

God uses CC missionaries to begin Renewal in Kyrgyzstan

Story by Debra Smith

Eyes brimming with tears, a Russian woman sat nodding in agreement with the man, also Russian, who was praying. “Lord, please forgive me for looking down on Kyrgyz people,” he stated. Similar words could be heard in other prayer clusters scattered throughout CC Renewal in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Ever since ethnic violence had broken out months earlier in the former Soviet republic, CC Renewal had met daily for prayer. Through the morning gatherings, said co-Pastor Jed Gourley, God was dissolving decades-old animosity between ethnicities. The Central Asian nation’s majority people, Kyrgyz, live among Uzbeks in the south and among Russians northward, in Bishkek. Typically, Jed explained, “Russians view Kyrgyz as lazy, and Kyrgyz see Russians as outsiders.” But during this season, he said, “Hearts opened. Through that trial, God did open-heart surgery.”

Missionaries Jed and Renée Gourley moved from Ukraine to Kyrgyzstan with their then-three children in 2006. The move followed that of Paul and Melanie Billings—Renée’s sister—who had relocated to Bishkek by train in 2005 while expecting their first child. Renée and Melanie’s parents, George and Pam Markey, entrusted the church they had founded in Kiev, Ukraine, to a national and accompanied Jed and Renée four years ago. George pastored in Bishkek briefly, but since his passing away in 2007, Jed and Paul have led CC Renewal together. “If one goes on furlough, there’s someone else here to pastor,” Jed commented. “We alternate books; Paul teaches through one and then I take one. People get multiple viewpoints that way.”

David—Renée and Melanie’s brother—and Deborah Markey joined the group in 2009. The siblings, three of George and Pam’s nine children, grew up as missionary kids in Ukraine. There, Melanie said, “We learned to work as a team. My parents made it clear we were all ministering together.” The Bishkek team also includes three Ukrainians and another American: Zhenya Kucherov, Anya Trofimova, Olga Lutsenko, and Tracy Groves.



Believers from CC Renewal in Kyrgyzstan’s capital, Bishkek, recently traveled south to Osh to donate food and essentials to Uzbeks, such as this woman, who were impacted by June’s ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek. *Photo by Pasha Bolshakov*



Uzbek women in Osh select clothing from the aid CC Renewal brought after civil unrest destroyed thousands of homes and hundreds of lives. *Photo by Pasha Bolshakov*



CC Renewal co-Pastors Jed Gourley, left, and Paul Billings baptize Mairam, a former Muslim who committed to Christ nine months ago.

The Birth of Renewal

In Kyrgyzstan, churches are required to hold an official government permit. Initially, co-Pastor Paul recalled, “We were told it would be impossible for foreigners to plant

a church in Kyrgyzstan.” However, added Melanie, “The biggest thing I learned from my dad was to expect God to do the impossible”—so the team looked to God to perform a feat no man could.

“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

Luke 11:10



Ukrainians, Russians, Kyrgyz, and Americans, including Melanie Billings on keyboard, lead believers in worship at CC Renewal's annual conference. The congregation worships in both Russian and Kyrgyz. The 2010 conference theme was Philippians 2:13.

Paul recalled, "After almost three years of praying and laboring, we were granted the license." While processing the registration, the government rejected the name *Calvary Chapel* because of its connections with an international movement. The missionaries had to submit five other potential names for government scrutiny; of the options, only *Renewal* was approved. When dozens of believers who had never been taught God's Word recently flocked into CC Renewal, "Many said, 'I want to be renewed—which is exactly what I'm getting, through the Bible,'" Jed stated. "Some said it was like intensive care, receiving healing from the Scriptures."

Most of the church's 200 believers come from backgrounds of traditional Christianity, atheism, or Islam. The nation is 80 percent Muslim. "While in Ukraine, Melanie and I had a growing burden for the Muslim world," Paul said. "There is only one missionary for every million Muslims. We began praying about moving here because so many were unreached, and now we're praying many will go out from here to other Muslim countries."

After a home Bible study in 2007, a Muslim teen approached Jed wanting to receive Jesus. "I tried to 'talk him out of it,' in a sense," Jed explained—testing the young man's seriousness by explaining the cost, pointing out the hostility that following Christ would bring him at home, school, and work. The

youth understood; "He kept saying, 'yes, yes, I want to do it,'" Jed recalled. The missionaries prayed with the boy—and stood by him and helped him finish high school when he was subsequently kicked out of his home.

Renewal Begins to Multiply

"We want to instill into the congregation the vision to look beyond ourselves," Jed stated. When in 2008 the missionaries began looking for a place to teach the church to reach out with the Gospel, a believer from a region two hours away suggested her hometown of Issyk-Kul. The team began taking a busload of believers to do children's ministry and lead worship each Sunday. "It was a great opportunity to train people for discipleship," Jed said. Two men in Issyk-Kul have now been established as Bible teachers, and CC Renewal sees need to visit only monthly to encourage the church.

"God continues to amaze me," Paul said. "Ministry here is taxing; I have never felt so physically, emotionally, and spiritually spent. There are challenges that take everything out of you—but also wonderful testimonies of what God can do for His great glory." ☞



Anya Trofimova, in bandana, helps Uzbek youth in Osh who were traumatized during the riots to process their emotions and experiences.

Photo by Gulnara Shabdanova

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

2 Corinthians 12:15a

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