

# THE RACES' RACE

*"Run in such a way as to get the prize." 1 Corinthians 9:24b*



Dear Friends,

February 2023

**God is working everywhere! Praise the Lord!** 2022 was a blessed year for us as God gave us the opportunity to see how He is working not only in Russia and the U.S. but also in Lithuania, the Middle East, and South Africa. Due to the war in the Ukraine God has given Albina and me the privilege of seeing God's children in places that we would never have visited otherwise. I have shared about the trips to Lithuania and the Middle East in previous letters. In this letter I will share about our trip to Johannesburg, South Africa. In addition, I would also like to share about the decision we have made on where to serve God next.

## **God's Hand in South Africa**

South Africa is an amazing, culturally diverse mix of people where God has greatly worked and continues to work. Christianity was brought to SA about 370 years ago by Dutch settlers. For a couple hundred years the growth of the church was slow but then accelerated. Today, 80% of the total population of 60 million claim a Christian faith. **Praise the Lord!**

With amazing growth come significant challenges. The number of trained and godly leaders has not kept up with the growth of the church and this has caused practical and doctrinal issues. There is a considerable need to train pastors and lay leaders in Bible and Theology to have sound doctrine. Training in Christian Life is also needed as biblical mentors modeling godly living are in short supply.

Arthur and Olga Alard, missionaries with Entrust, knowing our situation in Russia, invited us to look at their ministry in Johannesburg. Arthur is the director of the International College of Bible and Mission (ICBM). The college was started in the year 2000 to train pastoral and lay leaders for evangelical churches in South Africa and neighboring countries. They have had as many as 200 students. Due to accreditation issues, they were not allowed to receive new students for a couple years. However, they have been reaccredited and their newest class began last week with 27 new students. **Praise the Lord! Pray for godly leaders to be developed.**



With the ICBM chairman of the board, the director, and their wives



Albina, Olga, and Yevette at ICBM

Arthur specifically invited us to work in the area of marriage and family within the bible college and within the community of churches. Despite the high percentage of people who call themselves Christian there are many single mothers. The average age of men getting married is 37 and for women it is 33 years old. Many women have children, but they never marry. This is due to various cultural reasons and high poverty. If Albina and I were to go to Johannesburg, we would try to raise up biblical leaders especially qualified in the area of marriage and family. The new leaders would assist the next generation of South Africans to enter marriages that would honor God and meet the needs

of the parents and the children.

## Our Decision of Where to Serve Next

After the war started in Ukraine we have been led by the Holy Spirit, and by the counsel of many godly people, not to return to Russia at this time. As we seek God's will for a new field to serve in, one of our main criteria is that there is an invitation by local Christian workers to come and join them. **Praise the Lord!** We received an invitation to both South Africa and to a country in the Middle East. Having visited both countries we truly had the desire to go to both and serve the Lord. However, as mentors in Wyoming pointed out, Albina and I are not the Holy Spirit, and thus cannot be in two places at one time.

After our return in mid-December from South Africa, Albina and I spent the next month praying and talking with godly men and women about the options. We felt, and others counseled, that both places seemed like wonderful places to serve. On January 15<sup>th</sup> Albina and I closed ourselves up in my office (which doubles as our bedroom) and prayed and talked and prayed some more. Finally, walking by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7), we made the decision to pursue moving to the country in the Middle East and minister there.

**What will we be doing there?** As mentioned in an earlier letter there are 700,000 Russians living in the region where we hope to move, many having left Russia and Ukraine due to the war. The pastor of a local Russian speaking evangelical church has invited us to join him and his wife. We will minister to the Russian speakers that already are saved and reach out to the lost. We also gladly will join the church as it serves a Ukrainian orphanage that was relocated after the start of the war. (*Definition: "Russian speaking" refers to most anyone from the former Soviet Union that speaks Russian.*)



With friends from Tatarstan as refugees in our new place of ministry



With Pastor Andrey and Anna, our new colleagues

**What is our timeline?** Albina and I would be glad to move tomorrow. But we believe that our move with Rob and Sam will not come until June, after the twins graduate from high school. Until then Albina will begin an online Master of Theology program (offered through a college in Johannesburg); I will work on becoming ordained; and we will make a trip or two to our new mission field. (*Update: Just a few minutes ago we talked to the pastor and his wife about leading a family focused outreach sometime soon, probably in March.*) **Please keep our transition in your prayers. Also pray that the war in the Ukraine would end and that God would be glorified in the process.**

## Family Update

In December we visited my dad and stepmother in northeast Nebraska. Since then, my stepmother has passed away and dad has spent a week in the hospital. He is currently in rehab at a local nursing home. **Please pray that my dad recovers enough strength to return home.**

This is a year of transition for our family. The twins, Art and Ed, are graduating high school and deciding on colleges. Zoe is graduating from college and deciding what to do next. Sofia and Albert are both teaching but just have one-year contracts at this point. **Please pray for Spirit-led decisions as our children launch out into God's Grand Adventure for them.**

God Bless,

Monte and Albina

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