

THE CHURCH OF BRYTE – HISTORICAL PATH

Perhaps someone may deem it strange, but this path began in Ukraine, in the ancient city of Kamenets-Podolsk. This marvelous city is positioned on a rocky land virtually wrapped by the waters of Smotrish River on all sides. A single narrow neck of land connects it to the continent. The city is the unique creation of nature and people! It is an antique city from the 11th century. Besides the natural protective belt, the city is surrounded by a high stone wall with combat towers. Currently it's an object of international tourism.

So, near the city of Kamenets-Podolsk, Gampot village (presently Dolzok) is located, where in 1864 Nikolay Aleksandrovich Zelinsky was born. In 1928, he became the first pastor of the Russian Bryte church here in California.

He was the son of a bankrupt Polish count. At the age of 22, he came to faith through Ukrainian "Shtundists".

The official date of Baptism's birth in Russia was the baptism of Nikita Isaevich Voronin, a Molokan's pastor. Since Baptist churches were persecuted in this country, his baptism took place at night of August 20, 1867. Unfortunately persecution became Russia's defining feature: oppress, drive, and root out the so-called sectarians. During the tsarist time, the Russian Orthodox Church inspired the persecution. The royal authority was the executor. Thus, the rapid birth of Baptism in Russia took place almost in the "Forbidden Zone".

In April of 1884, the first Russian Baptist congress was held in St. Petersburg, where the gendarmes interrupted the congress and arrested many. Thus started and rolled onward the history of Baptism in tsarist Russia: from thawing to persecution.

To force them to renounce the new faith, medieval tortures and cruelties were used against evangelical believers: they were beaten with rods until unconscious, the bodies were burned with hands and beards squeezed in a vice, women's nipples were squeezed to bleeding, there were even cases of rape and murder of believing sisters. The exile to penal servitude in Siberia was the "Legitimate" measure. They were sent on foot in iron chains, formed in units of 400-800 convicts, with wives and children often following them.

Thus, in 1889-1891, the family of Yakov Tkachenko and Grigory Patkovsky from Kherson province arrived to Ochuri village of Minusinsk district of the Yenisei province in Siberia, and the families of G. S Verbitsky, F. V Kornitsky, and Nikolai Aleksandrovich Zelinsky arrived from Kamenets-Podolsky province. By that time he had a little daughter Maria.

The first church of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Eastern Siberia was formed by 12 souls. Brother N. A Zelinsky was elected as its pastor. The blessings continued, and the church grew. Another daughter, Feodosiya, and son Pavel, were born to Zelinsky's family. Believers had adapted and settled down. Thanks to endurance and diligence (Mr. Zelinsky worked as a blacksmith and engaged in agriculture), Zelinsky's family, though in exile, became fairly well to do. His daughters got married as well as his son.

But in 1917 the revolution took place. The tsarist regime was overthrown and Bolsheviks seized power. A long, bloody civil war, the red terror, and general turmoil began. Many believers from Siberia and Central Asia rushed through Mongolia to China. This path was already laid during the tsarist times, but was not yet so massive. Nevertheless, in China, the cities of Harbin, Kuyuj, and Shanghai became Russian transient points.

According to the stories of those who passed this path, Russians had to live in China for many years. Many were born in China. From China through the Pacific opened the way to the American continent. In this manner, many Russians came to the Pacific islands, the countries of South America and the western coast of the United States

In 1921, following the same pattern, Zelinsky's son-in-law, Leskovsky Daniil Pimenovich, reached America in the state of Washington. But since there were no Russians yet, he was advised to go to California. Thus he ended up in Bryte.

He was an artist and having zero knowledge of English, he began painting houses of wealthy people. That's how the first Russian Baptist came to Bryte.

Having settled down, Leskovsky summoned his wife Feodosia Nikolaevna with his two-year-old daughter Serafima (later Sasha) to Bryte. Feodosia was Zelinsky's daughter. In 1927, Leskovsky, Zelinsky's son-in-law, summoned Zelinsky Nikolay Aleksandrovich and his wife Anna Fedorovna from Harbin. They also had to

undertake a lengthy journey by way of Japan and Mexico. Dr. Patman went to Mexico to pick them up. By 1928 other families came to Bryte, so by that time the church had 30-40 members.

Upon arrival, Aleksander Nikolaevich became the pastor of the church. According to the recollections of the senior residents, some of the names from that period were restored: the families of Zelinsky's daughters and the son Paul, Ray, Max, brother Asredinov, sisters Minova, Samoilova, Svechnikova, Skubida, Lafina Maria (Zelinsky's daughter, former Karakozova) with son Aleksander, Lafina Feodosiya With four daughters, the family of Ashtembrenovs, Chepurenko K.K, Zhigarevs and Pozdnyakovs. Apparently their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live somewhere in the US in our midst. It would be nice to hear from them.

According to updated data, Zelinsky Aleksander Nikolayevich was pastoring until 1944. He was buried that same year. According to the account of "Cloud of Witnesses" book, he was pastoring until 1947. Chepurenko K.K became a pastor after him.

Families from China began to arrive in the United States in 1948; they fled from the Soviet power in the thirties. Shilokhvostov Petr Grigorievich and Lyubov Mikhailovna, with six children, was the first such family of that time. Tabitha, their oldest daughter, was still in China, since she turned 18 around that time and required separate immigration documents.

Similarly, Peter and Lyubov were children of exiled families. Peter was born in 1897 while his family lived in Siberia, and Lyubov in 1902 in Chernigov province (currently Ukraine). In 1906, Lyubov's family ended up in Bogotol city, Siberia. In 1927, she got married to Peter. By this time Peter Grigoryevich was already pastoring in Zacavrazheno village in the Novosibirsk region and served as an evangelist sent by Siberian Baptist Union in the Akmolinsk region. He was invited to serve as Bryte church's pastor. Chepurenko K.K moved to Kerman near Fresno and had successful ministry to the Russian Molokan.

From January of 1948 until 1954, Bryte church was pastored by Shilokhvostov Peter Grigorievich, who changed his last name to Amegin.

By 1950 the families of Krivonogov, Ganchukov, Zabudsky, Chekhmesterov, Tkachev, Loktev, Kuznetsov, and sister Levchenko arrived in Bryte from China. Overall 30-35 people arrived. The church grew to 50-60 people, including 15 youth.

We call the first wave of immigration this pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary (before the 2nd World War) immigration. It spread not only across the Far East to the American continent, but also through Europe and the Middle East to Canada, to the eastern coast of the United States and the countries of South America.

The first church in Bryte was cooped up in a residential building at 701 on Solano Street. The house was acquired by The Northern Baptists Association. Beginning in 1951, families of a second wave of emigration were arriving in Bryte. These were people who managed to escape from the Soviet Union through Western Europe during the Second World War. Most of them came to know God while in German relocation camps. Thus, in 1951 the family of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Vodnevsky ended up in Bryte. Besides them, the families of Ivanov, Bondarenko, Kuzmenkov, Kaplich and others came from Europe.



The Church at 701 Solano St, in 1952

The church became crowded in the house at 701 on Solano Street, and in 1951 they acquired a lot along 828 Solano Street. Rudnev's family resided there. In 1952, the first church was built at that location - this is the current outbuilding with a kitchen at the end.

On November 18, 1953, the church was officially registered as a corporation under the name of "Russian Church of Evangelical Christians Baptists." The church retains this name to this day.

In 1954, N.A Vodnevsky began to publish his articles in one of the Russian newspapers in San Francisco, which was distributed to many States in U.S. As a

result, the word of God spread, and N.A Vodnevsky together with Y.V Kudenchuk were traveling from city to city, including Seattle, and presenting the Gospel. Y.V Kudenchuk moved there to live, and soon a church of 20-25 people was organized in Seattle.



In 1956, Zabudsky Efim Vikentievich became the pastor of Bryte church. In February of 1957, the church merged with a group that had previously remained in the house of 701 Solano St. In the same year, it was decided to open a branch in Sacramento. Young people organized evangelistic meetings and services in the building of the American church, and literary evenings were held as well.

Soon, V. Zabudsky (1958) moved to Australia and the churches elected Deacon Loktev Daniil Terentyevich to pastor the church. He led the church till 1968. For a short term, Dyachenko S.P and Ivanov Kirill Efimovich pastored the church as well. The Bryte church was also visited by brothers Galustyan John Mark, Rogozin Pavel Iosifovich and Berezov Rodion Mikhailovich.

In 1960, the number of the church attendees reached 72, and there were 30 children. A need for the house of prayer expansion had surfaced. In 1962, a decision was made to open a permanent church in Sacramento. Several families lived in Sacramento, and since many of them still didn't have cars, it was difficult for them to get to Bryte on Sundays.

Amegin P. G became the pastor of Sacramento church, and his son-in-law Granchuk Ivan Semenovich became church's secretary. A private house was acquired and remodeled, and thus an independent church began its journey. The Bryte Church helped a new plant and in 1963 succeeded in getting Karpets Fyodor Petrovich transfer from Canada. He replaced Amegin P.G as a new pastor. The church grew and soon there was a need to build a new building. It is a house of prayer along Franklin Street; this church later on became to be known as the First Slavic Baptist Church.

The 60s and 70s were distinguished by much activity in the Bryte church. Loktev Daniil Terentyevich organized a choir of 30 people, there was a working Sunday school, they held outreach meetings, prepared radio programs for Russia, and the church supported missionary Yurchuk in South America, and an orphanage in Argentina.

In 1964, a prayer hall was added to the existing building - a perpendicular outbuilding. By the way, their expenditure added up to 24, 000 dollars. The Sunday school and printing house were soon added as well. In 1966, through the initiative of N.A Vodnevsky, publishing of "Our Days" newspaper was started by the church. In 1975, Loktev M.D established a church radio station, which began to broadcast to Russia.



Church building in 1964 at 828 Solano Street.

Brother Kaplich was the pastor from 1969-1970, and in 1971 Vladimir Kuzmenkov was elected. He led the church until 1987. Since he had to leave Sacramento, the leadership of the church was assumed by Mikhail Danilovich Lochtev. By this time, the number of church members had fallen to 17 people: the elderly were dying while many young people dispersed among American Churches.

1988 was the beginning of the third wave of emigration from the Soviet Union. The first family of this wave that came to Bryte was the family of Bondar Constantine Andreyevich. It was on October 1, 1988. On April 19, 1989, brother Bondar was ordained as pastor. By that time the church already had 8-10 new families. And in January of 1990, 45 people were present at the membership meeting. The Bryte Church became the center of "concentration" and a flood of immigrants poured in. Every year more than 100 people from all parts of the Soviet Union arrived. Among

them there were many ministers with different understandings and traditions, which led to friction.



The church building in 90s, at 828 Solano Street.

On April 1st, 1991 Anatoly Andreevich Kostenko became the pastor of the church. Yet in February of 1992 Sergei Ivanovich Neverov was appointed as pastor.

By 1993 the church already had about 400 members. The Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association relocated the print shop from the church outbuilding to a building owned by the First Slavic Church, but the Bryte church still lacked room. A decision was made to rebuild the prayer house by merging the two worship halls into one.

In 1994, more than 60 people separated from the church, and started the Slavic Baptist Church of West Sacramento. Vlastenko V. N became its pastor. At that time Bryte church has appointed Burbel V.F to be pastor's Neverov S.I. assistant.

By years 1994-95, the number of new immigrants somewhat declined, yet remained substantially high – about 70-80 people a year. In 1995, the church acquired a house at 821 Solano Street for Sunday school. The principal of the school was Loktev M. D.

In 1997, the church bought a house at 1608 Hobson Avenue, adjacent to the prayer house. In 1998, two more houses were purchased along 1612 Hobson Avenue and 813 Water Street.

The church was rapidly growing in numbers, and they had to decide whether to expand or purchase a new building. In 1999, seeking the solution, a construction team was formed, working out all possible options. But at that time a new inter-

church tension had surfaced, slowing down the search.

August 15, 1999 S. I. Neverov left the ministry. Bourbelle V.F. led the church and on October 24, 1999 Pavel Mikhailovich Khakimov was appointed as pastor. At this time 50 people left the church and created another church – the "House of Prayer."

In January 2000, a building fund was set up in the church. Funds were being collected for a new house of prayer. At the same time, the charter of the church was drafted and adopted on November 22, 2000. The church grew to 880 members. Four adult choirs were formed in the church: "Credo", "Praise", "Youth", "Hope" and four children's choirs: "Dawn", "Kolos", "Path" and "Stream". The space in the house of prayer rapidly decreased leading to breaking the Sunday morning service into two services: 8am and 11am. And still, worship halls (main and side one), the ministers' room, the patio and the front yard were crowded. During the services, all the adjacent streets were blocked by vehicles.

By this time, the construction team, having worked out a variety of options, suggested a necessity to acquire a new lot and build a new house of prayer. The church agreed to this proposal, and began an intense fund-raising to the construction fund: all church efforts were focused on this goal.

A lot between Sacramento Avenue and Kagle Drive was chosen, but it was owned by the City with plans for business development. There was no intention to sell it to the church. Negotiations went on for several years. Pastor Khakimov Pavel Mikhailovich, chairman of the committee (CEO) Semeryuk Aleksander Nikolaevich and the head of the construction team Diordienko Yaroslav Dmitrievich, as well as Loktev Mikhail Danilovich held negotiations with each of the members of the City Council, planning, and development departments. The church prayed intensely.

The construction team selected the type of the building and developed the technical documentations: plans, facades and location on the site. Brother Anatoly Dyadchenko, an engineer, was exceedingly helpful in this work. As a result, the city agreed. The "Bantain" construction company was chosen, the working project was developed, and on January 28, 2003 the construction of a new prayer house began.

On June 20, 2004, the first service in the new church building took place which, with great love and in remembrance of what was done by previous immigrants, was called the Second Temple. The transition to a new house of prayer somehow

increased the standards to the quality of service both spiritually and organizationally. At the same time, the influx of new members from other churches of the city became more intensive. They began radio broadcasting of the services, and then broadcast on the Internet. This, in turn, increased the requirements for all elements of the ministry. The number of church members increased to 1650.



Church building completed in 2004, Bryte



The main east entrance to the central worship hall.



The night fountain – an ornament of the main church entrance.



The modern building of the Bryte church.

The Second Temple gained favor not only with the church members, but also became an attraction for the whole brotherhood.

Some major events celebrated at the Second Temple:

- July 10, 2004 - celebration of 120th anniversary of Baptists in the Russian Empire;
- March 31, 2007 – MSC brothers’ ministry with participation of Eugen Pushkov's visiting musical group;
- April 21, 2007 - celebration of 80th anniversary of V. S Kushnir, the writer-poetess, organized by the “Title” publishing company (Germany, Patz A.P)

- April 28, 2007 - I.D. Bondarenko's "Three Sentences" book presentation with the participation of American astronaut C. Duke;
- August 25, 2007 – celebration of 140th anniversary of the Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood ECB (baptism of M. I. Voronin);
- October 12-13, 2007 - the regional conference with the famous American evangelist John Piper;
- October 25th - 28th, 2007 - celebration of 70th anniversary of Pacific Coast Slavic Baptist Association, jubilee congress;
- November 13th – 15th, 2007 - the California Convention of the Southern Baptists of the United States Congress.

There were many, many other events. Practically almost every Sunday guests from other cities of America, CIS countries, Europe, Israel serve in the church.

May God bless further our church by children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the continuation of the third wave of immigration!