

# Joy IN THE JOURNEY

Activities & Service Opportunities of Mayfair Senior Adults

## Meeting the New Testament Church in Russia

By Nobie Stone

The Neva Church is a small congregation of about 70 members—the only Church of Christ in St. Petersburg, Russia, a city of about four million people. Yet, their impact throughout Russia and surrounding countries is huge! For more than ten years, the Neva Church has published a newsletter, *“In Christ”* for the Russian churches. Rather than write an article, I have decided to let our Russian brothers and sisters tell you about their work in their own words.

Below are excerpts from five articles that appeared in *“In Christ”* over the past year and a half that give some insight into their activities despite the COVID pandemic. As you will see, they continue to be active in a land full of challenges.

### Good News!

By Igor Egirev

Dear brothers and sisters we would like to share the great joy with you – the “Institute of Theology and Christian Ministry” (ITCM) received a state license for educational activities. More than a year ago ITCM was registered as an educational institution. But this was not enough. In order to conduct educational activities, we also needed to have a special license. And finally, this goal has been achieved!

I must say that the path to this recognition was very thorny. In 2005, ITCM was registered as a non-profit partnership and, as such, was not allowed to independently engage in educational activities. Then, after an audition from the prosecutor’s office, we were required to change the name to the “Christian Resource Center.” But the idea of creating an educational institution did not leave us. We named the newly registered educational institution in the old way—ITCM. In December 2020, we finally received the license. Thus, one can say that there



**Igor Egirev serves as the minister of the Neva Church of Christ and President of the Christian Resource Center—Russia**

was a metamorphosis of the ITCM—from a non-profit partnership to a Christian School. The program is mainly designed for distance learning with periodic meetings in St. Petersburg and, possibly, in other cities.

This is the first Church of Christ Christian School that has ever received full recognition from the Russian Government. Praise be to our Lord Jesus for everything.

### Video Project "Bible Wednesday" Connecting During Times of Self-Isolation

When the pandemic began, we changed the format of our Wednesday night Bible classes to live videos with answers to questions about God, the Bible, Christianity, and the church.

At this time, we already have 34 editions of the program and we are full of enthusiasm to move on, developing this project and bringing something new to it. Our programs can be watched on the YouTube channel of the Neva Church of Christ and the public

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## Lakewood Church of Christ Reaches Out to North Huntsville.

By Cliff Mann

One of the special things about our Mayfair family has always been a love for people, whether around the world or locally. It is a love that fills short-term needs and makes long-term commitments.

In the 1970's Mayfair began reaching out to children in the inner city through a bus ministry in an effort to introduce them to the story of Jesus. Many Mayfair members were involved as drivers, bus riders, and teachers to touch these young people with the love of the Lord.

Over time, these efforts grew into sidewalk vacation Bible schools, ladies' Bible studies, an after-school learning center, a food pantry, and a benevolence assistance center as well as other ministries. Eventually, it led to the establishment of the Inner City Church of Christ, which has been a beacon of light to the community that has had a lasting impact on so many lives. Over the years, many Mayfair members have faithfully labored to keep this outreach ministry vibrant and growing.

In 2008, God blessed this work with the arrival of Tim and Michelle Smith. Their energy, heart, and dedication to the Lord's work continue to daily touch many lives for the cause of Christ. While many of us know that we are surrounded by a world of lost people, desperately in need of the saving grace of Jesus, few of us are convicted enough in our hearts to act in such a way to make a difference for Christ every day. Tim Smith, however, loves the Lord and the lost and seeks to find ways to bring the two together every day.

A philosopher said many years ago, *"There is nothing permanent except change."* This is true, for each of us personally, for our country, our city, and even our churches. If you have been in the Huntsville area very long, you have already seen churches move, close, or merge. It is often a slow process and can happen to any church for any number of reasons.

One of the more recent changes happened in the past year when the Mastin Lake Road Church of Christ made the decision to merge with the Meridianville Church of Christ. While this change was taking place, a seemingly unrelated change was going on in

the area around the Inner City Church of Christ on Seminole Drive. Due to the redevelopment of that area, many members of the congregation had already begun to move out of that neighborhood. In preparation for a possible change, members of the Inner City church, as well as the Mayfair elders, began searching for a new location for that congregation to meet.



**Tim, Michelle and Sherif Smith work with the new Lakewood Church of Christ**

God, as He often does, in his own timing, was working to make all things come together for good. The elders believe He was answering many prayers and bringing about a wonderful opportunity. Therefore, the Mayfair eldership, reached out to the former elders of the Mastin Lake congregation to inquire about their building and property; and along with Tim, and others involved in the property search, viewed the property on several different occasions.

After a time of prayer and fasting the Mayfair elders entered into negotiations with the former elders of the Mastin Lake Church of Christ. God has blessed these efforts and recently allowed the elders to secure the purchase of the property.

With over 5.5 acres of land, a building with a 300-seat worship center (complete with songbooks in the pews), and ample classroom and fellowship space, this property is the ideal place to relocate the Inner City ministry and broaden its ministry efforts. This new congregation, the Lakewood Church of Christ, will serve a community that needs to hear the Gospel of Christ. And will give them room to grow for years to come.



## Abraham Plants a Tamarisk Tree

By Dick Savage

*Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD the Eternal God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time. (Genesis 21:33-34 NIV)*

After Isaac is born, Hagar and Ishmael are sent away, and the covenant is made with Abimelech, we read the passage above. There are more than 31,000 verses in the Bible and every one of them is comprised of God-breathed words which are profitable for our lives. That would include the verse *“Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God.”*

At first glance, this might appear to not be an important verse, just a simple statement about a person, place, and thing that would likely escape our notice – unless we know a little bit about each.

Abraham is called by God and given the promise of land, seed, and blessing. Despite his age and the improbability of his wife Sarah giving birth, we find she has miraculously delivered a son named Isaac and there is joy in their family. Later on, we discover Abraham made a peace treaty with the Philistine king Abimelech and gained water rights to a well.

All of this takes place in a town called Beersheba. Geographically, Beersheba marked the southern boundary of the nation of Israel. It is a dry and barren land located in the Negev desert. Its name means *“Seven wells”* and refers to the oath of witness that Abraham and Abimelech declared and confirmed with seven ewe lambs as a sacrifice.

There isn't much in Beersheba other than sand and rocks. And yet Abraham plants a tamarisk tree. A tamarisk tree is a slow-growing tree, increasing only an inch per year and taking close to 400 years to grow to full height. Its evergreen leaves collect water vapor from the moisture in the air during the night, and when the sun radiates its heat, the droplets evaporate and produce a cooling system. It is an outdoor air conditioning unit for the blistering desert heat.

Further exploration of the tree reveals that insects

transform the juice of the tree into a white substance that is sweet to eat. Some have called this substance manna.

Why did Abraham take the time to plant such a tree? We might conclude that there was much to celebrate in Abraham's life and so he creates a monument to declare God's provision. The tree represents the Lord, the Everlasting God who has blessed him with a child, a peace treaty, and a water supply. That would be a logical explanation.



**Tamarisk Tree**

But when we put it all together – a tree that takes almost 400 years to grow, a tree that provides shade, air, and sustenance, a tree situated in the desert, a tree planted by Abraham – another thought occurs. Who comes through the desert some 400 years later in need of shade, air, and manna? Abraham's descendants. Rescued from Egypt and headed to the land God had promised Abraham, they would be in need of all the things the tamarisk tree would provide some 400 years after it was planted.

What a different way to read that verse. While Abraham may have indeed planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba to celebrate what God had done for him, he may have also planted a tamarisk tree with the future in mind. Even though he would never find rest in its shade, never feel the cool of the breeze, and never eat of its sweet manna, he planted the tree. While he would not reap the fruit of his labor, generations later, his relatives would.

I want to be planting tamarisk trees in the lives of others. With my kids, with my wife, and with the people God has placed in my path. To invest in them regardless of whether I see what it produces in them, to proclaim the gospel no matter what the outcome, to train them up even if I never experience the fruit. I want to be remembered as one who planted tamarisk trees for those that come after me. Don't you?

## Is Exercise Worth It Over Age 65?

C L “Butch” Kinzer M.D.

To answer the question, let’s turn to the medical literature, which shows that increasing physical activity, no matter the starting age, improves strength, flexibility, and fitness. All of these contribute to improved daily function and quality of life, helping to maintain independence and reduce the risk of falls with their related injuries. One study demonstrated that six months of aerobic exercise improved several elements of cognitive function (e.g., balancing a checkbook) and related verbal memory.

You might think, “I am too old to start exercising.” However, a study of sedentary patients, in their eighties, showed that exercise gave them a survival advantage over those who continued their sedentary ways.

Are there risks that could outweigh the benefits of exercise? Yes, as we age medical conditions, such as cardiovascular, kidney, and diabetes are more prevalent, as are falling and associated injuries. However, for those who are apparently healthy, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

If you have a medical condition, ask yourself these questions. Do I have tightness or pressure in my chest while walking, climbing stairs, doing household chores, or even at rest? Do I experience dizziness or lightheadedness? Do I have high blood pressure? Do I have pain, stiffness, or swelling that keeps me or limits me from doing what I want or need to do? Do I feel unsteady or use an assistive device while standing or walking? Is there a reason not mentioned that causes you to be concerned about starting an exercise program?

If the answer to any of the questions is yes, then you need to discuss a plan for starting exercise with your physician. It does not mean extensive testing unless your physician has concerns about significant problems after the evaluation.

When starting an exercise program, go slow. A goal is to reach thirty minutes of aerobic exercise per day five days a week. However, maybe start with five minutes twice daily at a comfortable pace. This is not a race. You get more benefit from the time spent with an aerobic exercise than you do from covering the same distance in 15 minutes rather than thirty

minutes. Increase the time spent walking as you are comfortable with the increased time. You will find that over time you will be able to cover a greater distance in the same amount of time. I have used walking as an aerobic example. If you prefer stationary biking, biking in the neighborhood or any other aerobic activity is fine.

Strengthening is also important. The suggested time spent weightlifting is ten minutes twice a week. Again start (slow) low with light weights. Again, do it comfortably. Initially increasing repetitions before increasing the weight.

I have briefly written about the benefits of exercise, but here is a more extensive list of the documented benefits of exercise.

- Reduced risk of dying from heart disease, high blood pressure, or stroke
- Reduced risk of type two diabetes
- Lower risk of cancer of the bladder, breast, colon, or endometrium (lining of the uterus)
- Improved thinking
- Probably reduced risk of dementia
- Reduced risk of anxiety
- Reduced risk of depression
- Controlling body weight
- Improved bone health (prevention of fractures with falls)
- Reduced falling and related injuries
- Improved sleep (Do not exercise within two hours of going to bed.)
- Improved quality of life (Even for those with chronic medical conditions.)

Finally, the answer to the question is a resounding “Yes.” It does not matter where you are in terms of fitness when you start exercising. What matters is that you start exercising.

***<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***

***1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)***

Remember, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (minor paraphrasing). We have an obligation to care for the temple of the Holy Spirit.

## From the Shepherd's Pen

By James Smelser, MD FACP



It goes without saying that the past two-plus years have been difficult for all of us, presenting so many unique challenges. If you're like me, you have simply had to survive rather than thrive and had to cope with many frustrations. We have all been fatigued with the daily life adjustments necessitated by COVID-19, some good but most not so good (at least on the surface).

Initially, non-essential workers were removed from the highways. For essential workers, this was one of the "best" consequences of COVID as the commutes were much more pleasant and peaceful. Many were "blessed" with the opportunity to work remotely. Children were home from school but parents were shifted to a home-schooling mode and many quickly tired of this.

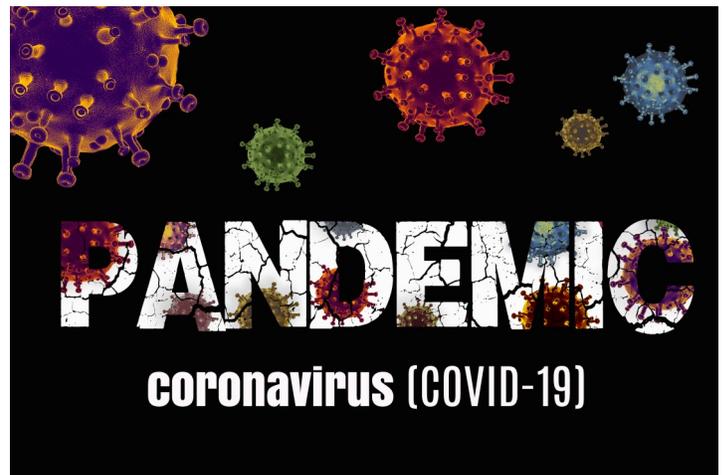
Some rediscovered family and learned things about each other they never knew previously. We were forced to create or revive alternate forms of entertainment such as board games and card games which had been shelved for years. We learned about the importance of the supply chain with particular emphasis on the value of household cleaners and a roll of toilet paper.

Personally, I was reintroduced to the use of the vacuum cleaner and other household chores, which I did not make time for in the past. Upon arriving home, I was declared "unclean", leaving my clothes in the washer and heading directly to the shower. We all learned to improvise regarding meal planning in the lockdown, particularly those who frequent local restaurants. Finding basic food staples was challenging.

Our family vacation plans were nixed sadly, though we called an audible and went camping ("glamping", actually) in a recreation vehicle to the North Shore on Lake Superior. We saw new areas of God's amazing creation and learned we still enjoy each other's company. We even went back in the summer of 2021.

On the church front, obviously, we were unable to meet for corporate worship for a considerable period of time but we were so very blessed by the remarka-

ble talents and skills of our ministry team to transition to an effective, powerful and impactful virtual worship format, some elements of which have been retained moving forward (more on that topic to follow).



Of course, the major impact of the pandemic was its health consequences. All have been affected, some with personal sickness from the virus and others through illness of friends and family. We were largely spared in our immediate family but lost my mother's brother and my wife's brother-in-law to COVID. We have lost so many to this terrible disease, both locally and worldwide. Thank God the vaccine has attenuated the virulence and spread of the deadly virus.

Despite the dramatic life interruptions and adjustments, I have found an opportunity in adversity and learned some valuable lessons through the pandemic. Allow me to share three life lessons that God and his Holy Spirit have revealed to me over the course of the pandemic.

First, I was taught the value of a "cup of cold water." In the early days of the pandemic, when one developed upper respiratory symptoms, the question arose as to whether all that was needed was a couple of doses of Claritin or whether a life-threatening course would ensue.

Besides the suffering, uncertainty, and fear from the illness, there was the isolation and loneliness derived from the required quarantine that followed. This was particularly evident in the hospital setting where no visitors were allowed and even simple things became difficult, such as finding a phone charger. A dead phone isn't very useful.

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As an insider, I had access to those who were hospitalized, providing an opportunity for pastoring I had not previously embraced. I was able to visit, touch, and pray with those who were otherwise isolated from family, friends, and church. Sometimes I was able to call family members and relay updates or messages. I had no idea the impact such a limited interaction could have on myself and those I visited. To this day, I still get feedback from the ones I was able to visit and encourage.

The lesson I learned was this: I have very limited free time based on my work responsibilities and commitments and I've always been very picky in the God activities I chose to pursue. Much like Naaman, I thought my time was best utilized in more grand activities than washing in the Jordan River seven times. The last parable of Jesus in Matthew 25 became a more vivid reality to me.

*"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 'The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" Matthew 25:37-40 NIV*

God revealed to me the value of the simple and seemingly insignificant act in his Name.

Second, I learned the value of fellowship. I don't think I will ever take for granted the blessing of worshiping together. What a joy it is to sing, pray, commune, and worship God together. God created us for relationships, both with Him and with our brothers and sisters. It was great to provide alternative ways to worship during the quarantine but nothing compares to our fellowship time together. Praise be to God to have that opportunity again!

Finally, I learned a lot about my own faith — in truth, I think we all did. No one was static, either we moved closer to God or further away. I will never forget singing along with the closing song of virtual worship services — *"We've come this far by faith."*

From my standpoint, no truer words were spoken over the past couple of years than those words. I had no idea what the next day would bring as essentially every aspect of life was altered and generally not previously chartered, even for the most seasoned folks.

As a shepherd and a physician, many times, I was looked to for answers I didn't have. We made difficult decisions regarding assembly, masks, etc. which some did not fully support.

In search of answers, I returned to the familiar faith chapter in Hebrews 11 and found an answer. In verse 27, the Hebrew writer speaks of Moses retreating to Midian and residing there 40 years before his triumphant return to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage.

*"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible." Hebrews 11:27 NIV*

When it seemed Moses was ready for action based on his training and role in Pharaoh's palace, why did God wait 40 more years to send him to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage? Perhaps he needed some additional seasoning, preparation, and humbling before he was fully prepared for his role.

On multiple occasions, Jesus declared *"my time has not yet come,"* because God has His own timing in His omnipotent design and plan.

We often talk about stepping out in faith to new horizons and opportunities but rarely if ever discuss stepping back in faith. Similar to the retreat of Moses, I believe God called us to step back from the assembly during COVID and now has us more fully prepared to again step out in faith to the deeds prepared in advance for us to accomplish by His providence. I have continued to learn to wait on the Lord — still very much a work in progress.

*"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." Psalms 37:7 NIV*

I pray that God may continue to bless us as we recover physically, emotionally, and spiritually in our post-COVID world! May we keep in step with his Holy Spirit as He leads us to exercise our faith in action! May He lead us forward in unity to show Jesus to our desperate world!

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“VKontakte” (the Russian equivalent of Facebook) with the same name “Bible Wednesday”. VKontakte is a very popular platform in Russia and we have been using it mostly.

We have 1,200 subscribers on VKontakte. We go on the air every Wednesday at 7:30 PM, Moscow time. People can ask us questions in advance, but also, they can chat right during the program itself. Since each program lasts more than an hour, we have time to answer 5–6 questions. Then we make a cut with answers to specific questions, each of which takes no more than 10 minutes. We also post those short video clips in the group on “VKontakte” and on YouTube.

More at: <https://crrussia.com>

## **"Give a Child a Book" The All-Russia Charitable Project**

More than two years ago the Federal State Foundation of Culture (Russian State Children's Library) announced the All-Russia Charitable project “Give a Child a Book” because many Russian children's libraries lack books.

On the project website, there are the addresses of



**Students in Russia receiving children’s Bibles**

libraries participating in the project and people can choose any library from the web site to donate children's books. We participated as soon as we learned about it.

The first year, working with Eastern European Missions who provided the Bibles, we sent 1,000 children’s Bibles to 500 libraries. We wanted to repeat that experience at the beginning of 2020, but because of the pandemic, we had to postpone our plans.

Finally, a special surprise came when we saw the number of libraries on the list increased from 1,500 to 2,213. It made our task a little more difficult as we had to separate libraries to which we had already sent books from the rest of them.

Finally, we did it with God’s help. We have already received more than a hundred thanksgiving letters with photos. Some libraries posted their thanks on the project website, while some of them posted photographs of books, kids, and librarians, which can be viewed at the following links.

<http://prk.rqdb.ru/dariteli?id=548>

<http://prk.rqdb.ru/dariteli?id=549>

<http://prk.rqdb.ru/dariteli?id=693>

In addition to two Bibles in each parcel, we inserted a welcome letter, with our information and an invitation to communicate. Now we are pleased to think that in many cities and villages of Russia children have the opportunity to read high-quality spiritual literature. Here is one of many responses of gratitude:

*We express sincere gratitude to the Christian Resources Center for the wonderful books donated to our library. "The Bible for Young Readers" and "The Bible for You" will occupy a worthy place in our library and become irreplaceable assistants in the spiritual and moral education of children and adolescents. Thank you very much, the Bagan Children's Library.*

## **Neva Church of Christ Choir**

[EDITOR’ NOTE: The Neva Church of Christ has a choir that participates in the St. Petersburg Epiphany Nights Festival each Christmas along with a number of other churches. In their first year, the Neva

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Church of Christ was the only acapella choir, but since then the entire event has been acapella!]

The Neva Church of Christ Choir has made a new video, "For help and mercy I will cry" (Psalm 142). Although the pandemic has influenced our lifestyle much, we didn't allow it to slow us down. Our choir still was meeting in small groups and we also had our usual rehearsal. We really miss the opportunity to sing at concerts, but instead, we produce video clips in which we combine our singing which is recorded separately. We recorded a song written by Konstantin Zhigulin, which can be found at: <https://youtu.be/VfyfdugcaYo>. We hope you will enjoy it.

Next, we plan to complete the recording of the audio of a Ukrainian folk Christmas song "Dear friends! May the Lord help everyone who goes through trials!" and will make a video for it as well. With a prayer for you, The Neva Church of Christ Choir, Saint-Petersburg.



## The "Footprints in the Snow Camp"

By Andrey Sergienko

Greetings! My name is Andrey, I am 22 years old. On January 2, at 06:00 am, the guys from the Tomsk church and I went to Biysk to attend a camp. Our trip flew by imperceptibly! We talked, sang songs, and watched funny videos. Approaching the goal of our trip, we got stuck in the snow. At -31 [below zero!] degrees Fahrenheit, we were pushing the car out of the snowdrifts. The car got stuck more than 6 times. We thoroughly "rolled" in the snow. Finally, we arrived and brought to life the name of the camp, "Footprints in the Snow."

During the entire camp, the temperature was -40 degrees Fahrenheit outdoors. Indoor it was also cool, but the communication and the kindness of all the participants were very warm. I was in a similar camp



The Kazansky Cathedral in Saint Petersburg, Russia

about 3 years ago and it was a great joy to meet familiar faces again! There was a feeling of coziness as if a big family had gathered after some separation.

The theme of the winter camp was "Hear Me." We talked and listened about why people, who speak the same language, sometimes don't understand each other at all. We also raised the questions, "Does God always hear us?" and "What barriers are there in communicating with Him?"

The fellowship in prayer groups was incredibly valuable to me. Sincerity and openness reigned in our prayer group. We spoke on spiritual and life topics shared our pain and joys and encouraged and prayed for each other.

Another thing that made me very happy is that the youth was entrusted with organizing a certain part of the camp. That made it clear how these young ministers had grown. They may look young, but they can talk about serious spiritual things, and it is clear that they know what they are talking about, that their hearts burn with faith and desire to grow spiritually!

The camp was attended by 32 people from 8 cities: Irkutsk, Tomsk, Biysk, Barnaul, Omsk, Chelyabinsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. I am grateful to God for this valuable and useful time in the "Footprints in the Snow" camp!

### Mayfair Assistance Helpline

256-704-3384

Mayfair has a helpline for members who may require physical assistance with home maintenance, automotive repairs, or transportation needs. Call and leave a message regarding your needs and you will be contacted for details.