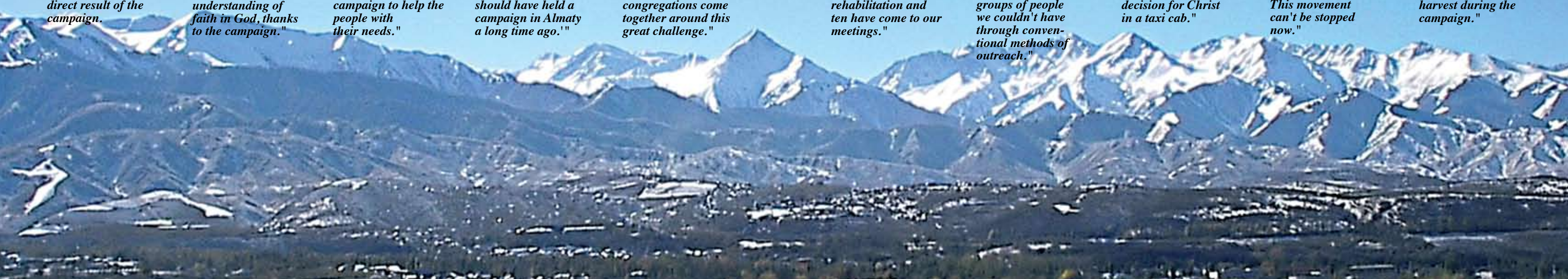
Pastor Permatilov: "An ex-security officer made his decision for Christ in a taxi cab."



"Already new people have been joining our church. This movement can't be stopped now."



Pastor Kitskov: "Our church has seen an abundant harvest during the campaign."



Pastors: "Mission Campaign Was a Great Blessing to Our City!"

to allow for Russian language ministry.

Pastor Nikolai Vasiliyev reports from the narcotics center he heads: "We have visited 60 homes during the mission offering to help those in need.

Through the TV programs six young people, addicted to drugs, have found their way to our rehab center.

"These are lost people"

Pastor Ljubov Sanikovich a pastor from a church on the outskirts of Almaty says:

"As a result of the Mission our congregations have connected with people more and they have been exposed to their needs and challenges they face.

People need God in their lives. Many cry tears of loneliness every day. When we visit people they welcome us openly. They receive the literature and do not want us to leave. There is a vast emptiness."

New Church Founded

Many have come to Christ in the village where Pastor Ljubov lives.

"We have established a home church from the fruits of the mission campaign. The joy in the group is immense.

One whole family came to the Lord because of the mission. They were watching TV and saw our programs. They called the phone number at the bottom of the screen and our counselors brought them a Power To Change book.

The husband and wife were ill at the time. By faith we prayed for their healing and God healed both of them.

A lady called our counseling center and I took the call. She cried out to me: 'I don't have the strength to live. I am all alone. Is there no one who can help me?'

Lyubov says: "Immediately, I dispatched two sisters from my church to meet with her. They found her in Almarasan, a ghetto where disfunctional youth hang out.

Beaming with joy Lyubov says, "My church

has experienced great change as a result of the campaign.

Thank you! You are doing a wonderful work. May God reward you abundantly!"

Churches Grow

The pastor of "Slovo Bozhie" Church thankfully says:

"This mission has opened our eyes to see how much people in our city need the Lord.

Already new members have joined our congregation."

The director for another rehabilitation center Valerian continues with the good report:

"Seven people have come in for rehabilitation and 10 others have attended our services. We are about to plant a new church as a result. We intend to continue this work in the same manner as we have observed during the mission."

Pastor Rita Gasimaleiva is enthusiastic also: "Our church is only one and a half years old. We are so happy to unite with other congre-

gations to help out in this mission.

Our small church has seen an increase of 9 new believers during the mission. Thank you for obeying God's voice. Thank you for coming to Kazakhstan."

Ex-KGB Officer Receives Jesus

Pastor Aleksander Pervatilov reports:

"I shared a taxi ride with a stranger recently. He happened to be a member of the Secret Service.

I told him about the Power To Change campaign that had arrived in the city. As we talked he opened up and told me about his life's problems.

I gave him the Power To Change book and we prayed right there in the taxi. He gave his life to the Lord without further delay.

I believe that God wants us to be a friend to unbelievers, without fear. We found a way to do this through the mission."

Yuri Shumayev, chairman of the pastoral committee for the campaign summarizes the

value of the campaign:

"The campaign has united the churches in this city behind one great cause.

It has given all of us immense visibility that we could never have had alone.

It has opened our own eyes to see the ministry of the church in a new way. There are many things we had not noticed before.

We have reached people in this city that we as churches could never have accessed alone through traditional church ministry.

We saw how powerful television media is in reaching the unchurched. Having witnessed it we have decided to start a TV ministry here and continue with the programs that brought us so much blessing.

Children in Prison

An important part of the outreach were the hundreds of children in prison in Kazakhstan.

IRR/TV delivered humanitarian aid to two prison camps for children as well as ministering to them. Many made commitments to Jesus.

Over 100 boys made a decision for Jesus when asked who wants God to turn their lives around.

Prepare, Equip, Train

Preparation for the mission started in the summer of 2005.

The production of locally shot TV programs required four production teams working relentlessly on site for months before the first telecast was aired.

IRR/TV called in two production teams from neighboring Kirgizstan—teams trained in its schools of broadcast in Russia.

1,500 believers in the city attended up to 50 hours of training in counseling and outreach for the campaign.

Training was designed for pastors, telephone counselors, special representatives assisting in home visits.

The campaign is over but the mission continues—so does the vision, in the hearts of the pastors of Almaty.