

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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PRESIDENT
Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe

PUBLISHER
Rev. Scott Klemsz

MANAGING EDITOR
Pam Knepper

ART DIRECTOR
Steve Blakey

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To communicate Christ to a person or people, you need to speak in a language they understand. To take it one step further, to most effectively share Christ in a way that impacts the listener, you should speak in the language of his heart.

18 **Peace for the Warrior** By the Rev. Dr. Daniel Gard, Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

To be a chaplain means to know the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and suffering, the courage and fears of warriors. If they are deployed to a forward position, he is deployed with them. If they face imminent attack, he faces it with them. If their lives are in danger, his life is in danger. To a chaplain who truly serves Christ, there is no being "in the rear with the gear." Where his people are, there he must be. Why? Christ must be there with them.

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Featuring the Rev. Brian Hamer, Pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Riverview, Fla.

Cover Photo: Rev Pavel Zayakin (with deacon's stole) conducting the Lutheran liturgy on St. John the Baptist Day in a cemetery in the village of Verkhni Suetuk, East Siberia. Assisting is Seminarian Alexey Vinogradov (black robe) who attends Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE

H E A R T

By Amy Kashenov

As Christians, ambassadors of Christ, our job is to “communicate Christ,” that is, let everyone know who He is and what He has done for us and for our salvation. But what does it mean to communicate Christ and how do we go about it to be most effective? As a missionary in the Republic of Kazakhstan, I am confronted by these questions every day. As a translator of Christian literature, I have a special responsibility to this important issue of “communication.”

According to David J. Hesselgrave in the book *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Zondervan, 1991, pg. 46), “the word communication comes from the Latin word ‘*communis*’ (common). We must establish a ‘commonness’ with someone to have communication. The commonness is to be found in mutually shared codes.” These mutually shared codes can be many things, but mainly it is language. So we should have a common language in order to communicate. That seems pretty obvious! But it is of the most importance when there is such a vital message to share. Put simply, to communicate Christ to a person or people, you need to speak in a language they understand. To take it one step further, to most effectively share Christ in a way that impacts the listener, you should speak in the language of his heart.

What is this “heart language”? Generally speaking, the heart language is one’s mother tongue, but in some cases the heart language goes beyond the bounds of simply being the language one speaks. Through my work with the Kazak people in Kazakhstan, it has become clear that Kazak is a very special heart language for them. Kazakhstan is a large Asian country, formerly a southern republic of the Soviet Union. While

Kazakhstan means, “Land of the Kazaks,” Kazakhstan spent 70 years under Soviet rule, and the people were denied their history, lifestyle, culture, and even their language. The Kazak language was repressed in favor of the Russian language. After so many years of Soviet rule, Kazak became stagnant, and only the older generations still knew and used it in the seclusion of their homes. Now that Kazakhstan is independent and back in the hands of its people, their native tongue has taken on a very special significance. Speaking it, they feel their freedom; something that had been denied them is theirs once again, and it is all theirs. If you speak Kazak, you are acknowledging their nation, their freedom, their special culture, and history. You are speaking the language that goes straight to their heart.

As a missionary in Kazakhstan, it is vital to recognize the significance the Kazak language has for its people. Language is “of the utmost importance to people – psychologically, socially, and spiritually” (Hesselgrave, pg. 345). The Kazak language encompasses all three of these characteristics for its people. Psychologically, Kazak means freedom, power, personal identity, and even honor; socially, it means national pride, unity, and knowledge of it can affect social standing and job status. But we are most interested in its spiritual aspects, and it would be a mistake to underestimate them. Because of their history, as a nation ruled by the Soviets, a nation whose every level of life was affected by that rule, the Kazaks are eager to support their nationality and all it entails, this of course including their language. The result of this is a preference for things Kazak. The psychological aspect of the Kazaks’ attachment to their native tongue results in a subconscious detachment, aloofness from its “opposite,” Russian. Say hello to an “aksakul,” a village wise man, in Russian (the common denominator of languages in this country of many nationalities) and you will get a polite though sincere response. Use his heart language instead and somehow his eyes light up, and you feel that a real connection has been made. When communicating Christ to the Kazaks, using their heart language gets results more quickly and on a deeper, more personal level. A Russian language Bible

will support their feeling that the Christian God is a Russian God, and therefore something foreign, not really theirs. Give them a New Testament, a prayer book, or the Small Catechism in Kazak, and their reaction will be entirely different. Now you are speaking to them, in a way they understand and in a way that enables them to listen. A door has opened and you are able to enter in, to communicate to them, free of psychological, social, and political barriers. A stumbling phrase spoken in the language of the heart will do more than a thousand literary phrases in another tongue: Kazak to reach the Kazaks, Russian to reach the Russians, heart languages reaching directly to the heart.

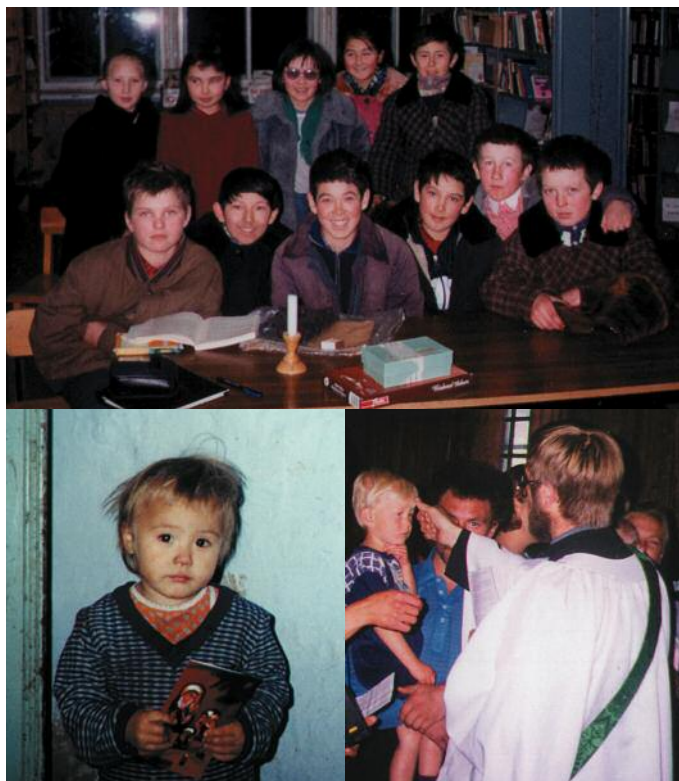
From the Bible we can see that the early missionaries recognized all the importance that language has and made use of it. Paul used different languages to reach through to the Roman commander and then the crowd of Jews, speaking first to the one in Greek, and then getting the attention of the crowd with Aramaic (Acts 21:37, 40; 22:2). The great miracle of Pentecost is an excellent example of how “heart languages” had an immediate impact on the listeners. Each person was amazed to hear the apostles speaking in their own language: “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:11). So here God Himself was using language to reach the hearts of the listeners. As

Hesselgrave states, “this incident is just part of the larger miracle that is God patiently communicating His truth to fallen humanity down through the ages—communicating it through the use of language” (pg. 345).

Having worked a number of years putting Christian literature into the Russian and Kazak languages, it is a great privilege to be a part of this “larger miracle”—communicating Christ to those who do not know Him, declaring God’s wonders to them in their own tongues. Like Paul, we can use Russian to reach the Russians, Kazak for the Kazaks, making use of the impact of the heart languages. In this way, we can most effectively share the Gospel,

that faith may come through hearing the message, the message reaching the entire world through the word of Christ.

Amy Kashenov is a missionary in the Republic of Kazakhstan.



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