

RAISING PERSONAL SUPPORT IN EASTERN EUROPE

By Eugene Simonov

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Christian groups poured in from the West and funded all the ministry projects here, but that created a wrong mentality in our minds. We became accustomed to wait for others to initiate ministry and provide funding rather than take on those responsibilities ourselves. In addition, there's an attitude in our culture that missionaries should be poor, and be working a job, too. Consequently, we have almost no full-time pastors.

That's the bad news. Here's the good. For ten years now our staff has been meeting with Christians here and challenging them to support us and our ministries on a monthly basis. It was a revolutionary concept (and still is!) for many, but a growing number of believers are taking that step of faith and experiencing tremendous blessings as a result. We continue to teach them to pray and give and be part of what God is doing here. My dream is to see—country by country—our ministries and workers completely supported by national Christians and churches.

Our practice each year is to take out a month to host a support raising training conference for our staff. We ask them to start preparing two months in advance, especially asking God to be working on their spiritual life and proper heart attitudes. If our staff views support raising as a burden, instead of a privilege, it's very difficult to transmit the right message to our potential ministry partners. So, this annual emphasis on support raising is not about money, but more about our relationship with the Lord and His building Christlike character into us. Here are some of the basics of what we do at our annual conference:

- We each prepare and bring a list of at least 50 contacts.
- We spend time in the Word building a Biblical mindset.
- We call together and set up appointments with Christians.
- During our appointments we share about our ministry and challenge them to partner with us through praying and giving.
- Then we call them back for a decision.

I've concluded that support raising is hard work! There is no easy way around it. Obstacles always come our way... or we create them ourselves. For instance:

- There is too much mediocrity and disunity among Christians here.
- Sometimes believers commit to give, but don't follow through.
- Our economy is very unstable and many don't have jobs with good salaries, and are barely surviving themselves and can just give very small amounts.
- Some staff don't discipline themselves and are not ready to work hard.
- Some staff lose their passion for God and ministry, and can't raise support effectively.

Two years ago, I formed a team of five leaders to regularly meet together to pray and strategize how to keep all of our staff fully funded. We then assigned each leader a particular group of staff to pray for, meet with, encourage and hold them accountable in support raising. In addition, we host a "Night of Vision" gathering each year where we invite all our staff's supporters, share God's

blessings as well as appreciate them for their faithfulness. This is very encouraging for us and for our ministry partners. They can see how God is using them right there in their own country to see the gospel advanced.

Eugene is with Campus Crusade in Moldova and ministers and raises his support there. Moldova is considered the poorest country in Europe and only 1-2% are evangelical Christians. Even though it is one of the most difficult countries in the world to raise personal support, Eugene and his staff are pressing ahead and seeing God fully provide.