

## **LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD – FROM PASTOR LAWRENCE**

The book is priceless.

From beginning to end, so much grace filled the entire 2019 Mission in Russia Journey. Even still, I'm able to name the precise moment in which God's amazing grace overflowed.

In the midst of worship, our mission team stood and presented to Pastor Slava and our sister church in Zlatoust the quilt so magnificently made by many women of Oxford Presbyterian Church. Smiles, expressions of delight and words of appreciation followed. Beautiful to behold, the quilt is truly a unique work of art.

Just as our mission team sat back down, Pastor Slava stepped forward. He opened a small box from a shelf at the front of the small sanctuary. From that box, he removed a small black book. He gently turned to the first page of the book to reveal very precise handwriting in Russian.

Looking right at our team, Pastor Slava told us about the history of that book. Christians were not only banned from gathering to worship during the persecution of the Soviet era, it was also illegal to own a Bible, hymnal or any other faith related material.



Those laws forced the faithful followers of Jesus underground. Since printed Scripture was illegal, believers would copy the books of the Bible by hand and pass them around the secret church. Similarly, hymnals were copied by hand. Then there were also books of testimonies and witnesses circulated among church members to inspire and encourage one another in the midst of unrelenting persecution and marginalization.

Pastor Slava then handed the book to me. At first it felt like a nondescript black book that it appeared to be.

Everything changed when Slava said, *This is the third type of book. It is a book about the spiritual history of King David.*

Priceless. In a journey filled with so much grace, the moment of transformation came when we both shared unique and priceless gifts from each of our congregations.

One week is not enough time to change Russia. One week *IS* enough time to change us.

Mission partnership journeys change us. We are changed by the people we meet. We are changed by the stories we glean. We are changed by joining Jesus Christ already at work in that place. We are changed by the grace to join as partners in that work.

Our team, comprised of Karen Shearer, Ginny Layton, Robert Smith and Nancy Wilson, was filled with joy, gratitude and humility to be called as partners with Christ and each other in mission to this world that God so loves.

Over the coming weeks, our team will be sharing the stories and experiences from this journey in worship and presentations. Yet don't wait for a formal opportunity to hear about how our Living God touched our lives on this mission journey. Please ask us. We have been changed by our mission partnership journey to Russia. And Christ is in the business of changing lives.