

Ministry Preparations Underway for 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi

Excitement is mounting in the Olympic host city of Sochi, Russia, where a countdown clock displays the number of days until the opening ceremonies of the 22nd Winter Olympic Games slated for February 2014. Online ticket sales for sporting events as well as the opening festivities are brisk, according to several news reports.

Staff members and volunteers from Baptist conventions in Oklahoma and Georgia recently spent a week with IMB missionaries in the host city to plan for the Engage Sochi emphasis. Engage Sochi is an IMB initiative that mobilizes Southern Baptists to reach the people of Sochi by sharing the gospel and planting churches.

“I think it is important for conventions to be leading out in Olympic ministry,” said Georgia Baptist Convention staffer Marty Youngblood, a veteran of Olympic ministries. “It allows us to reach the world in a much more responsible way, as far as our resources go.”

While many Olympic ministry projects have focused solely on sharing the Gospel, Engage Sochi also includes a strong church-planting component. Volunteers will have the opportunity to share the Good News with people from around the world, but the primary focus is to reach individuals who live and work in the host city.

Youngblood says the intentional church planting at an Olympic event makes the project unique.

“We are going to be focusing on the people of Sochi,” he said. “Mass evangelism is good. It’s important to focus on the

people from around the world. But, when we focus on the city and the people of Sochi, we leave more of a lasting influence than we usually would during the Olympics.”

Bob Nigh, managing editor of the *Oklahoma Baptist Messenger* newspaper, said he believes the Engage Sochi philosophy is important. “We need to be able to look back on this and ask, ‘What difference did all of that make?’ And hopefully, and prayerfully, this is going to make a huge difference in the lives of many people who live in Sochi.”

One of the duties for Nigh, Randy Lind of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and several members of the Singing Churchmen of Oklahoma was to find venues where the men’s choir will perform during the Olympics.

“We looked at Mexico, China and some other places to minister in 2014,” said Lind. “But, when I heard that we could help local pastors and also do work in church planting, that really touched my heart. The fact that we get to do all of this during the Olympics is just icing on the cake.”

Lind says the Engage Sochi team realizes there is much work left to do during the next year.

“We are going to be praying a lot,” he said. “We will be preparing to do things that we believe will reach out and touch people’s hearts, musically. But, we will also be refreshing that story ... that story about how our lives have been changed by God working in us, and how Christ has made a difference in our lives.”

Youngblood is asking Southern Baptists to pray for the Engage Sochi ministry team and logistics coordinators. “This may be one of the most difficult Winter Olympics that I have ever come to know and see as far as logistical planning is concerned,” he said.

“I think God is going to do something spectacular here ...

maybe even more than anything we have ever experienced in Olympic ministries," he added. "I am convinced that this is going to be a time where we see the Lord move in mighty ways in the community of Sochi, with the churches here and with people from around the world."

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