

Reaching Russian Jews from Finland **Juhani Koivisto, LCJE coordinator for Finland**

Finland shares over a thousand kilometres of a common border with Russia. The distance from Helsinki to St. Petersburg is some 380 km. With the new Allegro train it takes four and a half hours to get to St. Petersburg.

Finnish Christians were involved in mission work to Russia already during the Soviet time. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ties have strengthened, and many organisations have sent workers to Russia. This is a new historical possibility, which authorities did not allow before.

There is a positive attitude to the Jewish people among Finnish Christians. This attitude is stronger in the older generation, which has experienced the Israeli independence war and also seen many wars after that. Many Finnish Christians have visited Israel or helped the Jews who have made alia to Israel through Finland. Finns have given financial support or shared their homes for lodging. The younger generation's attitude is not so clear. This is a challenge for us in Finland.

Finns and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria

In Russia, there is a Finnish-speaking minority church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria. Before the time of Peter the Great, Ingria or Ingermanland used to be in the old area of what today is the surroundings of the city of St. Petersburg. The Church originates from the 17th Century, when the King of Sweden ordered Finns from the eastern part of the country to move to the Karelian area and the delta of the river Neva. This year the Church has its 400th Anniversary. Almost all of Finnish Lutheran work in Russia is connected with this church.

In St. Petersburg, the St. John the Baptist congregation has mainly Jewish members. Also in other congregations there are Jewish individuals. Especially the Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission has been active and sent workers from Finland. They have done both church and social work according to the needs of the people.

Jewish work in the Messianic congregations

The Keymedia (Avainmedia) has already had its roots from the Soviet time. It was founded as a result of a fusion of two earlier organisations, Avainsanomat and Hyvän Sanoman radio. Work among Jews by the Keymedia began in 1986 when they started distributing Bibles to Russian Jews. For example, in 1990 they distributed 100,000 Bibles, Children's Bibles and Hebrew-Russian New Testaments.

The Keymedia has done church work with Jewish people especially in St. Petersburg and also in other CIS countries. Messianic congregations need support, teaching, literature and social work. Social work is especially needed among elderly people. In Russia, social security is dependent on families and relatives. If the only child of the family has moved to another country, elderly parents may have need of social help.

The Patmos Foundation for World Missions works among Jewish people in Moscow. Through their work they have founded some 20 Messianic congregations in Russia and CIS countries. The central place is the congregation founded in 1992 in Moscow. In their meetings they may have some 300 members. In Russia long distances cause problems, so visiting homes is necessary.

Another centre is the city of Belgorod, which is in south-western Russia. The Messianic congregation there was founded in 2006. There are some 80 Messianic believers in this congregation. Visiting their homes and other deaconal work is needed.

Russian Jews visiting Finland

Some organizations have organised camps in Finland for Russian Jews. All costs for travelling and accommodation have been paid by Finnish individuals. The program of these camps consists of living in the Finnish atmosphere, teaching the Bible – both Old and New Testament – deepening their Jewish roots in the Bible. Also music has an important role.

Theological literature

Almost all the organisations have some kind of literature work. Rev. Risto Santala's three books have been translated to the Russian language: *Paul the Man and the Teacher in the Light of the Jewish Sources*, and *The Messiah in the Old Testament and New Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings 1-2*.

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