



Gary Payton

**A letter from Gary Payton in United States**  
**(Regional Liaison for Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia and Poland)**

The 2011 Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study, p. 203

Dear Friends in Christ,

Anniversaries, whether for a couple, a church, or a major historic event, can stand as a time of celebration, reflection, and considering the future.

2011 marks the 20th anniversary of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the dawning of a new age for the 15 independent states that emerged following the collapse. And, with the end of communism the renewal of Christ's church surged forward in places like the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Armenia and many more republics. There was so much to do. The destruction of houses of worship, seminaries, and monasteries across decades had been at a scale beyond our comprehension. The persecution of church leaders cast tens of thousands into the Gulag, most never to return. Whether Orthodox, Apostolic, Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Reformed or other, the task of renewal was gigantic.

In 1994 the 206th PC(USA) General Assembly stated, "Our support of Christian witness in the nations of the former Soviet Union can be a powerful sign of our oneness in Jesus Christ." The energy of dozens of PC(USA) congregations, thousands of members, mission co-workers, and national staff in Louisville found dynamic ways to "come alongside" our brothers and sisters as they renewed their spiritual traditions and literally rebuilt their churches' infrastructure.

Over the two decades no less than 16 mission co-workers were appointed by the General Assembly to serve in Russia alone. Each, led by the Holy Spirit, applied his or her talents to help their partners meet the challenges of this new era.

A new era, indeed, is in full blossom. The historic denominations have largely reestablished themselves. Thousands of surviving church buildings have been renovated and new churches built. Seminaries have been reestablished for the training of clergy and lay leaders. Monasteries once again flourish, reconnecting to ancient traditions. Social ministries with orphans, the elderly and infirm, and those most marginalized have been established.

And so, in this 20th anniversary year of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the PC(USA) mission presence with partners in Russia is in transition. Multiple factors apply: the changing needs of our partner churches, challenging visa/work permit rules for mission co-workers, diminishing resources within Presbyterian World Mission in budget-constrained times, a new strategic vision tightening the focus of World Mission's presence overseas, and the retirement or reassignment of long-serving folks who have given so much over the years.

When 2011 ends, the PC(USA) will have three General Assembly-appointed mission co-workers (Ellen and Al Smith, based in Berlin, and myself) and three congregationally commissioned mission workers dedicated to ministry with partners in Russia. In the months ahead we will remain open to new opportunities to engage in mission with our



Nothing says "renewal" like the all-season camp, conference, and educational facility of the Smolensk Baptist Church. Construction continues through 2011. Photo taken by Ellen Smith

**How to support Gary:** You are invited to continue supporting Gary's work through prayer and encouraged to get to know him through updates like this, personal letters and emails. If you are able, please support his ministry through financial gifts. Individual donations may be made on-line at [www.pcusa.org/give](http://www.pcusa.org/give), or mailed to the address below. Churches are asked to mail checks to:

**Presbyterian World Mission**  
**P.O. Box 643700**  
**Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700**

On the memo line, please write "Gary Payton" and ECO number, E200395 (individual giving) or DMS number, D506905 (church giving)

For questions about supporting Gary, please email: [mission.support@pcusa.org](mailto:mission.support@pcusa.org)  
 Read other mission worker updates at: [www.pcusa.org/missionconnections](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections).

**Thank you for learning about Gary's ministry.**



partners. Meanwhile, our historic connections with the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (Presbyterian support began in 1962!) will continue unabated. It is logical to assume that my responsibilities will increase as we shift the nature of our “on the ground” mission engagement.

As I consider the future, I see these pieces of PC(USA) mission in partnership in Russia:

- Continuity in the congregational twinning program between PC(USA) and Russian or Belarusian churches or parishes. This program remains the bedrock of our partnership in Russia.
- New opportunities for short-term seminary teaching with our Lutheran and Baptist partners. Both denominations have transitioned to modular courses.
- PC(USA) congregational support for such long-established ministries as the Kargel and Baedeker School in St. Petersburg and the Narnia Center’s publishing/children’s ministry in Moscow.
- Deepened support for evangelism work with Roma Christian leaders.
- Sustained support of the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in its vibrant church life and outreach programs (soup kitchen, medical clinic, racial issues task force, etc.).
- Readiness to provide disaster assistance when natural or human-made tragedy occurs.
- And the sustaining connectedness of our Russia Mission Network, a “community of mission practice” that connects wide-ranging parts of the PC(USA) with our partners in Russia.

In times of transition we often mourn that which is past, focusing only on what was. Yet change is an enduring constant all the days of our lives. Our partners change. We change. The nature of our mission engagement in the Russian Federation, therefore, will change.

I am reminded of Jesus’s teaching the disciples: “He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Matthew 13:52, NIV).

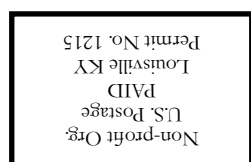
Let us celebrate the “old treasures” our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has shared and received living out the mandate of the 206th General Assembly across two decades, even as we bring out “new treasures” from our mission storeroom in the new era ahead.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,

Gary

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
Gary Payton  
UNITED STATES - August 2011  
Presbyterian World Mission  
100 Witherspoon Street  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396  
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