

Anointed Russians Bring Revival to the American Church

Pastor Nicolay Novik suffered persecution in his native country of Belarus because of his Christian faith. He was even fined for hosting church services. That's why he made the difficult decision to move to the United States 20 years ago.

In July 2001, he arrived in Philadelphia with his wife and seven children. He planted Word of Life Church, a predominantly Russian-speaking congregation. Today it has 800 weekly attendees.

"In the past, the Slavic church had only Jesus to rely on," Pastor Novik tells *Charisma*. "Our biggest treasure was our freedom in Christ. This gave us the joy and strength to go on. Christ was our source for everything. We had no one else to trust or to help us."

Today, Novik's church is not only reaching Philadelphia but also the Russian-speaking world. Many mission teams are sent out from Word of Life. And one member, an immigrant from a former Soviet republic, has planted dozens of Christian radio stations in Central Asia.

Alex Novik, 36, the pastor's oldest son, owns a graphic design business in Philadelphia. He was 16 when he came to the United States, and he and his wife have been leaders in youth and young adult ministry. The younger Novik sees God's hand in bringing so many Slavic Christians to America.

"Slavic churches can pray for hours without music and a cozy atmosphere," Alex says. "I believe the Slavic church is here in the United States for prayer and action. But Slavic Christians also need a deep encounter with God, just like all

other Christians in America. It is easy to get used to a comfortable and easy life here. Endless opportunity can cause you to stray from the true calling and purpose God has for you.”

All over the United States, pockets of Slavic Christians are building churches and spreading the gospel from their new home base. Most of them are Pentecostal or Baptist. The highest concentrations of Russian-speaking believers are in Jacksonville, Florida; Sacramento, California; Seattle; Boston; Philadelphia; St. Louis; and Dallas.

Why did God bring these immigrants to America? Perhaps God knew we in America needed some encouragement and reinforcement. I have done mission work in Russia, so I’ve had the opportunity to watch this Slavic movement grow in the United States. I believe in the same way one part of the body supplies another, the Lord calls one part of His church to strengthen and comfort the rest of the body of Christ for a season. And in this season, I have found exactly that in some up-and-coming Slavic-American leaders.

My friend Vik Fomenko, a Bible teacher in Vancouver, Washington, told me recently that he believes Slavic leaders can help the church in the U.S. develop new vision during this intense time of shaking.

“God is restoring spiritual sight to the church today,” Fomenko says. “Between COVID and the recent election, so many people in the church are stuck looking at what’s happening on earth. The church is deactivated when we see in the natural, but the Lord is revealing those who aren’t shaken by what they see in the natural. The Lord is sending leaders to raise the church’s vision so that we see His blueprint, from His perspective.”

I believe a major part of the next phase for the church in America is the refreshment and refire a small, but mighty

group of young Slavic-American leaders bring to the table. These are young leaders who have come out of spiritually dark places in the former USSR, and whose parents were thrilled to immigrate to the U.S.

In many ways, they've kept what is good about the Slavic identity they've come from, while also taking on major aspects of America's spiritual heritage and calling.

There will most certainly be other parts of the body, specialties or types of ministries that the Lord will also call to supply His family in America with what it needs, but when I see the fire and passion of many Slavic-American leaders, I believe the Lord has put something in them that can help spur us on as the church in America. The question is: Are we willing to receive it?

Passionate Faith

About a decade ago, an unbelieving professor made a point about the Russian soul that has stuck with me ever since. I had been studying the Russian language for a year at a secular university program. During one class, a drunk man stumbled by our classroom window and fell face first into the snow. The professor and I had been discussing the incredible sacrifice the USSR made to defend their land against Hitler when he pointed at the drunk guy picking himself up out of the snow and said, "If that man felt he had purpose, he'd be willing to push himself to the point of death in order to fulfill that purpose. Instead, he's probably ruined his family and will never do anything good in life."

That stung. While certain aspects of that statement can apply to all of humanity, my unbelieving professor opened up a revelation for me. I realized that that was the key to the contrast between my believing and unbelieving Russian-speaking friends.

When they decide they don't need God, they tend to run as fast

as they can from the Lord, but when they burn for the Lord, they burn red-hot. This infectious passion could act as a catalyst for so many in the American church today.

Meesh Fomenko, a powerful evangelist, is a young Slavic leader who burns with such a passion. "I believe I am called as a prophetic voice to this generation to reach, raise and release," he says. "Reach the world with the gospel, raise disciples in their identity and release influencers to transform the world."

As believers, it would be easy to wait until things calm down and don't feel as chaotic before deciding on our next steps in our relationship with the Lord or our plans for ministry. Instead, we should take more of Fomenko's example. While the enemy would like us to be on the sideline, waiting until things become easier or clearer, ministers like Fomenko aren't waiting for calm but striking back at the gates of hell in the midst of chaos.

We all need to be reminded from time to time of our basic marching orders as Christians, especially with the disappointment so many in our country feel after the 2020 election. Pulling on the passion of these young, Slavic leaders can help us reset our focus and reignite our hunger.

Vlad Savchuk, pastor of Hungry Generation church in Pasco, Washington, is another leader who exemplifies the passion of the Russian-speaking people. He shared with me his perspective on reigniting the passion in the American church, saying, "Churches now often grow through transfer growth instead of plundering the gates of hell. We've become houses of preaching instead of houses of prayer. I encourage the church in America to get radical in prayer, to burn again with a heart for the lost and to raise their expectations for the miraculous and for confronting demons."

What would we look like if just half the church in America

burned with the passion Savchuk describes here? Let's take the passion of these leaders and have a moment to truly reset our vision on the Lord and His mission in our lives, seeking Him and His kingdom above all else.

Generations Working Together

One other area we as American Christians can glean from these young Slavic leaders is honor between the generations. Many of these leaders have fought to walk in a kingdom mentality in their ministries, and that has borne the fruit of a culture of honor, especially between the generations.

This isn't something only available to Slavic cultures. In fact, as Russell Korets, a Slavic-American pastor in Redmond, Washington, puts it, this type of honor goes against much of traditional Slavic culture.

If you look at those of us with a Russian and Ukrainian background, you can see that many of us with that background aren't ready to say thank you to our forefathers," Korets says. "We are anxious to do everything in a new way, and we often are too quick to abandon our past. But I think that we've gained so much in our faith in large part because of the faith of our forefathers. We must look at their sacrifice, thanking them properly, and then move forward. They invested into us something very vital—holiness, seeking God and prayer. And when you add to this a ministry and passion for people, something supernatural begins to happen."

Under communism, the government, in many ways, becomes everyone's de facto parent. That is why Russia was known as one of the most fatherless countries in the world after the USSR fell. It had some of the highest numbers in the world in alcoholism, abortion, divorce and domestic abuse. When the state stopped directing and providing, it became too much of a burden for many Slavic men to provide for their families, causing them to abandon their families through alcoholism and

suicide. You can probably imagine the wave of broken families that came out of such a broken system.

In the churches in these countries that were part of the Soviet Union, however, the families were able to stay more intact after its fall. Their faith helped to act as an anchor, even amid the hopelessness and poverty they saw all around them.

Fast forward to today, when most of the churches that were planted by the families who immigrated in the late '80s and early '90s are ready to transfer leadership to the next generation. These mothers and fathers in the Lord have kept their way of doing church intact in many ways for decades, even down to the dress and song choice. They persevered under great persecution and want to hang on to the parts of their life and culture that were areas of victory.

But the young leaders are on fire and are anxious to reach their English-speaking communities. This type of transition between the generations can lead to a number of issues for many churches, Slavic or otherwise. In the case of Slavic churches though, coming from a culture not known for honor between the generations has created an extra barrier.

My friend Irina Kralenko is one of the directors of SOLD, a ministry school in Orlando, Florida. I asked her about this transition between the generations.

"[The older believers] have been through so many trials and so much persecution, and yet they remained faithful to their God," Kralenko says. "Through the years, they might have adopted traditions that could be irrelevant nowadays, so the younger generation is breaking free from certain traditions, stepping into their personal encounters and cultivating intimacy with the Lord. My dream, though, is that we would become a true family, to see the culture of honor established in communities between generations. My heart would be for the

younger generation and older generation to come together in unity for the greater good in the Lord.”

The honor that Kralenko and other young Slavic leaders have cultivated toward the older generation while still moving forward into what the Lord has called them to do is truly admirable. It didn't happen by accident though. They have fought to renew their hearts and minds to see other leaders, especially their spiritual fathers and mothers, from heaven's perspective.

In some cases, the transition between leaders has still been messy. Some from the younger generation have pursued what they believed the Lord was calling them to and neglected what He was already doing around them. And some of the mothers and fathers have insisted their way of doing church is the only right way.

In the midst of some of the mess that has come from transition, these young leaders have kept their hearts in a good place toward their elders, even when those elders didn't understand them and, in some cases, rejected them outright. But the young leaders also understand that dishonoring those who came before them would only cut off the fruit of the victories of the past, so they've fought past the rejection.

When I see the victory that these Russian-speaking leaders have fought for in the area of honor, I'm reminded of so many groups and individual leaders who could use that revelation in their own lives. If we could unlock our hearts and receive a deeper revelation of honor, I believe thanksgiving and gratitude would replace grumbling and division. Keeping our hearts in that place of honor would help us to keep what has been gained in the areas of worship, healing, prayer and seeking the Lord's face—without having to reinvent the wheel in future generations.

Power in Unity

I've received powerful impartations in my life from individuals, ministries and movements. By honoring what the Lord is doing in these Russian-speaking leaders, we can unlock the spiritual treasure brought from their spiritual culture. I've been surprised by something the Lord has done in my heart though. As I've honored them, I've been reminded of what is so special about our own culture and heritage as American believers.

Daniel Mironichenko is a powerful young Slavic leader who is aware of what he has gleaned from both American and Slavic churches. I asked him about how he would encourage his brothers and sisters in the church in America.

"There is a lot of freedom that the Lord has empowered us with," Mironichenko says. "I believe that the American church has so much to offer, so much to give. As a byproduct of both, I've been able to gain from both Russian and American churches. I learned community in Russian-speaking churches growing up, but I learned freedom in American churches. I'd want the American churches to be reminded of the freedom that I gleaned from them. That freedom is empowering, and it allows us to step out and dream and begin to reach the lost."

Andrey Shapoval is another leader who walks in the best of both the Russian and American cultures. His powerful annual conference, Kingdom Domain, has become a hub for young Slavic-American leaders who are driven by the passion of the Slavic world paired with the freedom and empowerment they've learned in their American upbringing. The results so far have been glorious!

Getting to see the passion and honor these young Slavic leaders have combined with that freedom and empowerment has been a boost to my own faith. The Lord isn't done with the church in America, and receiving from these leaders in this season has reminded me of that.

I believe His hand is on these young Slavic leaders and what they are bringing will help us reset our vision and combine the best testimonies of what God has done and is doing between the generations. In other words, the Russians are coming—and in this case, I couldn't be more excited!

Adam Morris has a passion for revealing the Father's love and equipping believers to hear His voice. He and his wife, Katherine, were missionaries in Russia and are now itinerant ministers based in Jacksonville, Florida.

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