

## **Some flashlights from Bielorussia and Russia**

**By Alexei Shepelev**

Shalom!

Many of this conference attendees are familiar with our AOHE ministry and with me personally. With many of you we've developed friendly relationship and found new perspectives for the joint ministry.

Let me introduce to those who don't know me yet. My name is Alexey Shepelyov. What is funny – I came from the heart of the former 'Evil Empire' – from Moscow. For 6 years I am the leader of the Russian-speaking branch of the AOHE mission, and I am the director and chief editor of the first Russian Messianic online-radio '[www.mashiah.info](http://www.mashiah.info)' as well.

Today I would like to tell you about our ministry in Russia and Belarus, about the opportunities we have and challenges we face in our daily service. As I've already said in the beginning, AOHE started its Russian ministry 6 years ago, and from our very first steps we tried to avoid those stereotypes and mistakes, which were produced by many of our colleagues.

Sooth to say, since 90s many bright reports and ideas of the noted ministries stayed on paper and hardly ever brought real fruits; only a few of them survived till today. Surely, I'm here not to criticize any particular ministries or churches, but we have to admit the fact that, for instance, in Moscow, the Jewish population of which (according to the current year) numbers from 300,000 to 500,000 Jews, there are only 6-7 Messianic congregations, and the number of their members is usually about 20-30 people. However, these numbers are not the absolute measure of the real quantity of Jews believing in Christ. I know such churches where the number of Jews is larger than in the Messianic congregations of Moscow rolled into one.

Having started our ministry in Russia, we tried to avoid those mistakes, which are so evident for any person having a realistic understanding of life in Russia and former USSR. From the very beginning we turned away from the practice of social or 'clothing' evangelism, and focused on educational projects and follow-up.

One of the problems I had to face was almost a complete absence of the Bible knowledge. The fact is that sometimes you can make the first contact with unbelieving Jews, but after the first step you should make the second one, third and so on.

Thus, from the very first we started paying our main attention to the following ministry directions, at the same time not forgetting about the main goal of our mission – to preach the Gospel:

**Publishing activities:** Someone may object that there isn't anything new and unique in it. Almost all the Russian-speaking ministries do the same. But our goal was not merely to print something. We wanted to do something that would be interesting and comprehensible for our audience – Russian Jews. For example, our AOHE magazine is specially directed to the interests of the Russian-speaking Jewry. Besides, we came to a decision that all our publications should be available for use by other ministries.

**Education:** It is necessary to understand, that despite the fact that many people came to faith during

the last years, the level of Biblical and theological literacy and competence on the territory of the former USSR is extremely low. I would even say, it is critically low.

That is why in the year 2004 we started arranging a series of seminars called “Jewish roots of the Christian faith”. Our seminars had their goal not only to teach Jews about the fundamentals of Christian faith. We also wanted to tell the church about its Jewish origin in order to make it understand the Bible correctly and to struggle with such an abnormality as Christian anti-Semitism.

During these 6 years we organized over 10 seminars in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, where among the participants were unbelieving Jews as well as Christians belonging to different confessions.

Online-radio: A year ago I started a new project – Messianic online-radio “Mashiah.info”. Though the leader of this project (I mean myself) is a Lutheran mission member, the radio itself is open for all relatively decent Jewish ministries. Despite the modest initial capital, during this year the number of our radio listeners grew up to 50,000 people, and the geography of our audience has surpassed all expectations. It would take too much time to list all the countries, so I’ll just remark that, along with the former USSR, we have listeners almost in all the European countries, in the USA and, of course, in Israel. Our air is open for everyone, who is interested in preaching the Gospel to the Jewish people and who is ready to speak about the Book of this nation – the Bible.

We’ve already prepared and put on air several broadcasts made by the “Jews for Jesus” mission, “Kehilat Yeshua” congregation and others. Besides, I would like to mention that our radio-team is scattered all over the world: I’m in Moscow, our translator and editor lives in Saint-Petersburg, our webmaster lives in Australia, and our presenter works in Minsk (Belarus).

It is worth saying that if usual broadcasting costs hundred thousand euros, the annual budget of online-radio is hardly over 30,000 euro.

We are open for any ways of partnership with other members of LCJE, because we don’t regard our mission field, where all of us work, as a place for competition.

These are only a few things I would be able to tell about the AOHE ministry among the Russian-speaking Jews. Today I touched only upon those aspects where we can cooperate. The following are the options where we are ready to help those ministries, which would like to work in Russia and Belarus:

Translation and publishing: we’ve already published the Theological declaration of NCMI. Among our translations are the early treatise of Martin Luther “That Jesus Christ was born a Jew” and the book “The Midrash of the Messiah” by Risto Santala. Besides, we prepare the series of broadcasts called “Bookshelf”, where we use the most interesting materials concerning Jewish evangelism. We may provide support in translations not only from English, but from Hebrew, Finnish and German as well.

Seminars: we are ready to help in arranging educational seminars “Jewish roots of the Christian faith” for believers and unbelievers, wherever the people are in need of deeply studying the Bible.

Online-radio: we may give an opportunity of radio broadcasting through the Internet.

If any of the LCJE members is interested in partnership with us, you have a wonderful opportunity to talk to me during this conference or later.

Thank you.