

Sharing Jesus in the Land of Lenin

Kevin and Leslie McNulty are reaching thousands in the former Soviet republics and in Russia –where Vladimir Lenin’s communism once repressed Christianity.

PLUS: Russian Women Lead the Way

PLUS: 100 Tents to Reach Russia

PLUS: Haunted by a Bloody Past

At the foot of the towering Tien Shan Mountains, a brisk, cool wind whips down from snowcapped peaks, whisking along the worn concrete tarmac of a closed airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan—capital of the central Asian republic that declared its independence from the former Soviet Union in August 1991.

Early May brought balmy weather after a long, cold winter, but there were more than crystal blue skies luring thousands of Kyrgyz (Keer-geez) from surrounding villages to bustling Bishkek, a city of 700,000 where Russian remains the main language.

Beyond the old runways accenting the Tien Shan’s dominance of the horizon rests a huge yellow-and-white circus-style tent. For 10 days in May, thousands of Kyrgyz and Russian residents celebrated a Savior during a gospel crusade hosted by American missionaries Kevin and Leslie McNulty.

The McNultys call Daytona Beach, Florida, home in the United States but juggle their schedule between their missions headquarters outside Moscow, where they train and equip an expanding team of Russian evangelists. Since 1991, through their ministry, Christian Adventures International, they’ve

been breaking ground for the gospel in nations that once belonged to the Soviet Union.

In Bishkek, the McNultys are exuberant. Their first successful attempt to lead a government-approved open crusade in Kyrgyzstan proves to be historic. Bishkek turns out to be just as groundbreaking as their October 2000 campaign in neighboring Karaganda, Kazakhstan, where thousands of Muslims accepted Jesus as Lord and the McNultys gained favor with government officials.

But the successes did not come without the normal obstacles to ministry that could be found when the . held power. Corrupt Kazak border officials were extorting money from trucks entering the country. Just days before the McNultys' team arrived, the Kazak minister of transportation fired all the corrupt guards and issued a fax that ordered the new guards to give the McNultys free passage.

In May, the Kyrgyz Religious Committee at first approved, then denied the McNultys' request because they feared a Christian event might stir up Taliban Muslim extremists who are trying to infiltrate the region. After the committee reversed its opposition, the Kyrgyz government approved.

"The government and the committee saw that what we were doing is for the good of the society," Kevin McNulty says. "We did not speak out against religion, but only for Jesus. It was the first time we offered humanitarian aid. We offered to feed and clothe the poor. And it proved to be very successful."

However, Kyrgyz government support didn't prevent one last attempt from the KGB to stop the Bishkek campaign. Just two

weeks before the May start dates, the KGB refused to approve religious visas for the McNultys, forcing them to seek and receive their visas from the Kyrgyz embassy in Washington, D.C.

Miracles in Bishkek

In Bishkek, the McNultys' Festival of Music and Miracles gathering brings 300 to 700 people nightly to the altars for salvation, and thousands more receive prayer for healing. The tent that seats 5,000 is jammed, and on each of the last two nights, some 1,000 people give their hearts to Jesus—in a mostly Muslim country where Soviet-ordained communism reigned from 1936 to 1991.

The nightly rush to the altars for salvation and the numerous healing miracles that follow are mind-boggling. The McNultys offer a simple, blanket prayer of faith after inquiring how many need healing. Every night, this question draws a raised hand from almost every attendee.

Charisma witnessed the miraculous healings of several people, including:

* Sergai, 12, couldn't walk since birth due to a paralyzing disease. God had a different plan. His father carried him into the tent. After Kevin McNulty's prayer, Sergai's legs were healed. Sergai walked himself home that night.

* Tamara, 61, had a heart attack last year that paralyzed her left arm. During prayer, she was instantly healed and raised both arms.

* Dima, 19, lost his speech eight years ago after a flu and fever caused severe infection in his ears. After prayer he was healed and rushed forward to share his story, speaking clearly for the first time in years.

* Vladimir, 81, a World War II veteran who served in the Soviet army, suffered deafness in one ear caused by artillery shelling. Because of another war injury he couldn't raise his right arm high enough to feed himself.

Sporting his war medals the day after May Day, Vladimir answered an altar call for salvation and after being prayed for, instantly raised his right arm high above his head and gained hearing back in his ear.

As word of the healings spread into the city and outlying villages, more Kyrgyz brought their sick. Wheelchairs lined the front row. One woman who had been crippled from polio for 45 years was healed—and got out of her wheelchair and walked to prove it.

"They reverence God, but they don't know who God is. They think He might be punishing them with illness," Leslie McNulty told Charisma.

"Sickness and disease is not from God," she tells a crowd in the tent. "He doesn't teach us with sickness and harm. He teaches us with love."

The Bishkek campaign represented a major first for Christian Adventures International. It was the first time a religious committee of a former Soviet republic wrote a letter thanking them for coming—and invited them back.

“They called us at the end of the meeting to tell us how good it was and that we could come back any time,” Leslie McNulty says. “They never call! That was a first. They promised us a letter as well, which has never happened!”

After the last night of the campaign, the McNultys are resting in the lounge of the Hotel Pinara near the tent. They are surprised when the manager of the Kyrgyz state orchestra walks up with his wife and children to greet them.

The manager formerly worked in the Kyrgyz government’s visa-application office and had often hindered the McNultys from getting entry visas. On this night, he had brought his family to the tent to hear the festival’s music.

He had heard Kevin McNulty preach the gospel and told Kevin how he and his wife came down to the altar for salvation. He then offered to bring the Kyrgyz orchestra to tent festivals the McNultys are planning for next year.

“When people in high places come to the Lord, that opens the nation to revival,” Leslie McNulty says. “That is extreme evidence that God gave a real outpouring of His Spirit here at this time. And there’s a lot more outpouring on the way.”

Ancient Strongholds

Most Kyrgyz profess to be Muslims, though most are nominal and do not study the Quran or pray five times a day, despite the hundreds of mosques across the country, Vasilii Kuzin says. Kuzin is senior pastor of the Church of Jesus Christ in Bishkek, a Pentecostal organization that has grown from 300

members three years ago to 6,000 members and eight churches today.

Kuzin is senior pastor over all the churches, which have headquarters at the main church in Bishkek in a building that housed a common Soviet center of culture and art. A bust of Vladimir Lenin over the church's entrance is covered up.

The McNultys credit the success of their tent campaigns to the persistent efforts of Kuzin's network and other local churches to influence the city with evangelism and prayer for revival.

"If not for the would not have happened," Kevin McNulty says.

Kyrgyz's spirituality is steeped in paganism and the occult, Kuzin says. Many will take a fortuneteller to a cemetery to pray to a deceased loved one. Some spend a Sunday afternoon at a city courtyard paying one of the 30 to 40 fortunetellers who gather there to break curses or advise seekers about their personal futures.

Another Kyrgyz tradition involves the worship of Manas, a spirit of war. A huge statue of Manas stands prominently in a Bishkek square. He rides a horse and waves a sword.

President Askar Akaev recently led a centennial celebration of Manas, and hundreds of cattle were sacrificed to him. Billboards proclaim "Kyrgyzstan is Manas!" on main highways. Worshipers also visit a traditional tomb in Talas to pay their respects, though scientists recently proved that a woman is buried there, according to Kuzin.

“They have a little piece of literature that says Manas existed,” he says. “It offers some impossible facts. But because they have no one else to worship, they worship him.”

Kuzin believes that Kyrgyzstan’s bloody battles with Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 were attributable to the Kyrgyz’ worship of Manas’ warring spirit. Russian support kept the Uzbeks from winning their former land back.

The Uzbeks fought the Kyrgyz for fertile land that belonged to Uzbekistan until it was annexed into Kyrgyzstan by the Soviets. The extremist Taliban regime in Afghanistan and its heroin-trafficking proponents planned to take over Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and combine them into one Taliban-run extremist Muslim state, the McNultys said.

By press time for this story, U.S. soldiers were based in Uzbekistan, poised to play a role in a ground war in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban. Russia and the United States began cooperation in the region after the September 11 attacks in America by Afghanistan-based terrorist Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network.

Russians Reaching Russians

Izhevsk, Russia, is located approximately 580 miles east of Moscow in the Republic of Udmurtiya, within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—the federation founded in 1991 that comprises 12 of the former republics of the . Yuri Degtyar, 35, pastors Word of Faith, a Pentecostal church in Izhevsk, where the McNultys conducted another groundbreaking tent campaign in July.

Degtyar says the Republic of Udmurtiya, population 1.6 million, has the second highest suicide rate of any country in the world, a sad fact that Degtyar says is a result of residents reaping what they sow. He says a “spirit of death” curses Izhevsk because a World War II-era weapons factory still manufactures the Kalashnikov machine gun.

He tells the story of a woman who worked in the factory. Her son joined the Russian army and went to fight in Afghanistan, where he was killed. The Russians killed the Afghans who shot her son, and they traced the Afghan soldier’s machine gun back to her factory line. They determined that she had made the gun that killed her son.

Drug addiction in the Republic of Udmurtiya is widespread. There are 60,000 heroin addicts in Izhevsk alone, or almost one-tenth of the population of the city of 655,000 people. Paganism also is rampant, Degtyar says, and animal sacrifices to pagan gods are common.

“The son of one of the leading pagan priests got saved and now attends our church,” Degtyar notes.

Word of Faith opened a Bible school in 1995, and the 300 students who have graduated since then have helped Degtyar plant 150 churches in the Republics of Udmurtiya, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and the Kirov region. Degtyar sees persecution in many forms, but he says, “I would lay my life down for the Lord.”

One of Degtyar’s protégés may have done just that. On the night of July 24 or early morning of July 25, six masked gunmen suspected to be local drug kingpins kidnapped pastor

Dmitri Marenko, director of a drug-rehab center operated by Word of Faith. Marenko's car was found in a ravine, but he has not been heard from since he disappeared.

Izhevsk is one of many transitional distribution points for the illegal drugs that pass through central Asia en route to Russia, where 1 in 5 teen-agers are drug addicts. Word of Faith opened New Life, its substance-abuse rehabilitation center, last year. Today, 60 are enrolled, and another 1,000 addicts are waiting for treatment.

Evangelical Christians, especially Pentecostals, face persecution from the Russian Orthodox Church and from local and regional governments that are influenced by Muslims or Orthodoxy. Often the local governments ignore superceding Russian laws passed in 1996 to protect the religious freedoms of registered churches.

In many regions where the Soviets once ruled, the gospel is preached in a vacuum that lingers from communism's premise that there is no God, that religion is only a symptom of hardship in society, and that hardship is something government—not God—can cure.

Despite the persecution, the McNultys and many Russian Pentecostals are enjoying great success in raising up and training Russians to evangelize Russians. The McNultys don't believe God is going to allow the door to Russia ever to be closed to the gospel again.

"That doesn't mean that prophecy will never be fulfilled with Gog and Magog," Kevin McNulty said. "But it has been shown that what door God opens can never be closed. You don't think

Jesus is going to come back and hell will be more populated than heaven, do you? God is not about to let the devil win.”

Russian Women Lead the Way

Natasha Schedrivaya was the first woman ordained a pastor in Russia and elected to lead a nationwide church network.

Women believers in Russia are working the hardest to evangelize their nation. But they are getting the least recognition for their efforts.

This common handicap won't dampen Russian women's zeal for servanthood—a trait not common in Russian hierarchy, according to a key female leader in Russia's growing Pentecostal movement.

Russian women make up approximately 80 percent of the membership in Pentecostal, Baptist or charismatic churches, and they are doing the hardest work. But they rarely are recognized or given the opportunity to advance their gifts in a male-dominated hierarchy, says Bishop Natasha Schedrivaya, president of Calvary Fellowship of Churches of Russia.

Schedrivaya is the first woman to be elected by male peers to such a key leadership post. Calvary Fellowship consists of 60 churches in Russia and 300 churches across the lands of the former Soviet Union. Schedrivaya also is considered to be the first woman ever to be ordained as a bishop in Russia—a very respected title there.

“Russians know how to order and to command, but we need to better understand that a leader is really a servant, especially in church structure,” Schedrivaya told Charisma during an interview in Izhevsk, Russia.

She said many of those evangelists who came in the wave of the early 1990s brought with them a teaching on spiritual authority that emphasized the absolute control of a pastor or leader. “This only produced what we had before [under Soviet rule]—over-control and resulting rebellion,” Schedrivaya says. “The body of Christ needs to set a new standard of leadership as a position not of control and power, but one of true biblical servanthood.”

With help from Leslie McNulty and Ladonna Osborn, Schedrivaya led some of the first women’s conferences in Russia. Women are taught the Bible’s principles for taking their biblical roles in the church. Many are surprised to hear they even can have a role. But Schedrivaya’s review of the roles women played in the Bible “gives them this fresh perspective on how we as women have a glorious future with God,” she says.

Schedrivaya’s election in 1997 as president of Calvary marked a huge step in progress for Russian women in the church. Her election occurred just one year after Calvary Fellowship’s leadership became Russian as American counterparts transferred leadership roles to indigenous people when enough leaders had been trained.

Today, Schedrivaya and other women in the many churches of Calvary Fellowship are implementing strategies to win Russia for Christ one village at a time. “Seventy percent of all the money is in Moscow. Let them have the money and the power struggle. The government will never help the villagers. But if

36,000 villages are reached for Christ, all of Russia will prosper.”

100 Tents to Reach Russia

Inspired by a vision by missionary T.L. Osborn, Kevin and Leslie McNulty use circus tents for gospel outreaches.

Kevin and Leslie McNulty are the type of missionaries who will hear God say, “Go to China.” And with no more instructions than that, off they’ll go to a communist nation they’ve never visited before.

The McNultys did exactly that in 1989, when they found themselves in Beijing handing out gospel tracts to pro-democracy youth in Tiananmen Square—not knowing that soon after they left many would be slaughtered by the Chinese army.

Being in God’s timing is everything for the McNultys. This is how they live each day—waiting for their next assignment, tangling with obstacle after obstacle in the world’s most difficult places for evangelism. Their level of faith is contagious.

“Every time I think we should scale back, God tells me to increase,” Kevin McNulty says.

Kevin graduated from Michigan State University and became a successful tennis coach at Central Michigan University and Valley Forge Christian College before God changed his plans. He pastored in Detroit, went on mission trips to Spain and

Haiti, and was on his way to minister to American Indians in Nevada when the Lord detoured him to Oklahoma.

It was at Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that Kevin met Leslie. They were married in October 1988 and immediately went into the mission field.

Kevin also earned a doctorate degree in missiology from Life Christian University (LCU) in Tampa, Florida. Leslie earned a business administration degree from Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, and a master's degree in theology from LCU. She received a ministry certificate from Rhema.

Since 1991, the McNultys have been winning Russians to Christ and training them to reach their own people. When many Western missionaries left Russia or went underground in the wake of Russia's new religious laws in 1996, the McNultys ignored the bad news and heard the Lord say, "Go big, go bright, and go above ground!"

"The doors have never closed, and we are legal wherever we go," Kevin says. "The law has helped us because it clearly defines our rights."

It's kind of hard to miss them—their circus-style white-and-yellow tent holds 5,000 people. In 1996 they helped missionary-evangelist T.L. Osborn lead 10 leadership conferences across Eurasia. It was Osborn's prophetic words to the McNultys that inspired them to set goals to reach Russia with tents.

"We owe T.L. so much—we really honor him," Leslie says. "He gave us an epistle that really launched our faith." Kevin was

planning to use one tent until Osborn challenged the McNultys to think bigger. "He said, 'No, you need 100 tents,'" Kevin says.

Christian Adventures International started with one tent in 1998. Today the ministry sends Russian evangelism teams with the ministry's 12 tents. "The real secret to this ministry is the duplication of the people as evangelists," Kevin says.

Today, when not at their U.S. headquarters in Daytona Beach, Florida, the McNultys occupy a mission house outside Moscow where they plan to build a training center for Russian evangelists—and a tent factory.

"It is an absolute miracle that we do what we do," Leslie says. "We have no more than 100 people who are involved in our ministry, and we may have between 100 and 135 people who give regular financial support."

Charisma readers can help send 100 Russian evangelists and 100 tents across the former . Send your tax-deductible gifts to Christian Life Missions, "Russian Tent Project," P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, Florida 32795-2248. You can contact Kevin and Leslie McNulty at .

Haunted by a Bloody Past

Lenin and Stalin rest i honor to Moscow's Red Square, but some Christians say their tombs represent a demonic history.

Against the Kremlin walls in Red Square, amid the center of

power in Moscow, lies what many Christians believe is a demonic stronghold—the prominent graves of two of Russia's most famous yet most brutal leaders. Russian Christians say this stronghold must be overcome if their country is ever to shed the grip of the dark forces that brought it atheistic communism.

That the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and its two largest icons—Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin—are still being honored at Red Square's most prominent place for national heroes makes some church leaders wonder what the Russians in government are thinking. Has the totalitarian reign of Soviet dictators really passed? Or is the new Russian federation just a Soviet cat with different spots?

In Red Square lies Lenin, still exhibited in a mausoleum built when he died in 1924. Lenin—who led the radical socialist Bolshevik Party to overthrow the provisional government in the 1917 revolution—hated God and those who worshiped Him.

Behind Lenin's tomb are buried the remains of the other Soviet icon, Josef Stalin, whose purge of suspected or potential political opposition before World War II resulted in the deaths of at least 4 million of his countrymen. And yet there is his sculpted bust, scowling arrogantly on a pedestal above his grave marker next to the Kremlin wall.

The body of Stalin, who died in 1953 and led the Soviet Union after Lenin's death, was on display with Lenin's inside Lenin's mausoleum until 1961. Then-Premier Nikita Khrushchev ordered Stalin's remains removed and buried in an unmarked grave behind Lenin's tomb.

In a rare admission of Soviet tyranny, Khrushchev noted Stalin's dark record of murder for power and said he did not deserve to be in such a high place of honor. The grave finally was marked in 1970.

Throngs of people stood in line last July in one of the worst heat waves in Moscow in recent history, just for a chance to gaze upon the remains of Lenin—dead for 77 years. His wish was to be buried in his home village next to his mother, but Soviet leaders decided it better to keep his body on display to keep his spirit alive in Soviet society.

Russian soldiers guard every turn in the dark hallways leading to Lenin's viewing room. Lenin's body is illuminated by lighting—his upper torso, folded hands and color-treated face glow eerily through the clear, pressurized glass as he lies in his casket.

Whispers invade the room as viewers move around his casket, which is roped off to keep visitors at arm's length. In the silence a question rings very loud: Why? Why is the body of a man who ushered in Russia's darkest years still on public exhibit?

"They want to keep his spirit alive," says Sergey Ryakhovsky, general overseer of the Russian Church of God and Christian political activist in Moscow. "However, the Russia today is very different than 10 years ago. The people love freedom, and they are eager to find God. They are accustomed to breathing freely.

"The door to these freedoms could become narrow. As long as Lenin's body is on Red Square, that spirit will try to avenge

this freedom. That is the concentration of demonic powers.”

Lenin “was demonic, had a demonic personality. On his order, millions of priests were tortured and killed,” Ryakhovsky says. “Lenin was the first leader to implement the communist ideology of Karl Marx, who said there was no God.”

Paul Steeves, professor of history at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, specializes in Russian history, especially the history of religion in Russia.

“Lenin was very hostile to the Russian Orthodox Church, practically a psycho in his hatred of them,” Steeves told Charisma. “Lenin, however, actually showed favor toward evangelicals and Protestants because Lenin knew they were considered by Russian Orthodox as an enemy.

“So, many evangelicals thought Lenin’s government was a government from God. They knew Lenin was a hater of God, but they also knew that Lenin was struggling against their enemy. It was an alliance of convenience.”

Ironically, Lenin’s favor enabled American and Russian Pentecostal evangelists to sweep Russia from 1923 to 1927 with tent crusades, similar to the crusades in America’s 1950s and to Kevin and Leslie McNulty’s ongoing crusades in Russia today.

Steeves and Eugene Huskey, professor of political science at Stetson, both believe Stalin’s burial place makes more sense than does the public exhibition of Lenin’s remains.

"It makes sense to leave Stalin there," Steeves says. "It would be problematic to imagine digging up graves of past rulers to do something with the body. That would be offensive to human thinking, more so than leaving them there, even though both Stalin and Lenin were inhumane people."

Huskey, director of Stetson's Russian Studies Department, said the display of Lenin and Stalin at Red Square is evidence of the ambivalence of Russians toward the Soviet legacy.

"They still feel themselves as partly Soviet," Huskey says. "They are worried about the elimination of all Soviet symbols. They might lose their identity—and they have yet to create a new identity."

"To make a decision to remove Lenin's body when no one is clamoring for this would be politically risky. It would alienate at least a small segment of the population. So if no one is holding up picket signs saying remove the body, why risk it?"

Steeves notes that the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church has on occasion voiced support for having Lenin's body buried properly, if only for humane reasons. "But he always backs off and says this is not the right time," Steeves said.

Could be Sergey Ryakhovsky knows why the time never seems to be right. "When I asked one of the Russian Orthodox bishops why they keep silent on this subject of Lenin's body, he says, 'We do not want to see the Christian cemetery desecrated by that demonic power.'"

And so the spirit of Lenin continues to radiate and permeate

Russian society from the Kremlin's center of power in Moscow's Red Square. Huskey and Steeves believe the Russians will within 10 to 15 years remove Lenin and bury him. Ryakhovsky and other Christian leaders believe the sooner this is done, the better. It will be a major victory in spiritual warfare.

"You can change the name of your country, and you can change the color of your flag," Ryakhovsky says. "But you cannot change the mentality overnight. It will take many generations."

Billy Bruce, news editor for Charisma, traveled to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia to file this report.