

Ensuring a Future

MANUSCRIPT

The inspiration for this project began not so much with a problem, as with a story; many stories, in fact. E.g. Zhora and Beso from the republic of Georgia. (slide1) Twin brothers, Pentecostal pastors. From 1961-1966, they were incarcerated in a Soviet prison for their faith and leadership in the body of Christ. For those 5 years, Zhora and Beso labored secretly every night, hand copying and translating a Georgian Orthodox Bible into their heart language of Osettian. These two men paid the price for spiritual leadership in the Soviet Union, and together they worked to ensure a future for the Osettian Pentecostal Church in the Caucasus regions of Georgia and Southern Russia.

Stories about pastors during Soviet times, ensuring a future for their churches caused me to begin to notice how much things are changing in the post Soviet era. Ensuring the future of the Church, especially the training and mentoring of new pastors, was a role held by elder leaders in Soviet times. People like Zhora and Beso poured their lives into preparing the next generation of pastors for their churches. (slide 2) Today, with all the opportunities and avenues for education and training focused on young people (197 western sponsored bible schools in our area- most residential), how leaders are identified and established in the church is changing. Pentecostal elders like Zhora and Beso are being marginalized in the present theological education process. Along with distrust toward western ministry models and spirituality, including worship imported from Sydney and theology from Grand Rapids or Tulsa, this intergenerational and intercultural disconnect is bringing an erosion of context and identity to the Pentecostal church-what does it mean to be a leader of the people of the Spirit in post-Soviet societies? And out of that Q- what are the biblical and cultural components of a more effective approach to leadership development, one that engages the generations in ensuring a future for the post-Soviet Pentecostal Church? How can western assisted theological education efforts contribute in a manner that adds value to both generations? These were Qs the project set out to answer.

The research phase of the project indicated that an effective approach would emphasize what I called the “intergenerational transfer of spiritual leadership.” A leadership development process that reaches beyond functional pastoral training and theological education to

transformational relationships that result in spiritual authority and responsibility passing from one generation of leaders to the next. The approach gives high priority to intentionality on the part of present church leadership in the selection and mentoring of potential leaders; and to collaborative training efforts among missionaries, bible schools and churches, recognizing leadership development is the work of the whole people of God, not educational institutions alone. The seven phases of the approach move in a cyclical process (slide 3).

Testing the credibility of this approach took place with the graduates of the Faithful Men program in Yerevan, Armenia. (slide 4) An education program we designed to offer theological education to proven pastors and leaders who were forbidden Christian education during Soviet times. Our intent was that if we invest in “faithful men”, as the apostle Paul said, they will be “able to teach others also.” They will be the ones to lead the way in ensuring a future for Armenian Pentecostals. The fact that Armenia had no AGWM assisted bible schools or training programs provided us with a “blank canvas” for developing the approach identified in the research. In October 2005, a capstone seminar entitled “Ensuring a Future” introduced the need, values, and implementation model for the project’s approach to leadership development. Successful implementation of this model in Armenia is already beginning to serve as a catalyst for similar leadership development efforts in other post-Soviet nations.

The project identified several costs for failure to progress toward a collaborative approach to leadership development in post-Soviet republics. The most critical is that of missed opportunities for expanding the Kingdom of God due to lack of effective new generation Pentecostal leaders. The epidemic of HIV/AIDS in former-Soviet nations threatens to overshadow that of Africa in the coming decade. The secularism of the West which easily captures the imagination of a generation of young people deprived of moral absolutes due to the influence of Communism; the explosion of prostitution, drug addiction, slave trafficking and lawlessness in countries strictly controlled and regulated just over a decade ago; rampant “kleptocracy”,(using Friedman’s term¹): corrupt governments and institutions consuming themselves and their people; these are the realities of post-Soviet society. Building a Pentecostal leader capable of engaging it requires the collaborative effort of elder seasoned leaders with a

¹Thomas Friedman. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2000): 145-151.

passion to teach and mentor; younger servant- leaders with a passion to grow; and spiritually empowered, culturally informed missionary educators engaging the body of Christ to ensure a future for the Pentecostal Church of the CIS and Baltic Republics.