

teaching is so strong in Muslim Central Asia that even secular leaders can make allowances for Christian teaching. In one case in Kazakstan, a teacher has been given permission by a school administrator to hold a Bible study on school grounds during an elective class period. The administrator was very supportive and told the teacher that she thought that the students needed to learn about the Bible. The Bible study is open to all students and about eight to ten students attend every week.

In Uzbekistan there is a much greater need for caution in ministry. Being Muslim is an integral part of the ethnic and national identity for the majority of Uzbek people. Thus, while most Uzbeks don't pray or attend services at mosques, they strongly identify themselves as Muslim. Explaining Jesus' relevance to a nominal Muslim presents a challenge. Because an Uzbek might perceive Christianity as a threat to his or her identity, tentmakers need to take as much of western culture as they can out of Christianity and dress Jesus in the clothing of an Uzbek.

In Kazakstan some teachers are able to hold investigative Bible studies in their homes. When students become Christians, they are encouraged to join a local church which most likely operates on a cell model with home meetings throughout the week and one large service on Sunday. The almost entirely local leadership of one church are thankful for tentmaking teachers who bring new brothers and sisters in Christ to their meetings.

Cells are concerned about living out a vital Christian witness and have initiated projects to feed street children and care for elderly people.

While the zeal of these new believers is inspiring, there is a strong

need for discipleship and theological teaching. Mature Christians who can model their faith are clearly needed in order for this church to grow.

The spiritual needs of Uzbek churches are similar. However, worship and service in Uzbekistan is much more low-key. Churches in Uzbekistan meet in small groups in people's homes out of necessity, and Westerners who have contact with Uzbek Christians must be careful about the times and places of meeting.

While life in Muslim Central Asia can be difficult, most tentmakers in Uzbekistan and Kazakstan would agree that the benefits of living there far outweigh the drawbacks. Tentmakers are apt to cite the warmth and hospitality of the local people as the best part of their overseas experience. The enthusiasm and passion that students have for their countries to succeed is infectious, and the depth and seriousness with which they take relationships is deeply appreciated.

"If you're thinking about going to Central Asia, I'd encourage you to stop thinking about it and just go!" says Robert Filback, CIS Program Director for Educational Services International.

"The need is indisputable, your contribution would be invaluable and I know the rewards are immeasurable!"

After her graduation from Stanford University, Sabrina taught English as a Second Language in East Asia for two years. She

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willing to go.” Miller says.

Miller has found that most of his frustrations don't stem from the relatively low living standards, but rather from a lack of information and miscommunication.

“One day our landlady met my teammate and I at work and told us that we couldn't go home. She told me that I was going to live with her son and that my teammate was going to live somewhere else. Under no circumstances were we to go back to the family we had been living with for the past several weeks.

I thought we had made some huge mistake and offended our hosts. She was so serious about it; we weren't even allowed to go home and get our books or our clothes. Later, I found out that we had been living with the President of a bank and that the Uzbek KGB thought we were a security risk,” said Miller.

English as a Second Language has become a popular avenue of service for many tentmakers in Muslim Central Asia and, for that matter, many developing countries. As English has become the lingua franca of the modern era, the need for ESL teachers has grown dramatically worldwide. Facility with the English language is needed not only for the establishment and maintenance of international business contacts, but also to keep up with the latest technological developments.

In Kazakstan and Uzbekistan, employers highly value the ability to speak English. ESL teachers are thus able to see the fruit of their labor as their students get jobs that will improve their lives and the lives of their families.

“I had one student who got a great job with an international airline

company. His English wasn't that great when he started our classes but he improved quite a bit. After he got the job, he came back to thank us and say that he couldn't have done it without our help,” says Karen Jones, an ESL teacher in Kazakstan.

Teachers also have the opportunity to build relationships and influence many of the region's future leaders. Just as a dash of salt can

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flavor a whole meal, a handful of faithful Christian witnesses can influence a whole community.

One of my Kazak students is on a track to be a highly-placed government official. All his future course work will be in English. Although he hasn't become a Christian, he thanked us for giving him a better understanding of service and morality.” says English teacher Tina Smith.

While tentmakers realize that teaching ESL fills a real need, they also realize that ultimately their students' greatest need is to know Jesus. But, being an effective witness for Jesus can be difficult in any country.

Incarnational Life

Wherever they are, Christians must earn the right to be heard. As students and colleagues observe the

lives of a Christian English teacher, they see a person who faces the same everyday problems and frustrations that they do, but with a peace that surpasses understanding. The consistently Christ-like attitudes and actions of tentmakers lead to genuine friendships and create natural opportunities to share the Good News.

“In Muslim Central Asia, sometimes just willingness to live in a place where utilities are irregular, clothes are washed by hand and water must be boiled and filtered can open up opportunities to share about God's love. One of the major questions I get asked is, “Why are you here?” Karaganda is such a difficult and desolate place that people can't imagine why an American would choose to visit there, let alone stay there to live,” says one teacher.

“My typical answer is that I came to help the people by giving them tools to grow economically. I also tell them that I am confident that it is God who told me to go and serve people. This is very meaningful for some of them because they have ancestors who are Russian Orthodox or Muslim and at least believed in a Creator God.”

Ministry opportunities in Muslim Central Asia are varied and can involve the participation of both foreigners and nationals. For most English teachers, in-depth discussions about God take place outside of the classroom, but appropriate opportunities to share about Christianity inside the classroom do arise.

“In my American culture class we study American holidays—there's no way to talk about Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter without talking about God,” says one teacher.

The need for hope and moral

Teaching, Tents and Telling the Good News

Economic development is the felt need of the post communist world. We can endear ourselves to them if we take these developmental issues seriously and come along side in a humble and non-threatening way. Christ will be Good News to them!

by Sabrina Wong

To the casual observer, there isn't much to see in Karaganda—no ancient mosques or cathedrals, no breathtaking landscapes or snapshot-worthy scenery, not even any major historical monuments. But there is something very exciting going on in this city, and if you have the opportunity to visit, you just might find yourself face to face with the radiant smile and twinkling eyes of a new Kazak brother or sister in Christ.

Historically, the peoples of Muslim Central Asia have had very little opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel. Today, however, a small number of dedicated believers are using the regions' unprecedented openness to the West to let their light so shine that people may see their good works and give glory to Father God. Most often, these believers are "tentmakers" who can look beyond dusty streets and cement buildings of the newly created countries of Kazakstan or Uzbekistan and find beauty in the countenances of their local friends.

While most people know that the Apostle Paul made tents to support his ministry, few realize that this leather-working trade probably occupied as much of his time as his preaching ministry. And while most are apt to consider Paul's tentmaking as primarily a financial consideration, it is clear that this social identity built

rapport with people and gave him opportunities to share his faith with other members of local trade guilds.

Today, the term tentmaker commonly refers to a Christian with a secular job which supports his or her cross-cultural Christian witness. But, just as leatherwork was more than Paul's means of support, today's tentmaking jobs serve many purposes. In newly independent countries such as Kazakstan, providing viable service means participating in vital economic development and growth. Such service is not to be offered in exchange for souls, but in the genuine spirit of a *servant*.

Educators Wanted

The republics of the former Soviet Union don't necessarily want Evangelicals. What they do want are educators and business people who can help them modernize and join the international community. "By sending qualified teachers to Muslim Central Asia, we are meeting the real needs of the people as well as providing incarnational Christian service" says Ron Nicholas, President of Educational Services International, (an organization which trains and sends teachers overseas).

You can't just go into these countries and say that for the past 75

years under atheism that they were wrong and that there is a better way. For them the better way is economic development. Their big questions are: "How am I going to provide bread for my family?" and "What kind of job will I have ten years from now?" says English teacher Tina Smith.

Tina Smith and other tentmakers in Kazakstan see this country as a strategic bridge to Muslim countries in which it is more difficult to engage in Christian ministry. Portions of Kazakstan lie in the 10/40 window, with most of the country bordering it. And, while Kazakstan is nominally Muslim, there are no national laws against Christian proselytization or gatherings.

Kazakstan is a great opportunity for high-impact short-term Christian service. Smith says. "For me it has also served as a stepping stone to visit the much more conservative region of Western Uzbekistan. From that short visit, I've been encouraged to pray more and harder!"

Joshua Miller is a tentmaker in Uzbekistan who became interested when a recruiter described the tough living conditions he might encounter.

"When the recruiter mentioned that Muslim Central Asia was not for the faint of heart I knew that I was up for the challenge. I wanted to go where other people might not be