



# ESD

## A Story of Struggle, Tenacity, Faith, and Blessing

BY BRANISLAV MIRILOV

**O**n the cover of the book *In Passion for the World* by Floyd Greenleaf, the history of Adventist education is referred to as “a story of struggle, tenacity, faith, and blessing.”<sup>1</sup> This description is especially true of the short history of Adventist education in the Euro-Asia Division (ESD).

Currently, the ESD, which includes the countries of the former Soviet Union except the Baltic countries, has only a handful of schools: eight primary/secondary schools (in Tula; Nizhny Novgorod and Zaoksky, Russia; Kiev and Lviv, Ukraine; Sukhumi, Abkhazia; Tiraspol, Moldova; and Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan) and two institutions of higher education (in Zaoksky, Russia; and Bucha, Ukraine) with a total enrollment of

about 2,500. In addition, there are several English language schools (Almaty, Kazakhstan; Moscow, Russia; and Kiev, Ukraine). The one in Kiev has expanded and now has branches in the cities of Levov, Harkov, and Dnepropetrovsk. During 2009, more than a thousand students attended these language schools. However, as most of schools are fairly new and operate in very different political, cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts, each faces special challenges. Thus, every one is a miracle school with a unique story.

Although, over the years, the overall enrollment has gradually increased and most schools are managing quite well, unfortunately due to a lack of adequate facilities and finances, the primary school in Ryazan, Russia, had to close in 2007. Yet we believe that during the 10 years it was in operation, it was a

real blessing to the many Adventist and non-Adventist children who enrolled.

However, we are glad to report continuing initiatives in opening new primary schools, such as in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia; and Lviv, Ukraine. The school in Nizhni Novgorod has tremendous potential for development. Plans are being made to build a new modern facility that will offer a complete primary and secondary education.

Another cause of rejoicing was the dedication of the new elementary school facility in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan, on November 4, 2009. This 12-year-old institution, the only Adventist school in Central Asia, enrolls primarily non-Adventist pupils. Many people and church organizations from the local fields and abroad worked hard on this project, which also received a generous contribution from Global Mission.

The news about higher education also contains both successes and disappointments. Russian Sahmyook University in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk on Sakhalin Island, founded by the South Korean Union in 1992, which had functioned well for a number of years, closed in 2006 due to the loss of facilities and other problems. The university still exists as an entity and is currently under the jurisdiction of Zaoksky Adventist University (ZAU), where some of its assets are preserved. Despite setbacks, the work of the ZAU and the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Science (UIAS) have consistently progressed. In fact, both institutions celebrated anniversaries during this quinquennium—ZAU its 20th and UIAS its 10th.

Over the past five years, ZAU made a number of improvements in its facilities and expanded its academic and professional programs. Currently it offers a Bachelor of Theology, B.A. programs in religion (English language emphasis), music, and music pedagogy, a B.B.A. in ac-

counting; M.A. programs in religion,<sup>2</sup> practical theology specialization: youth ministry, leadership, missiology; and music ministry and music pedagogy; a D.Min. as well as a number of certified nine-month programs such as an intensive pastoral course, a practical course for church musicians, a secretarial program, and a three-month agricultural diploma. During the two decades since it was founded, ZAU has graduated more than 3,000 students. Its major achievement during the past quinquennium was obtaining government accreditation for its B.B.A. program in accounting (2008). The school is currently working on government accreditation for its other programs.

UIAS, which opened in the Bucha, Kiev, region in October 1999, is the first Adventist educa-



Government accreditation for B.B.A. in accounting at Zaoksky Adventist University (ZAU)

tional institution in the Ukraine to receive state accreditation for its programs. The school currently offers B.A. programs in language and literature, religious studies, as well as in business administration, marketing, and management. In addition to this, UIAS is offering the first two years of a B.A. in theology (its students finish their degrees at ZAU) and special summer/winter programs in the study of Ukrainian and Russian. The campus is also used as a training center for distance education and the professional development for denominational workers.

The students of both institutions are very active in community work and Christian witness. The students of ZAU visit local hospitals, nursing homes, and orphanages; and each year prepare a Christmas program



Zaoksky Adventist University graduation, May 2009

that attracts thousands of children from the regional orphanages and poor families. The UIAS students are also known for their contributions at the local churches in the Kiev region and for their community involvement. As UIAS has a large non-Adventist student body, the institution places great emphasis on internal witness—and as a result, each year many students are baptized.

During this quinquennium, the ESD Education Department organized two major advisories (in 2007 and 2008), which brought together school directors and teachers, and union educational leaders. Both events took place at ZAU and emphasized the integration of faith and learning, professional development, motivation building, as well as the synchronization of educational effort within the division. The guest speakers for the 2008 advisory were C. Garland Dulan (the church's world director of education) and Ella Simmons (General Conference vice president).

In May 2009, ZAU hosted, for the first time, the European Theology Teachers Conference, attended by more than 60 professors from the three European divisions (Euro-Asia, Euro-Africa, and Trans-European divisions). Only a few years ago, organizing a conference of this kind was almost unimaginable. This is another proof of the tremendous changes that have taken place and the opportunities that are still available for expanding and enhancing Adventist education in this territory.

During the past quinquennium, both ZAU and UIAS have published a number of books and doctoral dissertations. However, the material produced by the school in Tula deserves special notice. In 2008, after many years of hard work, they published an attractive five-piece educational-methodological guide for

grades 9-11 entitled *The Biblical History and the World Culture* with photos of artistic objects from ancient and contemporary world culture: reproductions of art by famous Russian and non-Russian artists, spiritual poetry, short video clips, selected classical music, as well as geographical and historical maps. The document has been highly praised by religious and non-religious educational bodies for its content, layout, and non-sectarian approach to teaching biblical values.

However, despite its many accomplishments, the ESD Education Department faces a long list of external and internal challenges. The four



ZAU students witnessing



Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences (UIAS) student baptism, December 2009



Graduation at UIAS



European Theology Teachers' Conference at ZAU, May 2009

most pressing are:

1. *The constant need to challenge, in many countries of the former Soviet Union, government prohibition of private religious education.* In countries where private schools are allowed, the state legal requirements are so high as to make it financially impossible for conferences and unions to operate schools or to expand educational opportunities.

2. *Making members, and sometimes even church pastors and administrators, aware of the importance of Adventist education.* For many church members, paying for Christian education when government provides free quality education is not considered a viable option.

3. *Implementing existing Adventist education policies.* Although we have good strategies for the advancement of Adventist education, sometimes other church needs take priority, leaving many Adventist children without necessary financial support and many schools functioning independently of the church structure.

4. *Developing a strong primary and secondary school system to feed our institutions of higher learning.* These, in turn, need to develop new ways to attract larger numbers of

Adventist youth.

The above mentioned challenges, and many others, still unforeseen, will definitely help to shape our agenda for the next quinquennium. Yet we thank the Lord that He turns challenges into opportunities, for His many blessings upon our dedicated school administrators, teach-

ers, staff members, and especially our children and youth who have, as a result of attending Adventist schools, entered into a saving relationship with Christ and committed themselves to the path of service and the mission of the church. ✍

**REFERENCES**

1, Floyd Greenleaf, *In Passion for the World* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2005).  
 2. The M.A. in religion and the D.Min. degree are offered in affiliation with Andrews University, the missiology degree in affiliation with Griggs University.



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Teaching materials for Religious Education, grades 9-11