

To Russia With Love

A MISSIONS OUTREACH AFFILIATED WITH CAPITAL CHRISTIAN CENTER

APRIL 1991

To Russia With Love is a christian relief effort targeting the people of the Soviet Union. We are gathering food, clothing, medical supplies, and literature to fill a 40 foot container. It will be sent to Germany where it will be trucked into the USSR by Stephanus Christliches Diakonisches Hilfswerk, e.V. Thus far we have sent supplies through Impact Ministries in Redmond, Washington. Our goal now is to send our own container from Sacramento. Already several hundred boxes of supplies have been collected. We still need more donations of goods as well as about \$3700 for shipment costs.

OUR DONATIONS REACH THE USSR

We know that because of Soviet government corruption some of the aid sent by American relief organizations never reaches the Soviet people. Therefore we have chosen a very creditable organization to transport our donations: Stephanus, based in Speyer, Germany. The chief driver for Stephanus, Rubin Firus, is a long time friend of To Russia With Love worker John Venikov. To further establish the credibility of Stephanus To Russia With Love worker Arild Barrett accompanied them on recent deliveries in Ukraine. Below is an account of that trip.

March 2, 1991

Our convoy of seven vehicles is standing at the Polish-Soviet border. The two largest trucks are twin-trailer semis of over 20 ton gross weight; the smallest is a Ford van. Of our group of 17, 10 are Russians who have immigrated to Germany, 2 are hired German truck drivers, 4 are German church people with an interest in missions, and one, myself, is the sole American of the group.



Arild Barrett at a truck stop in Poland

The border crossing is no problem. Because we are bringing help to the Russian people, the guards are very cooperative. There are no thorough searches, only the usual filling out of customs forms. Soon we are in the town of Brest where we leave the vehicles at a guarded parking lot, and spend the night the house of Sergei Tsvor. He knows many of the Sacramento Russian immigrants who came from the nearby town of Novovolinsk. He has his own two story brick house. Although it was warm and roomy, it was not equipped with hot running water or an indoor toilet.



On the road to Kiev, we enjoyed police escort. They drove before us with lights flashing. All other traffic pulled over as we drove past. Evidently armed bandits have been masquerading as police, pulling over trucks and stealing their cargoes. As we travel along, our police escort is changed often in order to distinguish between the true local police and impostors. At last we reach the beautiful city of Kiev. Our escort takes us through the city center not stopping for red lights, directly

to the guarded parking lot. The Russians in our group joke that it was as if Gorbachev himself came through town.

We check into the tourist hotel "Dnipro", where we enjoy a dinner in the hotel restaurant. Total bill for 17 people is 105 Rubles. At the black market exchange rate of 21 rubles per dollar, that's only about five dollars.

We have a couple of hours the next day to sight see. To my surprise the Central Department Store seemed to be well stocked. The Russians say the stores are well stocked with things they don't need. We learn that the government has recently issued coupons to residents of each oblast (administrative region like a county). The coupons specify how often one can purchase food, clothing, gasoline, etc. That does not guarantee that it will be available in the store, however.

We make our first deliveries to the home of Pyotr Chornozub, in Kiev. He led a powerful prayer of thanks in which I could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. I am moved by the deep joy that the Russian Christians have, in spite of their living conditions and a hostile government. I feel ashamed for being discouraged about the relatively small problems I experience.

The next day we drive through small villages and towns to Alexandriya. I notice how backward Russian country life is. Roads are full of pot holes, the houses and buildings are in disrepair, and mud and dirt are everywhere. People draw water from wells, use outhouses, and drive horse-drawn wagons.

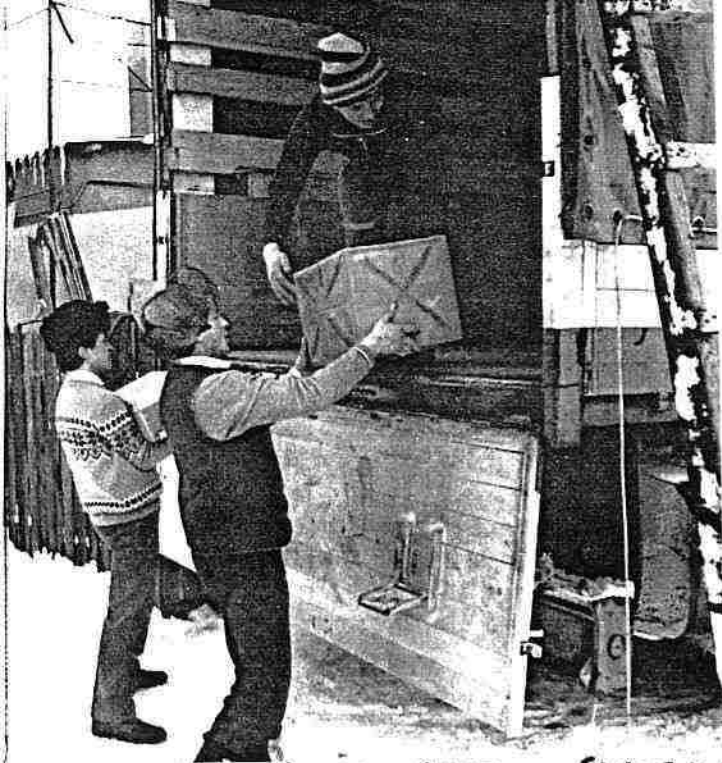
We delivered several dozen boxes to Alexandriya, and pressed on to Krivoy Rog.

Krivoy Rog is the ugliest city I've ever seen. The red dust from large iron mines has settled on cars, buildings, bridges. The trees have died because of the pollution, and many people suffer from cancer. In stark contrast to the run-down city is the church built by members of the local pentecostal congregations. Inside, it is clean and beautifully decorated with murals, banners, and fancy pine woodwork. We delivered many boxes to this church. The clothes and food will be distributed to the local believers according to need, and also to the general population. Pastor Vladimir Laschuk is a bundle of energy. He told me of plans for large evangelism meetings in city stadiums this summer. They are in desperate need of a public address system and musical instruments.

Later, we had an opportunity to attend this church's Sunday meeting. The congregation sat on wooden benches. Men sat on one side and women on the other. Of the two or three hundred worshippers, there were three or four times as many women as men. I was really impressed by the special music. Two talented young men had written their own songs, complete with synthesizer accompaniment. During the four hour service, several speakers presented short, emotional messages. We paused for prayer three or four times, once on our knees.

I rode with the 20 ton semi to Mariupol, a port city on the Azov sea. It was here that we unloaded the boxes from Sacramento. The people are very excited to talk with an American. They want to know what I think about the USSR. They ask questions about life in America. When asked what kind of things they need they say men's, women's, and children's winter and summer footwear, clothing. One woman asked for a wedding dress for her sister.





After unloading we were invited, as usual, to sit down and eat. It doesn't matter if it's meal time or not, or if you're hungry, you sit down and eat. Typical fare is mashed potatoes with chicken, sausage, pickles, strawberry compote and of course, bread. Tea and coffee are served after the meal. The menu doesn't change much from breakfast, lunch, to dinner.

unloading boxes from Sacramento in Makhopol

After nine days in the Soviet Union, we are again at the border. The line of waiting vehicles is literally a mile long. Because of our special status as transporters of relief, we drive past the line directly to the gate. Again the guards whisk us through with no hassles.



Stephanus driver Rubin Tirus (back row, second from left) with Kivoy Rog believers (in hats)

It is amazing to witness the openness the government has allowed. The Russians all agree, however, that the time of freedom will be short. It is crucial to do what we can before the forces of tyranny close the door to outside help.

Recent Price Hikes in the USSR

	old	new
white bread	0.4	0.74 rubles
butter	3.4	10.00
milk	0.22	0.62
Russian cheese	2.90	8.60
beef (1 kg)	1.90	12.20
sausage (1 kg)	3.30	15.50

Monthly food allowances have been lowered. Below is an excerpt from "Sovietskaya Sibir" newspaper dated Jan 4, 1991:

meat products	1.0 kg per person per month
butter	0.4 kg
vegetable oil	0.1 kg
sugar	1.0 kg
eggs	10
tea	0.1 kg